*UNDER REVISION*

Billy showing up was shitty icing on the already shitty cake.

Steve hadn't been too bothered by it until Billy had caught sight of the kids in the window and any illusion he'd had of quickly getting rid of the man went straight out the window, pun intended.

He'd expected a fight, for it to get bad.

What he's not expecting is to get a hard shove onto Billy, sending him careening backwards right into the Byers fridge.

Unfortunately the heat of the moment causes Steve to be on a one-track mind, total tunnel vision as he belatedly realizes something incredibly, terribly important.

It's the fridge with a dead demo-dog inside of it.
My Tumblr: https://0cerulaine0.tumblr.com/

I'll be honest I'm really disappointed in how the show has handled Billy and how unnecessary he seems to be, I'm holding out hope that if we get a Season 3 they'll do something with his character so I'm holding back full judgement until that time but for now I must satisfy my own needs.

What if things had gone differently?
2019 Ceru, Log 1: So hello, long time no see.

As of writing this I'm 4 chapters into revising this fic.

Its been well over a year since this thing last updated, season 3 got released and surprisingly the beach became canon.

I dunno bout y'all but uh, that actually shocked me.

I loved the season, it was phenomenal as always.

I'll just be honest, seeing the beach scene & Billy dying kind of lit a fire inside of me.

I mean, like I said over a year ago we all knew Billy was gonna die.

We'll see if this fire dies again or not but I am now undertaking the insane adventure of going back through this beast of a fic & seeing if I can salvage up an ending for all of you & myself.

I always had an ending for this in sight, I even had a sequel planned, time will tell if I decide to write that sequel but first I need to actually finish this thing.

Back when I quit this fic I was going through a lot, my life is not the same as it was a year ago.

I'm not the same person by any means.

As I've gone back through this thing I cringe, I cringe really hard at younger Ceru.

There's a lot wrong with this thing & maybe I'll change some of it (I pretty much already have tbh)

I could sit here all day & shit on my writing, I'm still not that great of a writer but I have improved so I hope whoever reads this enjoys the changes I'll be making.

If the chapter has a title it means my 2019 self has gone through & revised it.

I'm calling it: Broken Pieces 2.0

Riveting, I know.

Anyway I'm sorry to anyone I disappointed for just disappearing out of nowhere.

Wish me luck, I hope I can finally finish this thing.

Billy showing up was shitty icing on the already shitty cake.
Steve hadn't been too bothered by it until Billy had caught sight of the kids in the window and any illusion he'd had of quickly getting rid of the man went straight out the window, pun intended.

He'd expected a fight, for it to get bad.

What he's not expecting is to get a hard shove onto Billy, sending him careening backwards right into the Byers fridge.

Unfortunately the heat of the moment causes Steve to be on a one-track mind, total tunnel vision as he belatedly realizes something incredibly, terribly important.

It's the fridge with a dead demo-dog inside of it.

The kids clearly realize where this is going too because the air gets sucked right out of the room and it's a tangible feeling.

"Oh shit-" he hears himself say.

Billy tries to find purchase as he falls back, grabbing at the fridge handle which only causes him to fall straight on his ass, which also leads to the fridge opening, which also causes the heavy, very literal dead weight inside of it to fall right out and onto Billy's lap.

Steve watches as a variety of emotions and expressions play out on Hargrove's face.

First, it's clear he's livid at the fact that Steve had managed to make him lose his footing.

*Plant your feet Harrington.*

Yeah, fuck you too Billy.

Second, was the realization that something heavy had fallen out of a fridge and knocked the wind out of him which could be pretty easily categorized as shock.

Third, was the realization that it's something dead.

Lastly, the very apparent realization that it wasn't anything he'd ever seen before as the demo-dog's head lolled to the side and opened into the horrific flower shaped pattern that still gave Steve nightmares to this day, all out and on display across Billy's fucking lap.

To say things had turned from bad to worse was quickly becoming a gross understatement.

Billy did what anyone would naturally do, what Steve had done when he'd had his own first encounter with something from the upside down.

He began to panic.

"What- WHAT THE FUCK!" he screamed out, trying to push it off of himself in a way that you'd expect someone to react if an overgrown spider was crawling on them.

Which needless to say means, very gracelessly.

It would be hilarious if Steve wasn't able to relate on such a personal level but he'd be lying if he said it didn't give him some ounce of guilty pleasure to see Billy, the guy who was always trying to play it
cool, completely losing his shit.

Billy eventually manages to lift himself out from under the creature, off of the floor, and onto the counter as he tries to make himself as small as possible using one of the cabinet handles above him as leverage.

It would be hilarious, but the sight of the dead demo-dog was just disconcerting enough for Steve to keep himself from laughing out loud which he was pretty sure Billy wouldn't have appreciated very much.

Max clearly doesn't feel the same as she manages an aborted chuckle.

Steve closes his eyes for a moment, cursing silently under his breath and praying for some sort of higher being to strike him down then and there to end his suffering.

Billy looks back and forth between his audience and the 'dog' rapidly, obviously not wanting to keep his eyes off of it.

"What the fuck is that?! What the fuck is going on Max?!” Billy yells as his foot slides down, almost causing him to fall off of the counter before righting himself.

There's a slight pause as they all look at each other trying to figure out what to say until finally Max speaks for them.

"It's just a prank you dip shit." She answers.

Steve's eyes widen.

He immediately knows that was the absolute worst thing to say because that was just going to make Billy-

"-FUCKING KILL YOU!” he manages to hear Billy say, getting snapped out of his own panicked thoughts as the man who had previously been about to piss himself leaps down from the counter, just barely missing falling onto the demo-dog, and begins to stalk towards them.

Steve braces himself as best as he can in front of the kids as Billy grabs him by his jacket and lifts him up off of the floor, pushing him backwards and forcing the kids to scramble as he collides painfully with the wall behind him.

"So, King Steve, this is the game you wanna play?” Billy hisses mere inches from his face.

"Billy, calm down we can explain-” Steve is about to continue but he doesn't get to finish as Mike takes some sort of gold object and bashes Billy over the head with it, knocking him out cold.

Multiple things happen at once as they all speak over each other.

"What-” he feels the word form on his lips but can't hear himself over the kids.

"Holy shit, you knocked him out!” Lucas says.

"Yeah, good one Mike!” Dustin says with an added fist pump.

"Whoa, how did you even knock him out?” Max asks quietly.
"We don't have time for this, we need to help El!" Mike says glaring at Billy's unconscious body.

Steve recovers quickly, "Oh no, no, no. I've made it perfectly clear that's not happening and now all you've done is make it worse!" He says as he flails his hand towards Billy to try and prove his point.

"Well you're the only one not in favor and you're pretty outvoted here my dude." Dustin says as if they were casually arguing about the weather.

Which they aren't.

"Yeah well you need someone to drive you there and I'm refusing, Billy's unconscious so it looks like you're shit out of luck." he states factually, hoping it might deter them.

They all look at each other as if they can somehow read each other's minds and suddenly Max darts past him. He turns in time to see her go for the syringe and realizes what is happening way too late.

Dustin and Lucas launch themselves at his arms as he flails and he's quick to pull himself out of their grip, but it's just way too late as he turns back towards Max who injects the syringe directly into his neck.

"What the hell!" Steve gasps out, his automatic reaction being to grab it quickly and pull it out.

Suddenly, Mike appears in front of him as the other kids start to ease him to the ground. He hadn't even realized he'd begun to fall.

"I'm sorry Steve, but if this was Nancy you'd have done the same thing." Mike says to him and wasn't that just a kick to the gut because even Steve's rapidly drugged up brain knew the kid was right and he couldn't even bring himself to be upset about it.

Things become hazy quickly after that as he starts to go in and out of consciousness. Max clearly hadn't given him a large dose, but it was a large enough one to keep him out of commission for a bit.

"We can't just leave Billy here can we? There's a dead demo-dog on the floor." he hears Dustin say at some point.

"Uh yeah we can, let's just load Steve into the car and go." Max says unhelpfully.

"Yeah, leave his ass here." Lucas agrees.

Steve feels himself black out.

He wakes in a car.

Max is driving, Mike is in the passenger’s seat directing Max, Dustin is on one side with Lucas on the other.

He turns to see Billy next to him who had apparently woken up right before he had and is screaming something at Lucas, looking ready to strangle the kid.

Steve flails, hitting Billy in the shoulder and everyone is screaming at each other but he can't make
out what anyone is saying.

He sees the moment Billy turns his attention to Max and lunges at her. He immediately reacts and puts Billy in a chokehold.

He really doesn't wanna crash and die, that would just be embarrassing.

He's been through too much at this point to have that be the way he goes out.

"Harrington, I swear to god if you don't fucking let me go!" he hears Billy say as he begins to struggle and honestly Steve isn't under any illusion that he can actually hold Billy for long. The guy is a bit bigger than he is, definitely stronger, which is something he begrudgingly admits to himself.

Damn if he isn't going to try though.

He doesn't have to struggle to hold him back for very long as Max slams on the breaks and they both lurch forward. Billy ends up far enough forward that he has to brace his hand against the dashboard and Steve is forced to let go to brace his own hand on the back of the passenger seat as he hovers just above Billy while the kids pile out of the car.

Billy makes an aborted gesture to grab at Max but isn't able to get a hold and slams his fist down instead. His head shoots up and the angle causes Billy's head to connect with Steve's chin.

"Aw FUCK!" Steve yells out, the force of the collision making him bite his tongue hard enough to draw blood as he falls back against the seat behind him.

Billy takes the opportunity to turn around to face him and crawl over to get out of the car.

Steve tries to react quickly, but the drugs are still making him a bit sluggish as he makes a grab for Billy and misses.

He falls forward out of the car and almost collides with the ground face first which is just great.

As he begins to recover he sees that Max has filled the syringe again, but Billy catches her arm and grabs it from her and throws it to the ground, smashing it under his heel.

"You little bitch I'm going to-" Billy says, only to stop himself as he turns his head to see where they are and Steve finally sees the moment Billy actually starts to question what the fuck is actually going on right now instead of being a ticking time bomb looking for a chance to explode at any given moment.

Logically, if Steve was in Billy's shoes right now he'd think all of these little kids were about to try and throw him into a hole in the ground and set him on fire.

Mostly because Steve was beginning to see the pretty picture that they all painted having Billy surrounded by gasoline cans.

This really didn't look good, it actually looks really, really bad.

The only problem is whatever Billy must think right now, it's probably nothing compared to the true reality of the situation.
"Are you all being for real right now?" Billy asks, most likely rhetorically as Max pulls her arm out of his grasp.

Billy shrugs down at her and turns around to stare Steve down.

"Explain to me what's happening right now Harrington."

Steve finally pushes himself up off the ground and brushes himself off.

"Why the hell did you guys bring him?" he asks deliberately, ignoring Billy's question.

"We were gonna inject him, keep him under in the car and thought if things got bad we could use him as bait." Max says before anyone else can answer.

"You what?!" he says in disbelief.

Billy's head whips around and Steve wonders if he almost gave himself whiplash. "Excuse me, bait?!"

"It was Lucas!" Max says.

"What?! Oh hell no, we are not blaming this one on me. This was Mike's idea!" Lucas retorts.

"We pretty much all came up with the idea but now that idea doesn't mean anything when the syringe is broken!" Mike responds.

"Hey, I didn't agree to this one guys." Dustin says raising his hand.

"Shut up!" they all say in unison.

Steve runs a hand over his face wondering not for the first time how this had somehow become his life.

"He's your brother." he says to Max who turns to glare at him.

"He's my stepbrother. We aren't even related."

"That's hardly an excuse. Look nobody is using anybody as bait, look just-" he groans as they all look at him like he's insane and he goes to the trunk and grabs his bat and goes to stand in front of Billy.

He holds it out to the larger man for him to take and Billy looks at him like he's grown three heads, which with the events that had already transpired, wouldn't exactly be as far fetched as it sounded.

"No matter what any of us tell you it's not going to make sense and you won't believe us and at this point we don't have time to explain." He pauses to rub a hand over his face again.

"That thing in the kitchen wasn't a prank. It was real and there are more of them down there, except those ones are alive and we're going to draw them to us because apparently, we all have a death wish so you can either take this bat and come with us or take the car and go. It's your choice." he says hoping Billy won't take it to bash in his skull instead.
"Ok you know what, you're all fucking insane if you think I'm gonna fall for this shit." Billy says like this is all some sort of joke.

"Billy, these kids just kidnapped both of us, stole a car and drove it to a hole in the ground, and I'm giving you a bat with nails coming out of it after you just tried to beat the shit out of me and Lucas, I might add-" he looks at Lucas to drive his point home. "Who is much smaller than you are, which is a pretty dick move by the way. Who the fuck tries to fight a kid? Do you really think I'm fucking around right now?" He finishes, pushing the bat closer to Billy.

He doesn't know how long they stand there, but Billy just looks at him like he's searching for something and Steve isn't sure what until finally, after what feels like an eternity, Billy shakes his head chuckling and saying something under his breath that Steve can't hear and takes the bat from him.

He swings it in front of him a couple of times to get a feel for it and points it right at Steve's chest.

"I'll bite Harrington, but if this is just a bunch of bullshit I'm going to actually beat the shit out of you, I'll use this bat to do it too."

Steve's expression hardens as he rolls his eyes.

"Yeah you won't be saying that for very long Hargrove."
Last Ditch Effort

Chapter Summary

Beta'd By G_R12

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for the kind comments I really, really appreciate it. I'm not sure what has come over me but I feel like a mad woman possessed, I usually don't write and haven't done so in years but I can't help myself, I'll go mad if I don't get this one out.

Thanks again and enjoy!

*2019 Ceru, Log 2:* 

I'm looking back at this note and CACKLING. Back then I really did write like an absolute machine, I have no idea how I got so much of this thing written, part of it was probably because I merely went with the flow.

I can't write like I used to, not large portions in a small sitting, not like I did a year ago.

I remember I just lived and breathed this story, my whole life was possessed by it, it's probably why I ultimately stepped away from it, I dunno.

Old Ceru was a fucking weirdo for sure.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Getting Billy back into the hole proves to be a difficult endeavor that nobody is really all that willing to undertake.

They'd wasted enough time watching him go through the five stages of grief when your whole world gets turned upside down and your whole life is a lie.

Pun definitely intended.

Steve can't take it anymore, he's had enough of this.

Billy is just beginning to finally climb out of the hole when Steve grabs him by his ankle and yanks him back down.

He gets up close and personal, right in Billy's face, mostly because the red cloth covering their mouths to keep them from breathing in the spores makes it harder to hear each other.

Steve doesn't want Billy missing anything he's about to say.
"I told you I wasn't fucking around Hargrove, now, if you're going to leave then nobody here blames you, but give me my bat back and get the fuck out of here because we don't have time for your god damn existential crisis right now."

The kids were already restless enough and if looks could kill, Mike's glare would have murdered him already.

"Oh, I'll blame you." Max supplies unhelpfully.

"This can't be real." Billy retorts, sending a glare her way.

Steve stares at Billy for a few more moments and rolls his eyes, huffing in annoyance, taking the bat from his hands.

"Give me the map. If we're doing this I'm the one that's going to be in charge." Steve says, holding his hand out to Mike who was finally looking placated.

He gets up and starts walking away, leaving Billy behind. The kids soon follow after and none of them even bother to look back to see if Billy will follow.

Steve really doesn't care at this point because quite frankly, he has far more to worry about than Billy fucking Hargrove.

This whole day was just getting better and better.

At some point after they've walked for a while, Billy has apparently decided to come along for the ride because when they hit what Steve assumes is the halfway point, he feels Billy fall into step next to him only for the larger boy to yank the bat out of his hand.

"So, what exactly are we doing down here?" Billy finally asks and Steve realizes it's the first time Billy has ever talked to him without any sort of malice.

Well, less malice than usual.

"We're going to the center where the tunnels branch out and we're going to set it on fire." he says honestly.

Billy stops and Steve rolls his eyes again, getting increasingly more annoyed that they keep getting held up.

By Billy.

He was starting to think it might actually be a good idea to use him as bait.

"Why the fuck are we doing that?" he asks, clearly wanting it to come out far angrier, but the shake in his voice was starting to suggest otherwise.

"Can you just stop asking questions and go?" Mike asks rhetorically, bumping into him and somehow managing to make Billy lose his footing, he quickly catches himself before going face first into the fleshy, viney ground beneath their feet.

Billy looks at Mike and then back up at Steve for some strange reason.
Steve shrugs and then turns back around to start walking again.

"We haven't even seen the demo-dogs yet and this guy is ready to piss his pants. Why did we bring him again?" Dustin asks as he walks past Billy as well.

They had all begun walking past him when Billy pipes up for what feels like the hundredth time.

"That thing in the fridge, you said there's more and they're down here. Are we going to burn them?"

Lucas shakes his head and gives him a look over his shoulder as they keep walking, "No stupid, we're gonna burn him." he says, gesturing to the area all around them.

To everyone other than them it's a clear indication he's talking about the Mind Flayer, which Steve is aware Billy would not be able to even remotely understand.

Lucas eventually continues before Steve can even attempt to clarify, "then, the fire is gonna draw the demo-dogs to us and we're gonna run for our lives."

Steve clenches his jaw, it all sounds easy when it's put into such simple terms but the reality of their situation isn't lost on him.

All that matters is getting these kids out of dodge when this shit goes down.

Easy enough.

Maybe.

Hopefully.

Billy says nothing but he also doesn't stop walking which is a small miracle in Steve's honest opinion.

He's expecting Billy to bolt at any moment if the look on the guys face is any indication.

Steve isn't sure why Billy had come in the first place. He could have just taken the car, getting himself as far away from here as possible.

He certainly seemed narcissistic enough to do it, yet somehow the guy was still here.

Things had gone pretty smooth after that, as smooth as it could go after setting fire to some sentient shadow demon from another dimension.

Billy had even taken one of the gas cans at one point, emptying out the last of it for them.

Well, actually he yanked it from Lucas, the force of the harsh pull almost causing the kid to topple over, but Steve liked to think that might be some form of progress.

At least he'd been willing to help in the first place, ulterior motives aside, whatever they might be.

Although, he was quickly realizing he'd have to keep a closer eye on Billy around Lucas. The guy was clearly a total racist piece of shit because Steve could see that Billy gave no shits about his step sister so the aggression clearly wasn't coming from a 'protective older brother' standpoint.
Eventually, another shouting match had started between Billy and Max.

Steve had to step into Billy's personal space yet again to get him to chill the fuck out.

The major hiccup in their plans ends up being them coming up on Dart on the way back.

Steve was really starting to question his life choices.

They were all quickly starting to learn that Billy's immediate response to any given situation is to bash the shit out of it and ask questions later.

Steve watches as the larger boy starts to get ready to swing the bat and immediately goes to grab him by the arm, pulling him back. It causes Billy to crash against his chest, knocking the breath out of him a bit as he whispers harshly in his ear.

"Don't move. Just don't do anything."

The other kids also grab onto him, holding him back as Dustin works his magic with a 3-musketeers bar.

How the fuck was this Steve's life right now, seriously.

Billy looked on as if this was somehow the strangest thing he'd seen so far.

They move past it slowly and Steve still makes it a point to keep a tight grip on Billy's upper arm as he maneuvers them both past.

Steve's a lot more worried that they might startle the creature by purely existing.

Running becomes the next best option afterwards because they can hear the demo-dogs coming right for them when the ground starts to shake.

It's all going smooth, according to plan.

Steve helps the kids back up through the hole while Billy merely stands next to him like a dead fucking doorknob, frozen in fear.

"Oh that's great, now you choose to do nothing?!"

The boy simply stares through him as if he's not even there.

Fantastic, they already broke Billy.

Steve gets Dustin up but he can feel a shift in the air.

It's too late.

He can see those things in his peripheral coming at them as if it's all happening in slow motion.

I'm gonna get torn to shreds by demon dogs next to stupid fucking Billy Hargrove.

He thinks as he hisses out a pained breath, there's just not enough time.
At least the kids are safe.

It's his last thought as he waits for his inevitable death, eyes closing, fists clenching at his sides.

Except it never comes.

His brain eventually catches up with him as he realizes that Billy has grabbed him, thrown him to the ground, covering him with his own body.

Shock turns into a deeper form of shock, if that was even possible. His mind races trying to comprehend too many things at once.

He's expecting to hear Billy's screams. He's expecting the creatures to tear him apart, to feel blood soak through his clothing, to hear flesh ripping.

Instead, all he can hear is the loud pounding of blood in his own ears that turns into a high pitched ringing noise like he's being submerged under water.

Through all of that he can feel Billy's hot and heavy breathing against the shell of his left ear as Billy's cheek rasps against his own.

The demo-dogs avoid the pair as though they don't even exist, running right past them, over them.

"Where are they going?" he hears Billy ask in a whisper, sounding breathless.

Billy lifts his head up to look toward the retreating dogs and Steve lifts his head back as far as it can go to see as well.

Steve doesn't get a chance to answer.

He isn't sure what he would have said regardless as a bright light starts shining through the hole the kids had just crawled out of.

Billy brings his arm up to shield his eyes, still draping himself over Steve.

Billy is just large enough that Steve only needs to squint his eyes as Billy's body blocks most of the brightness coming through.

Everything still sounds like he's going through a tunnel until finally he's able to focus completely again.

Billy recovers first, but not before locking eyes with Steve. They stare at each other for a few moments before whatever trance Billy has gotten himself into is broken.

The boy gets up, brushing the dirt off of his pants and suddenly the hole begins to close in on itself.

Something strange starts to happen because as Steve stares up at the closing hole he knows that what he's looking at isn't real.

He can feel that it's some sort of illusion except somehow, he knew it was becoming real.

It feels like an out of body experience.
The Mind Flayer was trying to pull them into the upside down.

It's the only thing that would make sense.

Steve begins to put together that it was trying to manipulate the world around them; they were in this things domain and it could do whatever it wanted with them.

It's a lot like getting sucked through a vacuum.

This was certainly new but hadn't Hopper gotten stuck down here too, only to get back out?

It didn't make any sense, none of it made any sense.

But this?

This felt different.

Is this its last ditch effort?

Steve thinks helplessly, he feels the shift of being between something real and not real become more prominent by the second and wonders if this is how Will Byers felt when he would move between their dimension and the upside down.

It's a physically tangible feeling that was getting stronger and stronger by the second.

Worse was that Steve might not be the smartest guy in the world but even he knew what this meant.

The gate was closing for good and they were about to be stuck on the other side.

There wasn't going to be a way out of this.

Billy must have felt the wrong in this whole situation too because they both panicked, beginning to scramble upward yelling up at the kids who'd been staring at what Steve began to realize were the headlights of the car.

The kids finally realize what's happening and start to scream at them to hurry up and grab their hands.

Everything divulges into absolute chaos.

Billy loses his footing just as Lucas is about to grab hold of him and falls back down, getting the air knocked out of him.

Mike and Dustin manage to grab hold of Steve's arm and Steve looks from Billy back up to the kids.

Time seems to slow once again.

He locks eyes with both Mike and Dustin, something unspoken passing between the three of them.

He hopes his expression is enough to get his point across.

I can't just leave him here.

It must do the job because in unison, just as Steve goes to pull away, they both let go of him,
begrudging acceptance on their faces mixed with horror, horror at what was to come because Steve was fully aware he'd just made the biggest mistake of his life.

It was too late. Eleven had done it.

The brightness of the headlights disappears as vines start covering the hole above, cascading them in muted, muddy darkness and he feels like a rubber band being stretched taut only to snap back into place.

The illusion had become a reality.

The gate was closed and now Steve and Billy were stuck in the upside down.

Chapter End Notes

Looks like this story just got turned...upside down.

Would you believe me if I told you I changed the ending of this chapter last second? This was NOT how this story was gonna go at all but it hit me like a ton of bricks and I never looked back.

*2019 Ceru, Log 3:*

Oh yikes, that upside down joke, nice job old ceru, you're hilarious.

(Not)

So, I mentioned that back then I changed this chapter ending last second.

If I remember correctly Billy & Steve in the original draft for this story were never meant to get stuck in the upside down, I had an entire other fic written about this scene that occurs at the snowball dance, Billy & Steve dance around each other, the fic was super normal.

It was just this character analysis into their dynamic & not very heavy on the supernatural elements.

Last second it popped into my head: "What if Billy & Steve get stuck in the upside down?"

It all spiraled out of control from there folks.

It's weird looking back on this moment.

Huh.
Wrong Side Of The Mirror

Chapter Summary

Beta'd By G_R12

Chapter Notes

That awkward moment when you almost make a Silent Hill reference in your story but then you realize the story you're writing is set in the 80's and Silent Hill wasn't released until 1999.

Feelsbadman

*2019 Ceru, Log 4:*

Uhhhhh I dunno where I was going to put a silent hills reference I have no idea what my past self was talking about here lol.

*update*

I REMEMBER!

Steve was going to compare the upside down to silent hill but because i was trying to be historically accurate silent hill hadn't been released yet so it would have made no sense for Steve to make the comparison.

Mystery solved.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Steve is almost positive that time is passing differently in this dimension than in his own.

It's like he's lost years off of his own life, isn't even the same person anymore. That's definitely a feeling he's become intimately familiar with at this point.

The demogorgon had been a pretty decent introduction into all of this, it was the first time he'd laid eyes on something not from his own world.

Before all of that was the realization that he'd been living a lie, the fight with Jonathan, Nancy helping him realize he isn't who he thought he was.

The Steve he was before was just bullshit, not the real him, didn't know that there was a calm before the storm coming.

Naive, ignorant, always too slow.

He'd had no clue, was forced to deal with having his entire existence tilted on its axis.
However, all of those past experiences were *nothing* compared to this and he's eternally grateful because 'Pre-Steve' would have lost his fucking mind.

Instead, it just feels like another tuesday.

Maybe he should feel more afraid, more like a basket case. He probably will be one when this is all over.

If he survives of course.

It's probably all just shock anyway, he can have a mental breakdown later.

Although, it's more likely that this sense of calm he's feeling is because there's a silver lining to all of this. The Mind Flayer is clearly preoccupied, probably off licking its wounds after getting the gate snapped shut in its face.

Figuratively speaking, of course.

Steve wasn't much of a betting man but he was willing to bet that the Mind Flayer had gotten pretty weak from this whole mess.

Nothing had tried to kill them yet, not a single god damn creature had come for them from the moment they'd gotten stuck in this hell.

There were no demo-dogs anywhere to be seen, not even dead ones; no vines trying to reach out and grab them.

Nothing.

If anything *that's* the only thing putting him on edge.

Everything else so far had been pretty kosher, all things considered.

There's also Billy.

The guy might be awful company but there's a security in knowing that Steve doesn't need to go through this alone. It sucks sure, but at least if they die, they won't die alone.

That's what scares Steve the most, he's got plenty of fears ranging from spiders all the way to dying a horrific and painful death.

Being alone is his worst fear though, a deeply ingrained one that he struggles with every single day of his life, one he's tried to conquer since he was a child.

If anything that fear had simply continued to grow the older he'd gotten.

Regardless, his fears, worries, and concerns all meant nothing right now, it would all have to take a back seat because Billy didn't have the luxury of already knowing this place even existed, not like he did.

There's a sinking feeling in Steve's gut at the realization that Billy's first experience with this shit is similar to that of Will Byers.

Sink or swim.

That being said, Billy definitely doesn't seem to be holding up all that well.
He'd been uncharacteristically silent, completely unlike himself or rather, unlike the person Steve knew him to be.

Which was to be a loud, cocky asshole at any given moment.

They only spoke to one another when it was absolutely necessary, other than that they stuck close and kept quiet; mostly in fear that they would jinx the silence and something would go bump in the night to rip them apart.

A pretty valid reason in retrospect.

Still, it didn't change the lost look Billy kept giving him, like he was well and truly out of his depth.

Steve's only suggestion had been to start walking towards where the demo-dogs had been running because it would be towards the lift, which would bring them up to the lab.

In theory.

There was clearly no safe place to go but being above ground definitely sounded better than being stuck underground and Billy hadn't said anything otherwise.

It was probably the first time the guy had ever listened to something Steve said.

Which is how he knows that internally Billy is probably moments away from hysterics and Steve can't even blame him for it.

Pure willpower keeps them going and finally they reach the lift after what feels like an eternity. It's conveniently lowered down to them and he briefly wonders if maybe it's all some sort of trap.

It's not like they really have any other choice though.

The ride up feels strange, the world around him not quite right, the air smells stale; it's not unlike walking into a room that has been devoid of human contact for decades.

He's not sure why they aren't dead yet, not that he's complaining by any means.

"Why didn't you get out while you could Harrington?" Billy asks, cutting through the silence, sounding resigned and Steve jumps a bit.

Billy's voice reverberates, echoing around them, sounding much louder than it has any business to.

"Why did you...do what you did?" Steve retorts poorly.

Why did you pull me to the ground?

Why did you use your own body to protect me?

Why did you stay?

Those were the things he'd meant to say, but it doesn't come out that way. He's not even sure how to address it, isn't certain if 'protect' would be the proper word to have used if he were to bring it up
properly, if that had even been Billy's intention.

Billy snorts in amusement which seems a bit out of place, given the situation they were currently in, but Steve wasn't going to judge.

"Don't get too excited pretty boy, I slipped and fell. I'll admit it wasn't my proudest moment."

Steve purses his lips, refusing to turn and look at him, he could still feel the pressure and heat from where Billy had grabbed his upper arm and roughly pulled him to the ground.

If Billy wanted to sit there and lie about it Steve wasn't going to stop him, it was the least of their worries right now so he left it at that.

For both their sakes.

When the lift finally reaches the top Steve just wants to go right back down into the tunnels because at least what's down there is familiar territory, but this.

This .

This shit was like something straight out of a nightmare.

They're in bed together without a care in the world, nothing to stress about, just a day to themselves.

Steve brushes a strand of hair out of Nancy's face, tucking it behind her ear, smiling down at her. He'd never get tired of looking at her face.

"What?" she asks, seeing the imploring look on his face. She's always been able to see right through him and yet he himself could never seem to figure her out.

"I-" he licks his lips, pushing a hand through his hair "no never mind, it's nothing."

Nancy makes that face he adores, the one where she purses her lips while smiling, making her already big doe eyes look impossibly bigger. He knows the look all too well, it's a Nancy Wheeler trademark.

"Ok so...what's it like, the upside down thingy?" he finally asks, not entirely sure if it's going to upset her. He knows it's a touchy subject, but curiosity had gotten the best of him.

Her smile falls and she gets a far off look in her eyes for a moment before coming back to herself and locking eyes with Steve.

"It's like a mirror, except the mirror is wrong."

It's Hawkins lab alright, except it's wrong . That's the only way Steve can describe what he's seeing.

Nancy was right and he feels a sudden sharp pang of longing somewhere behind his ribcage.

God, he missed her.

Powerful, smart, capable Nancy who always had an answer for everything, was always right about everything. She'd have known what to do and Steve finds himself briefly wondering if she'll even miss him or come looking for him, if anyone will.
He doesn't ponder it for very long as Billy bumps shoulders with him, moving past.

"Look alive Harrington, we're not in Kansas anymore."

Steve wonders if maybe he's trying to lighten the mood and shakes his head. "You're pretty cheerful for someone who has no idea what the fuck is going on."

He knows it's unnecessary to say the moment the words come out of his mouth, but his mood had already turned sour long ago. Not to mention if there was one person capable of getting under his skin at this point it was Hargrove himself.

Billy stops and turns around, raising an eyebrow at him. "You're right. I don't know what the fuck is going on so why don't you tell me?"

It's not the response Steve is expecting by any means as he comes to a stop. "I-it's not exactly a short story Billy, time isn't really something we have."

Billy shrugs, looking around them.

"There's nothing here, not even those weird demon things that ran past us to get here," he raises his arms, gesturing around them to prove his point until he finally settles on looking at Steve again.

Silence carries on between them as Steve simply stares passively at him.

"So?"

Billy stalks toward him, crowding into his space while looking him up and down, clearly trying to be intimidating for reasons very unclear.

"We find some place relatively safe and you," he pushes his finger against Steve's chest to emphasize his words "break this whole thing down for me. I want every last detail, don't you dare leave a single god damned thing out. Do you understand me?"

Steve knocks his hand away, looking affronted.

Since when did Billy decide he was the one calling the shots?

He supposes he shouldn't be very surprised considering how abrasive the asshole always tends to be all of the time and rolls his eyes at him.

"Great idea Hargrove, where would you like to go so we can have our little chit-chat around the campfire?" he antagonizes.

"I need more information before we decide we wanna go prancing down the streets of whatever hell this -" he gestures around wildly with his hand, "place is."

Steve can't help but frown at him, not really knowing how to respond but not getting a chance to as Billy continues.

"We should hole ourselves in one of these rooms so there's only one way in and barricade it, in case something finally decides to show up."

He blinks at him rapidly a few times like he's seeing Billy for the first time, nodding slowly, not seeing any real reason to disagree.

The more Billy knows, the easier it will be to work with him, hopefully.
They quickly get to work after that.

Billy suggests they try to find whatever room is holding the security cameras, stating that he wants to see if electricity still works in this place.

Steve assures him it doesn't, but Billy argues that if the lift worked then clearly there's electricity.

Steve isn't sure what that implies but he quickly shoots down any ideas involving getting anything back up and running in the lab. It would just draw unwanted attention and Billy doesn't fight him on it.

Soon after, they hole themselves inside of said room, Steve doing most of the barricading as Billy stares helplessly at the blank TV screens, like he's lost in thought, or pretending to be so Steve can do all of the heavy lifting.

It's hard to tell with that whackjob.

At some point Steve takes the cloth off of his face because it's only making him sweat more, being the only obstructive thing in general.

He wonders absently if this place is toxic, if it’s killing them slowly, if maybe they'll just eventually die from being here too long, breathing its air but forces himself away from that path of thinking when it starts making him feel too helpless.

"Will this place eventually kill us?" Billy suddenly asks, turning from the screens to look at him.

He takes Steve's silence as confusion and huffs, "the air I mean, you took your cloth off of your face."

Steve takes a moment to recover from Billy somehow reading his mind and shrugs. "I don't really know, the lab quarantines you when you're exposed, treats you as if you have a deadly disease until it gets out of your system."

He remembers Hopper mentioning it briefly at some point.

There's a look that crosses over Billy's face that Steve doesn't quite like as he tries to scour his brain for something that might make him feel better.

Not that he should probably care how Billy feels, although if he's going to be stuck here with the guy he may as well try to make peace.

"Will Byers survived in this place for a week, he had no protection of any kind." He quickly adds.

"He had to detox after getting out though, right?" Billy asks, not looking very placated.

"Well yeah, but his situation was a bit different."

Steve doesn't mention how the poor kid got impregnated or whatever, causing him to bring Dart to the other side with him. It doesn't seem relevant and he's trying really hard not to gross himself out more than he already is.

"Right, okay."
There's a long bout of silence after that, a pensive look on his face as Steve sees the cogs moving in his brain, like he's trying to figure something out.

Fuck if Steve knows what that might be though.

"Okay, that means it's probably safe to say that transitioning from one side to the other is probably what causes the toxic reaction to occur." Billy mumbles, like he's talking to himself as if Steve isn't even there anymore. "While we're here, the air isn't toxic but our bodies will purge it once we get back to the other side." he continues on to say, gesturing with his hands.

Who knew he was so expressive?

Not Steve, that's for damn sure and his face morphs into pure disbelief. "You a scientist or somethin' now, Hargrove?"

Billy snorts, shaking his head "I'm just not a fucking idiot Harrington, you gunna start telling me what's going on or are we gonna sit here and stare at each other all day?" He asks raising his brow again and crossing his arms against his chest impatiently.

Steve continues to just stare at him and Billy rolls his eyes in response, "Don't get me wrong pretty boy, you've got a nice face but we've got more important things to worry about right now."

Steve blinks, feeling himself blush involuntarily before glaring at Billy. Could the guy go one second without sounding patronizing?

"Fine, you'll wanna find a place to sit though. This is gonna take a while."

Chapter End Notes

I'll be honest, it's a long hard road to redemption for our Billy, and what better way than to force him into a horrible no good situation?

I do feel bad for making Steve into collateral damage so apologies, he deserves so much better.

I realized these chapters are pretty short but a lot happens in them, I wonder if that's a good thing or a bad thing?

Maybe they'll get longer, I'm winging it here guys.

*2019 Ceru, Log 5:*

Guys, I hate the way I wrote Billy & Steve I literally hate it.

They're so annoying, I'm sorry but someone had to say it, I'll try to respect the vision that my past self intended from a year ago but I'm not making any promises, I already altered their dynamic quite a bit in chapter 4 so we'll see how much further I go.

I look back & Steve's boring as fuck, anyway sorry, I know I shouldn't be shitting on my past self so much but I needed to get that out there.
Mutual Understanding

Chapter Summary

Beta'd By G_R12

Chapter Notes

Forewarning, I've had to change the tags of the story because of this chapter and I'm sure I'll have to do so in the future but ANYWAY.

I've seen a lot of people discussing the ship name and I just want to say that my vote goes to Harringrove as the ship name.

Just wanted to put my two cents into that one.

I'm seriously enjoying writing this story, it has been years since I did any writing and all of your comments are just so lovely, the passion you all have is just awesome, thank you all so much.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's the exhaustion that hits them harder than anything else, starts breaking down their resolve.

Through some miracle they'd still somehow managed to keep things relatively civil between each other though.

Steve had almost lost his voice trying to cover every base, answer any strange question Billy would seem to come up with, most of which he ended up answering with some variation of:

*I don't know.*

*I'm not sure.*

*You'd have to ask so and so.*

It was making him feel pretty worthless, it also made him realize just how little he actually knew.

Billy's jabs about not knowing certain things he apparently *should* know reinforced that feeling ten-fold.

It ends up being Billy's idea to make their way into town and hit up the closest store, claiming they weren't gonna survive long without food and water.

Steve knew Billy wasn't wrong but he also wasn't sure if there was anything here in the first place but they were sure as hell about to find out.

Also, the last thing Steve wanted to do was make Billy feel even more helpless about their situation
than he probably already did.

Having something to occupy themselves with was the only thing keeping them sane, no point in raining on anybodies parade.

The trek isn't easy, it takes them multiple stops and neither one of them gets any actual sleep.

It was starting to take its toll on both of them.

When they would try to sleep one of them would keep watch, the other would try to take small naps if at all possible until they both got frustrated enough to keep going.

It had started to become a seemingly endless cycle.

When Steve could fall asleep in small intervals he would have nightmares of dark vines on the ground grabbing hold of him at any moment, being used as an incubator like poor Barbara.

Sometimes he'd jolt awake in terror to Billy hovering over him, hands on his shoulders telling him it's just a nightmare except waking up was so much worse.

Fortunately Billy wasn't having nightmares but that hollow look in his eyes was becoming more and more prominent, Steve wasn't becoming very fond of it.

It looked a lot like surrender, a word he wasn't sure he would have ever associated with Billy prior to all of this.

Even now he's not so sure.

In Steve's eyes Billy just doesn't seem like the type to simply give up.

Granted, he doubts this is the kind of situation Billy ever expected to find himself in.

It's that fact alone that makes him feel even more concerned or perhaps he just doesn't know Billy the way he thinks he does.

Not that he actually knows him very well in the first place.

Sometimes he'll catch Billy looking at him in a way that makes him feel a little too vulnerable, like he's judging the level of fucked they are based on Steve's reaction to things.

Or maybe he's just reading too far into it.

Regardless it's best not to test that theory so he pretends to have his shit together, pretends like he knows what he's doing when in reality he feels just as lost.

By the time they've finally made it into town Steve feels like a zombie and judging from Billy, that's probably exactly what they look like.

Still, nothing comes after them.

Steve isn't sure if that makes him feel better or worse.

---

The first house they find, they break into looking for anything useful, taking turns relieving themselves.
Steve makes his way to the kitchen and figures it won't hurt to at least *try* turning on the faucet, his knees almost buckle when water starts coming out of it, *clean* water too, he'd been expecting that even if water *did* come out it would be black yet here it was, like the normal tap water he'd drink at home.

*It doesn't like water.*

He remembers Ms. Byers mentioning it briefly and maybe the water isn't polluted because the creatures don't wanna touch it.

Either way, Steve isn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

He uses his hands to cup it, drinking a bit too fast from it like it's the greatest thing he's ever tasted in his life.

At this point, it is.

Billy soon appears in the doorway ignoring Steve completely as if finding running water means nothing to him.

Steve takes a moment to give him a pointed look, "you're not gonna drink?"

"The faucet in the bathroom works too," he replies.

Steve realizes that maybe he should have tried that first but shrugs, the end result had been the same.

Billy eventually makes his way to the pantry, opening the door cautiously as if something is going to pop out at any moment and Steve finds himself following closely behind.

The smell coming out of it is awful, food inside has been overtaken by the black sludge all around them.

He assumes Billy is just going to close the door but instead he turns around quickly, pulling at the red cloth around Steve's neck and he can't help the automatic knee-jerk reaction he has to slap Billy's hands away.

It doesn't help, the poorly done knot goes loose and Billy comes out triumphant as he gives Steve a smug look.

Billy turns back around as he reaches out to grab at something using the cloth.

"Oh come on!" He exclaims, flailing his arms at his sides in frustration.

That black shit was *never* going to come out, he'd have to get rid of it now.

Steve can't really see but Billy eventually emerges with cans of food in tow.

"Holy shit." It's all Steve can think to say as his mouth immediately starts to water.

*Please don't be tainted, please don't be tainted.*

It's the mantra that keeps repeating in his head over and over as he watches Billy place it all on the counter.

The logical part of his brain tries to tell him that even though it's canned food that doesn't mean the contents inside haven't somehow turned to black mush.
It’s the first ounce of hope they’ve seemed to have gotten since getting stuck here however, so he keeps those thoughts to himself.

He wants to be wrong.

"Don’t just stand there, find me a can opener or something." Billy says after a while, breaking him out of a particularly nice daydream he was having of tangible food being inside of his mouth.

Steve startle, looking put out but complies regardless, pulling out drawers and sticking his hand in things he doesn’t want to know anything about.

He eventually comes out victorious with a perfectly usable can opener, wipes the black sludge from it and handing it to Billy who is staring at the cans of food wiping black sludge off of them with the cloth while his other hand is extended out towards Steve being held up impatiently.

Billy doesn’t even look at Steve like somehow the cans of food are so much more interesting which in the guys defense they most certainly are but he still finds himself really not appreciating his fucking attitude.

Self-entitled prick.

He thinks to himself while scoffing at Billy before dropping the can opener into his hand.

Billy throws the cloth at him in the next instant and he catches it against his chest.

"Ew, gross." He says, throwing it off to the side somewhere, brushing his hand on his pants to get the blackness off of it afterwards.

Definitely ruined yet a small price to pay so he decides to let it all slide.

He watches as Billy opens the first can, looking over the mans shoulder expectantly, not wanting to get his hopes up.

He lets out an embarrassing noise he’d deny ever having made later as perfectly canned, untainted food appears before them

The most perfect canned pears he’s ever laid his eyes on.

"Oh my god, holy shit." He exclaims rather loudly.

Billy ignores Steve's excited freak out and hands it to him with a look of disinterest before getting started on the next can.

Steve can't help himself as he scoops two of his fingers inside to get a hold of a piece of the delicacy, he’s halfway towards getting it inside of his mouth before catching sight of Billy staring at him with a look of disgust on his face.

He realizes how he must look, mouth agape in an aborted half gesture to put the piece of pear in his mouth, staring dumbly at Billy.

"There's running water in the faucet you dumbass, grab a fork and wash it off." Billy says shaking his head while mumbling under his breath.

Steve isn’t able to hear what the brute says but he assumes it’s something along the lines of 'how did I get stuck here with this guy?'
Steve gives Billy a sheepish look not wanting to admit that he hadn't even thought of that because of how hungry he was so instead he decides to try and save some face.

"Pretty sure black sludge doesn't wash off very easily." He retorts, mentally patting himself on the back.

"Didn't you say something about how the creatures in this place like it cold and hate water? Hot water probably gets that gunk off better than we think" Billy says while getting the final can of food open.

Steve was really starting to hate the fact that Billy was much smarter than he looked. Way smarter in fact, something he'd started to learn real quick if the questions were any indication.

Steve can't help but think of Nancy again, part of him wishing it were her instead of Billy Hargrove, if only because she'd be far better company.

He'd certainly never wish for her to get stuck here, would never allow it but at least she'd never belittled or made him feel like shit.

He briefly wonders who had taken a steaming dump in Billy's cheerios to make him so insufferable before remembering they were stuck in another dimension, he musters a small sliver of pity for the man.

A really small one.

He thinks to himself absently.

Ultimately he chooses to ignore Billy out of spite, not wanting to give him any sort of satisfaction.

Billy rolls his eyes and slams the can opener down on the counter violently, the sound reverberating through the entire house before going over to a drawer, pulling out silverware and turning on the sink water to wash them off himself.

Steve's chewing slows down as he watches Billy wash it like its made a personal attack against him.

Who the fuck washes forks aggressively?

"You've got a lot of pent up anger in you, don't you Hargrove?" Steve asks between bites.

"How about you close your fucking mouth when you chew Harrington, you look like a fucking cow." He replies, deflecting just like expected.

Steve shrugs making it a point to chew even louder in response, Billy's face hardens and he moves around the counter towards him.

Here we go again.

He thinks to himself as Billy goes to stand in front of him attempting to look intimidating but Steve's been through this song and dance before and he stares him down instead, trying to get across his absolute indifference towards Billy's childish behavior with the look on his face.

After a moment he looks down to see him clenching the clean forks in his hand so hard his knuckles have started to turn white and Steve idly wonders if Billy might actually try to stab him with them.

Instead, Billy's free hand comes up to knock the can of pears out of his hand and it crashes to the
ground with a loud clang.

"What the fuck Billy, you're fucking psychotic!" he yells, flailing his arms out.

He almost pushes Billy back in retaliation but catches himself, it would just make things worse and things were already shitty enough as it was.

"What's wrong Harrington, you gonna hit me?" Billy says, he uses his free hand to give Steve a light shove and he's forced to take a step back and right himself again.

Steve clenches his fists at his side and seriously considers just laying Billy on his ass but somehow finds enough willpower to stop himself.

"We're stuck inside of another dimension and you wanna start a fight like a child throwing a tantrum, grow the fuck up Billy." He spits out instead, walking past him and bumping into his shoulder in retaliation.

Before Billy can fully react though Steve stops, turning himself back around as Billy spins towards him and they're face to face yet again.

"Actually you know what, go ahead Billy, just lay it on me, I know this shit sucks but if hitting me is gonna make you feel better than be my guest, get it all out of your fucked up system, let's just get it the fuck over with!" He yells in his face daringly.

He fully expects Billy to take him up on his offer but instead the guy just stares at him for a long time, like he's at war with himself before visibly deflating.

Instead, he takes a few steps forward almost walking right into him but Steve stands his ground instead of stepping back, it causes Billy to turn himself, reaching past Steve to the point that he can feel their chest's brush against each other.

His brain realizes belatedly that Billy is reaching out to grab one of the open cans of food from behind them.

Billy pulls back, holding out the washed fork and can of peaches for Steve to take and he wonders if this is Billy's idea of an apology.

If it is, it's a really shitty one.

They stare each other down until finally Steve takes the peace offering from him silently.

In the next instant Billy turns around, not waiting to see if there will be a response as he walks away to find more food for himself.

_Fucking weirdo._

Steve thinks as he starts eating again, still trying to decipher the anomaly that is one, Billy Hargrove.

---

Things continue on in awkward silence as they start loading everything they can into Steve's backpack to lug around with them until finally they find the store.

When they're inside Billy stops, looking like he's searching for something specific.

"What?" Steve asks.
"Find a newspaper." Billy says.

"Newspa- why?" He questions.

"Because all of the clocks in that house, they were stuck on the same time and-" he stops, pointing up towards the clock hanging above them, the time reading 8:11pm. "This one has the same time too."

"Huh, well how bout' that." Steve says as they both start looking for a newspaper.

Soon Steve comes across one on a stand on the far left side of the store and motions Billy over, he grabs it and he shakes his head in what looks like disbelief.

"You said that girl closed the gate right?" Billy asks and Steve nods his head.

He turns the paper over to Steve, pointing to the top of the page. "Well that's the date we disappeared inside of this place."

Steve looks at it and then looks at it again a couple more times in case he's started hallucinating or something.

He's right.

"So you're saying the gate closed at exactly 8:11pm on this day."

"Looks like it." Billy says, putting the paper back on the stand.

"Ok, so what does that mean?" Steve asks not really knowing how any of this is relevant.

"I remember you mentioning at some point this place is like a mirror right?" Billy asks, looking at Steve pointedly.

"How do you even remember- uh yeah, that's right." He says, still trying to wrap his head around what Billy was trying to say.

"Well the gate is closed, the worlds aren't bleeding into each other anymore so that must mean time froze on this side after that little girl closed the gate."

"Ok...so what does that mean then?" Steve asks, feeling uneasy.

"I have no idea."

"We can't stay here, there's glass windows all over this damn place." Billy says, changing the subject as they raid the store for supplies.

"Ok yeah, you thinking we need to find a place we can easily defend?" Steve asks, he'd been trying to find lighters for the past fifteen minutes but doesn't seem to be having any luck.

"Yeah, clean it up, make it habitable and go from there." Billy says with a nod as he puts food into his own newly found backpack.

A backpack they'd spent a good twenty minutes cleaning up to make useable again.

Although clean was a pretty relative term.

What Steve wouldn't give for a hot shower at this point.
After nodding to Billy in acknowledgement he makes his way back down an aisle he'd already been
down and curses at himself, the lighters had been here this whole time.

He goes to grab as many as he can carry when suddenly he hears a loud high pitched inhuman
screech coming from outside.

Somewhere from above them.

*The sky?*

He immediately gets down into a low crouch, moving himself quietly into the aisle he'd last seen his
human counterpart in.

Except Billy isn't there anymore.

"Fuck." He says under his breath.

Whatever is here with them crashes through the window farthest away on the other side of the store,
he doesn't catch sight of what it looks like.

*Fucking fantastic.*

Steve goes completely still, trying to think of what to do next.

*Find Billy.*

Everything after that can come later.

He hears the creature get up and start flailing around in the glass for a while, like it can't find its
footing.

Hopefully, it's hurt.

Just from those sounds alone though, he can tell that whatever this thing is that they're trapped in here
with, it's much larger than a demogorgon because of course it is.

It finally rights itself because Steve can feel the ground shake slightly as it starts stalking down each
aisle like it's looking for them.

*Where the fuck is Billy?!*

*Don't move, it's attracted to sound.*

*Don't bleed, they smell blood all the way from another dimension.*

All of the information he's ever gotten from Nancy and everyone else for that matter flashes through
his mind.

He's glad he'd also passed that information on to Billy except he was still fucking missing.

Steve hears the creature get about three aisles away before quietly moving himself to get more space
between them, using it as his rinse and repeat method to buy him some time to figure out what the
fuck to do.

Luck apparently is not on his side however as he turns a corner, attempting a good six aisles of
distance between himself and the monster.
His shoulder barely brushes against a small stand he hadn't been expecting to see.

Time slows down as Steve watches it fall over and crash to the floor with a loud 'look at me I'm over here' cacophony of sound.

He has never hated boxes of macaroni more in his entire life than in this very moment.

The monster becomes alert, sliding across the floor and breaking out into a run towards him, knocking itself into shelves.

"Shit, shit, shit." He hisses out quietly under his breath like he still has silence on his side, which he doesn't.

He gets into a standing position, backing himself away slowly, getting as far away from the thing as he possibly can.

It's a lot like being a cornered animal that's about to get its head ripped off, it feels like an eternity before Steve finally gets to see what it actually looks like when it appears at the other end of the aisle from him.

It slides again, crashing into and knocking down the large shelving unit to its left, the whole thing topples over into the next aisle, sludge infested boxes of pasta flying everywhere.

Steve gets a good look at the monster and-

We're fucked.

They're fucked, everything is so far beyond fucked.

Its height reaches just over seven foot with the body of what resembles more of an overgrown cricket than anything else, large wings attached to it that are tucked into its body.

They can fucking fly too?!

The familiar flower shaped face of death opens up at him as it lets out a screech so loud Steve has to cover his ears.

Even worse is that it has yet another set of menacing teeth behind it that extend outward.

"Oh fuck me." He hears himself say out loud and the thing breaks out into a run down the aisle towards him.

He starts back tracking quickly without looking behind him because he's not about to take his eyes off of the monstrosity that's about to barrel right the fuck into him.

When he turns the corner, fingers brushing against fallen shelving he feels himself get pulled by the back of his shirt, landing flat on his ass and skidding across the floor a bit from the force of it.

When Steve looks up Billy is standing in front of him, bat in hand ready to beat the shit out of the monster that's about to turn the corner with them and Steve panics-

Oh my fucking god that is not going to help-

It rounds the corner with them, looming over Billy as it stands on its hind legs, now ranging well over nine foot as it opens its face to screech again.
Oh fuck, he's gonna die.

Billy's posture falters which means he clearly only saw Steve rounding the corner yet hadn't actually caught sight of what the creature looked like yet.

*Dammit Billy, you impulsive piece of shit-*

Steve brings his leg up and hits him in the back of the knee just as he goes to swing the bat.

The bat somehow still connects with the creatures face right as it goes to lean down, Billy loses his grip just as the monster takes a swipe at him.

It misses his head by mere inches as he crumples to the ground from the hit to the back of his knee.

Steve goes into a low crouch, grabbing Billy from under his armpits as he pulls him around the corner but loses his footing as a result.

He gestures for Billy to get behind him as they gracelessly climb over each other and Steve puts himself at the front this time.

They both start crawling backwards, trying to gain purchase but the cricket demon is already on them again.

Steve thinks quick, pulling his backpack off and into his lap to grab a lighter and aerosol can he'd picked up earlier in case shit like this finally started going down.

The creature struggles for a few moments too, dislodging the bat from itself with its foot as it slams itself into yet another shelf.

It turns to look at them again, letting out a different kind of screech but Steve doesn't have time to ponder what that means as he turns on the lighter and sprays the aerosol in its face to light the fucker up.

The screams it makes are so loud their ears ring as it falls backward, wings flaring as it starts flailing around violently on the ground.

Steve feels himself get lifted up by his upper arm, getting dragged along somewhere and if he wasn't already moments away from *shitting his pants* he'd have asked Billy where the fuck they were going but at the moment he *really* didn't care.

Soon they come upon a door and Billy opens it, pushing Steve inside first and following in right after as he slams it shut and bolting it before sinking to the ground.

Steve takes in his surroundings and it's a moderately sized managers office.

It takes him an abnormally long amount of time to catch his breath as he leans against the far wall and slides down, putting his head in his hands for a moment.

When he looks back up it's to the sight of Billy across from him still sitting with his back against the door looking at him in a way he can't decipher.

Billy takes a deep breath and swipes his hand along his forehead pensively, "you didn't think to tell me about whatever the fuck that thing is, Harrington?" He spits out, all aggression.

"Dude, I've never seen that thing before in my life, it's new to me."
Billy looks at him like he might not believe him and shakes his head, getting up off the floor and walking over to the desk, laying his palms flat on top of it still trying to catch his own breath.

"Also, do you have a fucking death wish or something Hargrove?" he asks through clenched teeth purely out of anger and frustration.

Billy had almost died, was moments away from it because he didn't fucking think before acting first.

"The fuck you talkin' bout'?"

"I'm talking about you trying to take a knife to a gun fight, if you'd bothered to look at the thing first you'd have known a fucking tiny little bat with nails in it wasn't going to work." He says as he gets up off the floor, back still to the wall gesturing towards the door they'd just come through in exasperation.

Billy gets that crazy look in his eyes he's seen before and tilts his head to the side, Steve isn't sure what it means but it makes him look completely insane as he feels himself get a bit uneasy.

"Let's get something straight, sweetheart. " Billy says, tone dripping with complete malice and sarcasm as he points his finger aggressively at Steve, don't you ever fucking try to tell me what to do."

Steve rolls his eyes running his hands through his hair in pure indignation, "oh my god, come the fuck off it Billy, this tough guy shit is beyond old!"

Billy laughs and it's an ugly, deep guttural thing.

"Look at you all riled up, I just love it when you talk dirty to me Harrington, how about I throw you out this fucking door and we see how things go for you?"

Steve sneers at him and suddenly as if on cue there's a loud bang coming from the other side of the door.

Fuck.

Billy howls in excitement and goes across the room to a shelf near the back, when he comes back into Steve's peripheral he has a crowbar in his hands and Steve wonders where the hell he had even found a crowbar in the first place.

Billy turns towards him and the crazy look in his eyes is still there, if anything he just looks purely insane and Steve isn't sure what he's more afraid of anymore, the monster or Billy.

Is there even a difference?

He thinks to himself, thoughts turning dark as Billy makes his way to him, stalking towards him like he's the prey now.

Steve realizes he can't back up due to being cornered against the wall already and actually starts wondering if Billy will throw him out of the room.

At this point he has no idea what to expect or if Billy had finally lost all of his marbles.

He'd thought they were actually getting along pretty well.

Obviously not.
Steve slides to the side trying to put more distance between them in case he actually needs to make a bolt for the door to use the creature as a distraction and Billy goes for the backpack he'd left on the floor next to him instead.

The psycho next to him crouches down, rustling around for a bit before coming out with one of Steve's lighters.

Billy smiles up at him looking completely manic before grabbing the aerosol can they'd just used on the creature that was still trying to break down the door.

He shakes it, throws it into the air and catches it before standing back up to look at Steve again.

"This was a good idea, I guess you aren't just a pretty face after all."

Steve gulps and watches as Billy turns away from him and starts walking toward the door.

"Oh my god, Billy don't." he isn't able to finish as Billy unlocks it and violently yanks it open.

Steve takes it as an opportunity to grab his backpack and run to the opposite side of the room, wanting no part in whatever the fuck was about to happen.

He hears it charge and just before it collides with Billy the man merely steps to the side.

It crashes into the wall behind him, plaster going everywhere.

Billy merely twirls his crowbar in one hand while shaking the aerosol in the other and Steve sees that the lighter is being held between his teeth.

Steve shakes his head in disbelief wondering what the fuck Billy is even thinking right now and huddles himself into the corner, holding his breath.

The monster's wings flare out and it turns around, staggering a bit to recover from running into the wall.

Billy walks right up to it without a care to the world, jabbing the crowbar straight into its right wing, pinning it into the wood of the beam.

It screams out in pain and starts to thrash violently while Billy dodges its swings, laughing like this is the most hilarious thing he's ever seen and Steve even thinks he might be enjoying himself.

He's fucking insane.

Steve starts to wonder if he's lost it or if he's just always been this way.

Poor Max.

Billy takes the lighter from between his teeth with his newly freed hand, flicking it on while spraying the monster's wings with the aerosol, lighting them on fire.

The creature thrashes around even harder, the crowbar dislodges and clatters to the ground, the creature falls sideways and into the desk, destroying it completely.

The sounds it starts making cuts through Steve's soul, like its crying.

He starts to feel physically sick to his stomach, can feel the bile rising up in the back of his throat.
Billy picks the crowbar back up again and the monster turns its head, opening its mouth at him.

Absently Steve realizes it's probably to try and frighten Billy off or an act of defiance but at this point it seemed pretty clear who the real monster in the room was out of the three of them.

Billy lunges the crowbar straight into the center of its mouth and it goes still for a moment and after a few seconds it begins to make half aborted squeals.

Billy sprays the inside of its mouth.

Steve turns away, can't even bring himself to look anymore.

He isn't sure how long Billy takes to kill it but eventually it stops moving.

At some point Steve had merely slid to the ground, put his head between his legs and shut everything out, not even caring what might happen to him anymore, just wanting the pained noises to stop.

Eventually they do stop.

The only thing he can hear after that is the sound of ragged breathing and when he looks up Billy throws his bent crowbar to the side and turns around to look at Steve.

His heart rate skyrockets as a small involuntary whimper leaves his throat.

*Oh god, I'm next.*

Is the only thought in his mind and for some reason he can't move, is petrified in place by fear.

Fear of Billy.

Except he doesn't have that crazy look in his eyes anymore, instead it's the emptiness he'd sometimes catch glimpses of from before, that look of surrender.

Steve knows he's visibly shaking, coming off of the adrenaline, the terror, *all of it.*

He has absolutely no control over his own body or its reactions, wishing in that moment that he did.

Whatever look Steve seems to have on his face does something to Billy because he slumps his shoulders, runs a hand through his hair like suddenly he's uncomfortable and starts to walk up to him slowly, meticulously, like Steve's a fawn ready to bolt.

"Hey, it was *us* or that thing." Billy says like he's trying to defend himself to Steve.

Like he knows exactly what this looks like.

Logically, Steve knows that Billy is right but the whole thing had just been so inherently wrong.

"You tortured it, you didn't have to *torture* it," he says quietly, sounding more timid than he ever has in his life, a bit worried that he'll set Billy off again.

He wonders when had he allowed himself to become so afraid of Billy Hargrove.

Probably somewhere between getting a plate smashed over his head by him and watching the guy kill a demon from another dimension effortlessly.

Billy's entire face changes and the look of vulnerability on it shakes Steve to his core.
They both stare at each other for a long time until Billy finally starts to walk closer.

Steve flinches involuntarily, cursing at himself internally and Billy lets out a deep sigh before sitting down next to him, the back of his head thunking against the wall.

He notices that there's quite a bit of space between them and Billy starts to wring his hands together nervously before running a hand over his face.

"I got into a fight with the old man before we got stuck inside of this place." Billy finally says, waving his hand in the air to put emphasis on the 'this place' part.

"We don't really get along, there's a lot of reasons really, the list is too long but uh-" Billy stops, scratching his head and turning it to the side, facing away from Steve.

He thinks he knows where this is going, knows the signs because he recognizes them in himself so he knows Billy is forcing himself to talk about things he's not ready to talk about.

At least, probably not with someone like Steve, a guy he barely gets along with.

"Billy." He says softly and the guy turns his head to look at him, the vulnerability back in full force.

"It's ok, you don't have to-" he stops and takes a deep breath before letting it out nice and slow, "I get it."

He doesn't, but he does.

If anyone understands having a fucked up father, it's Steve.

That shit sticks with you, makes you into someone else, someone you aren't until one day you meet a group of people that help you realize how much of a douche you'd been, made you realize you were just playing the victim card, using it as an excuse to act like a shallow piece of shit who only cared about himself.

Okay, so maybe Steve was projecting a little bit.

Billy gives him a look, like he knows too, one that says so many different things at once and Steve isn't really sure what to say next.

It's like they're both coming to a mutual understanding about each other.

The look lingers for a bit longer and Steve clears his throat as the moment breaks, trying to wipe at his face like he's trying to get rid of an eyelash.

If Billy notices he doesn't say anything.

Chapter End Notes

So I guess Dacre was told to pull inspiration from Jack Nicholson in The Shining by the Duffer Brother's. Dacre has also been quoted saying "There’s something far more sinister going on with Billy. We’ll see how that unfolds"

That's pretty loaded and could mean anything but for the sake of my story I wanted to
try to capture what they're implying because Billy is very clearly just off his rocker
insane and my god is he fun to write.

I've known people that have dealt with severe forms of abuse and a common coping
mechanism they develop is just losing themselves to their own rage, they describe it as
everything going black, or blank, or seeing red.

Usually they have no recollection of the events that even transpired.

I wanted to try to capture that very inherent flaw that Billy has acquired from the abuse
he has had to endure where he gets so angry about things and feels like he needs an
outlet for all of his frustrations as well as his need to feel in control.

I don't want to take the truth of just what kind of person Billy is lightly because I feel
like it'd just be a cop out and we've got a really long road ahead of us fam, and it's not
going to be pretty.
When they finally collect themselves Steve explains that they've probably just royally fucked themselves over by fighting the creature in the first place.

He tells Billy about the fact that the monsters are all connected to a hive mind.

Judging from the reaction he gets he's pretty sure if they hadn't just recently shared an important bonding moment Billy would have knocked him the fuck out for not having told him sooner.

Steve's not sure how he'd forgotten to mention it but there was a lot of ground to cover so he figures he can be forgiven for a couple of slip-ups.

Billy however disagrees and was currently giving him the silent treatment.

The guy had claimed it was probably one of the most important things to have mentioned and logically, Steve knows he's not wrong but it's Billy so he forgives himself pretty easily.

"At the very least it knows what vicinity we're in, weird that nothing else has shown up to try and kill us though." Billy finally says when he's done pouting.

Steve just shrugs, not really sure why either, he's just hoping that their luck continues long enough for them to find a way out of this place.

The more time they spent in this place the more dangerous it would probably become.

That Mind Flayer probably wasn't going to keep giving them a head start.

Wherever it is.

On the flip side, ever since Billy had learned he could beat the shit out of things and get away with it there had been a new look in his eyes.

The guy was already a cocky fuck but killing that strange flying, cricket demon had clearly done wonders for Billy's ego.

His sanity was still a lingering question in the back of Steve's mind, whatever was rattling around in Billy's head was something not normal.

Or maybe he was just being too judgemental, it was still too early to tell.

Whatever demons were plaguing Billy felt less like anger and more like a torrential rage, always there under the surface, coming and going in waves.
It was certainly something he'd have to keep an eye out for.

A guilty part of him is glad that his current traveling counterpart was more than willing to make this shit look a walk in the park.

For some reason he feels safer knowing that no matter how crazy shit gets it will never come close to the levels of crazy that Billy Hargrove was apparently capable of reaching.

Steve remembers that moment in the tunnel when Billy froze, doing nothing.

It all felt similar to his own experience with the demogorgon, he'd frozen too only to get pulled along, anchored back into reality by the tug on his arm.

Billy had clearly gotten past his shock rather quickly, that fear from before was gone completely.

It looked more like what Steve usually felt when some new life altering experience decided to beat him over the head too.

Begrudging acceptance.

All in all, he's glad they're finally on the same page.

"I think it's hurt because the gate closed." Steve finally says, pulling himself back out of his own thoughts when he sees that Billy isn't going to continue speaking.

"Makes sense, it's weak so it would probably have pulled as many defenses to itself as possible for protection." Billy states, nodding to himself.

Steve of course finds no reason to disagree, he thinks back to when the demo-dogs had ignored them completely, being pulled away to protect the Mind Flayer most likely.

Later on when they've walked for so long that his thighs start to burn Steve almost trips, catching himself right before eating shit.

When he looks up he sees Eleven and goes stock still.

"What-" he says under his breath, it causes Billy to stop and turn around to look at him in confusion.

There she is a good ten feet in front of him, simply staring.

They locks eyes for a moment before she starts craning her head around, taking in their surroundings.

Within the next few moments she disappears, as if it was all an illusion or a fever dream.

Maybe it was, maybe he'd hallucinated-

*No.*

They were coming for them, *they were coming for them.*

For the first time Steve feels hope bloom in his chest.

He looks over at Billy and gestures to where she'd just been standing, "you didn't see her?" he asks, still in disbelief.
Billy looks at him like somehow Steve is the insane one, glancing to the spot he'd just pointed to and back again.

He shakes his head and Steve deflates a bit.

"It was Eleven, the girl, she found us." He tries to explain to him.

*It was real, it had to be real.*

"Yeah no shit, you said that's what she does, finds people and if she found us then why are we still here?" Billy huffs out, crossing his arms.

Steve frowns, looking around. "I- it's probably not as easy as all that, she'll have to reopen the gate to get us back through, I think."

"You seem pretty confident that's what's going to happen." Billy says, tone serious.

"Why wouldn't she?" He asks, genuinely not knowing where Billy was going with this.

"We're just a couple of teenagers Steve, we're nobody, disposable, did anybody go and save that chick Barbara?" Billy yells out in a sudden outburst.

If there was a question of how Billy felt before, there isn't one now.

Steve looks at him like he's the stupidest idiot he's ever met in his life.

*He kind of is.*

"That was different, of course they're going to fucking save us Billy, you don't know them like I do."

He remembers the look he shared with Dustin and Mike.

Steve *knows* they'll all at least *try* and judging from the fact that he'd just seen their magic pumpkin ride out of this place he figures there's a pretty high chance of survival at this point.

Billy throws his head back and laughs, it's hollow and fake.

"You're delusional Harrington, *nobody* is going to save us."

Much later in life Steve thinks he'll reflect back on this moment.

He'll assume it's a combination of getting trapped in the upside down, having to deal with Billy, his breakup with Nancy and just about everything piling up one after the other that possesses him to say what he says next.

Something in him snaps.

It must show on his face because Billy actually looks taken aback for a moment before recovering, putting the tough guy front back on that Steve had gotten so used as he crowds into Billy's space, staring him down.

"You know what Hargrove?" He spits out, voice laced in venom.

Billy merely stares back at him, daring him with his eyes.

"We *will* get out of here and when we do, do you know why we'll have gotten out of here?" He asks
rhetorically, taking a deep breath through his nose, nostril's flaring.

"It's going to be because I stuck around to save your sorry ass."

He goes to turn around and walk away from Billy but changes his mind as a new bout of anger washes over him so he grabs Billy by his shirt.

"Actually, you wanna know what else?!" He hisses, getting even closer to his face, their noses almost touching.

"If I wasn't here, nobody would come to save you Billy, not a single fucking person would give a shit if you were gone."

Billy looks up at him and for the first time ever he doesn't say anything back.

A new look Steve has never seen before appears on Billy's face and it makes him look younger than he's ever seen him.

Like he's a scared child.

Billy's eyes begin to water and my god they're the most expressive eyes he's ever seen-

Steve belatedly realizes what he's just said and done.

He takes a step back, immediately getting sick to his stomach, feeling completely disgusted with himself.

"I- I'm sorry I didn't-" he goes to say and Billy looks at the ground wiping the unshed tears from his eyes.

"Yeah well, you're not wrong for once Harrington, congratulations." Billy says and it's quiet, broken, it pulls at something inside of Steve as he reaches his hand out to him.

He's not even sure what he's reaching it out to do but Billy just shakes his head and walks away.

That constant feeling of guilt doesn't go away.

It's a feeling Steve hates the most.

He'd crossed a line, something he seemed to be very good at doing except he knows it's more than just crossing a line.

Steve hit a very deeply buried nerve that Billy clearly didn't want anyone hitting and the implications of it were making him want to cry.

Steve doesn't know why he opened his stupid fucking big mouth in the first place.

This was why he could never get close to Jonathan, because of the things he'd already said and done.

Steve feels another wave of nausea hit him as he replays the memories, saying things he didn't mean only so he could hurt him.

He had wanted Jonathan and Nancy to feel what he felt, it had been stupid and childish.

Sure, they'd all made their peace with each other a long time ago but he also knows it's never going
to change what happened.

Suddenly, out of nowhere a crack of thunder in the distance pulls him from his thoughts as he looks to the east.

The sky goes black, the red hue getting engulfed as a storm starts to form.

His blood goes cold.

The nausea changes from guilt to terror induced within the span of a few seconds.

*That can't be good.*

Billy seems to have noticed it too because after a few moments he realizes the guy had come to stand next to him at some point.

He doesn't know how long they both stand there gaping but everything forms *fast.*

It almost looks as if it's coming right for them until Steve starts to realize *oh fuck, it's coming right for them.*

The thunder and lightning becomes more and more violent as Steve starts taking a step back.

He can smell ozone in the air with that hint of static in the air that makes the hairs on his arms stand up.

Billy turns to look at him, they lock eyes for a moment.

Something dark starts to break in from behind the storm, catching his attention as he goes from looking at crystal blue orbs to the darkest black he's ever seen in his life.

A strange moving smoke emerges from the clouds like tornados forming but-

Steve feels rooted in place, like he can't move, he's cold, frozen in terror and then he sees it.

Sees it.

Panic starts to set in as he almost falls backwards, flailing has arm out toward Billy who also seems to be frozen in place.

Steve had seen the drawings in the Byers house, he knows what he's looking at right now.

"Billy, Billy, that's it, *that's the thing,* it's the Mind Flayer."

It comes out sounding far more hysterical than he'd intended but he figures he can be forgiven.

Billy turns and glares at him as if they aren't about to fucking *die.*

"Yeah, no fucking *shit.*"

They both come back to themselves in that next instant, survival instincts kicking back on as they both turn to run away from the direction of the storm.

There's no destination in mind yet but it was pretty clear they needed to get the *fuck away from there.*

They eventually hole themselves up inside of a smaller looking house, emptying out their back packs
to look for anything that might help against a gigantic shadow monster.

There's nothing, nothing at all.

Steve looks out the window and sees that while the storm has slowed it was still headed right for them.

It was like it was waiting them out, taunting them.

"We can't keep out running this thing." Steve states, pursing his lips.

Billy is across the room, leisurely leaned back against the wall, his head thunking back against it softly, periodically, like it's tick and he can't keep still.

When he stops he simply tilts his head up toward the ceiling for a while and then turns his head back towards Steve.

"Yeah, I know."

His voice sounds resigned again except there's something different in it that Steve doesn't recognize.

"Look Billy, I-" Steve goes to say but Billy pushes himself from the wall with the back of his foot and starts moving toward him.

"Do you ever shut the fuck up Harrington?" He huffs out, rolling his eyes.

Steve furrows his brow, not wanting to start another fight at a time like this.

"Sorry, it's just-"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, did the word sorry just come outta that mouth of yours?" Billy asks, a look of disbelief gracing his features as he shakes his head and starts mumbling under his breath.

Due to the silence around them and their close proximity Steve can still clearly hear him say 'we really are 'bout to die.'

Steve shakes his head back at him, "we aren't gunna die, Billy."

It doesn't come out very convincing, not even to his own ears.

Billy chuckles, putting his hands in his pockets as he goes to stand in front of Steve.

For once he doesn't feel threatened like he usually does when the guy gets up into his personal space.

Steve feels a nagging in the back of his mind like he's missing something really important but ignores it.

Billy simply stares at him and for some reason Steve feels his heart start trying to beat out of his chest.

He swears he can see something almost resembling fondness for a split second but the look quickly goes back to resigned surrender fairly quickly.

This time though, Billy's face hardens.
There's something different there too, the look Steve still couldn't quite put his finger on.

"Don't worry pretty boy, I won't let the big bad monster get you."

It's the last thing Steve hears before everything goes black.

Chapter End Notes

*2019 Ceru, Log idfk:*  
I dunno if anyone has noticed but I started removing the times that Billy calls Steve princess.

Back then it seemed cute but now that I'm older it kind of lost its luster so yeahhhhh im sorry if that upsets anyone but it just doesn't feel right.

The alternative makes far more sense in my opinion, like things coming full circle.

Also, the greatest thing about this revising im doing is i can put even more foreshadowing in the story.

Y'all know how much I love my FORESHADOW, that still hasn't ever changed about me lol.
Steve dreams.

He dreams of Nancy. Her smell, her smile, her face, can hear her laugh and it envelops him for such a long time and feels so inherently good he never wants to leave, wants to stay buried in this state of pure sensation.

Eventually though he feels wrong, like there's something missing.

The dream shifts.

Nancy and Jonathan are together, they're happy, happier than he's ever seen them, they look a little older, a bit more battle-worn but secure.

Absently he takes in their surroundings, everything around them looks a bit more technological than anything Steve has ever seen, they're hunched over some sort of computer when a door to their left opens and someone walks in to join them.

Before Steve can see who it is he's thrown back into darkness and he feels resigned, knows how inevitable it had all been.

He'd just wanted Nancy for as long as he could have her, there was always that knowledge somewhere in the back of his mind that she would only ever have eyes for Jonathan.

He dreams of the kids. They're all standing around some machine at the arcade laughing together and it warms Steve's heart, he feels content.

They deserve this.

He thinks to himself but that feeling of wrong creeps back up on him, tingles at the back of his neck when all of the sudden Will Byers turns around like he's heard someone call his name.

He looks straight at Steve with a look of complete terror on his face.

"It's coming."

The dream fades, he's standing in pure darkness this time, a solid feeling of being instead of something that was far more corporeal from before.

Panic rises in his chest until he starts to feel like he's suffocating, like someone is trying to choke the life out of him.
A memory, dream, feeling, warning?

He isn't sure.

The feeling shifts, changes, becomes stronger, changing shape but the only word that comes to his mind is wrong.

So, so very wrong.

It's fucking unbearable, like a migraine pulsating on the inside of his skull, getting worse and worse like it's going to consume him, swallow him whole.

He knows he's screaming but he can also hear someone else screaming too and for a moment he feels everything, too much all at once.

There's so much pain.

It's like he's being burned alive from the inside out.

It lasts forever, doesn't stop-

For a fleeting moment, one single inescapable moment, he feels whole, like a jagged piece has slotted into place inside of him.

It's euphoric.

It doesn't last long.

The euphoria is gone in an instant and he feels like he's being torn apart, it's like something is trying to reach back inside of him.

His very essence is bleeding, like his soul is wounded before it feels like that jagged piece is forcefully ripped away.

Steve falls to his knees in the darkness, wrapping his arms around himself as he hunches over, screams, cries, harder than he ever has in his life, he never knew that a pain like this could even exist.

Give it back, give it back, give it back.

It's too late and suddenly there's nothing.

No pain, no emotion, no feeling.

Nothing.

The nothing is worse, like he's being suspended in a state of existence with no end in sight.

At one point he looks ahead of himself, standing back up.

There are doors surrounding him, so many doors everywhere, all different types.

That's weird.

It's not the doors that catch his attention the most though.
Chains.

There are large metal chains blocking off the doors all around him.

Some feel old, some feel new, he's not sure why they're there or what they're trying to keep inside.

*Why?*

He reaches out to grab one except it fades away into smoke the moment he touches it.

*Remember.*

Remember what?

*Billy.*

Billy's in danger.

His heart starts again.

Everything is sluggish, slow as he belatedly realizes it had stopped beating in the first place.

The nothing washes away as *feeling* comes rushing back to him, making him dizzy with it, finding *himself* again.

Steve runs, shouting out into the darkness until his voice is rasp, calling out for Billy.

*Have to find him.*

*Get him back.*

He doesn't know why, it's just a feeling and he *feels* like he's gonna go insane.

Suddenly, Eleven is there in front of him.

It's almost as if she heard him crying out, appearing out of thin air like some sort of herald.

She was always, *always* there when he needed her most.

*Thank fuck.*

Steve lets out a wracked sob, dropping to his knees in front of her.

"You have to save him, please. It's my fault, all of it." He rasps out, tears streaming down his cheeks and he can feel the warm wetness of them, can smell and *taste* the salt, it all feels so *real*.

She tilts her head to the side curiously while looking down at him.

"He is...your friend?"

Steve nods his head vigorously. "Yes, yes he's my friend, please. He's in danger."

He isn't sure *why* Billy is in danger or *how*. He doesn't remember *why* he's reacting the way that he is or saying the things that he says.
It’s like he's watching himself, having no control over what's happening and merely being swallowed up by the single-minded feeling of needing Billy to be safe.

She nods like somehow that's all she needed to hear and puts a hand on his shoulder.

"Okay."

Steve jolts awake.

There's a hospital bed, he's in a hospital bed.

Why-

There's only the loud, erratic, and alarming beeping of a heart monitor in his ears.

Absently he tilts his head to look up at the heart monitor.

It's steady, normal.

What-

Confusion washes over him until he realizes that he's broken out into a cold sweat, feeling like several levels of death.

Steve starts to wish he hadn't woken up at all.

He hears himself groan, everything sounding far off as he tries to take in more of his surroundings, pull himself back into focus.

White walls, white floor, white ceiling, it all looks familiar-

Hawkins Lab.

He's out of the upside down.

Steve panics.

His heart rate monitor starts to actually go off, blaring at him.

It's really not helping his pounding headache.

He pulls his IV's out, pulls at every obstructive wire attached to him and that feeling of wrong has crept back up on him.

He feels weak, weaker than he's ever felt in his life and suddenly there are arms in front of him that aren't his own.

The room is suddenly full of people and they're holding him down.

He thinks he might be yelling or screaming, maybe both, but there's so much going on and he can't think straight.

Billy's in danger.
I need to see Billy.

It's my fault.

Billy's gonna die.

It's all he can think, a never ending mantra clouding his mind as the memories come flooding back.

He remembers.

He remembers Billy.

They'd been in that house, running from the Mind Flayer.

"Don't worry pretty boy, I won't let the big bad monster get you."

Steve screams.

The all-consuming pain, the feeling of being burned alive crashes back into him.

This time it feels like it's trying to claw its way out of him instead of inside.

It only lasts for a moment before it's gone, almost as if it was all just a dream.

He starts to pick up on the voices around him, begins to be able to focus a little bit better as his head starts to clear.

"Jesus, how is this guy even moving? He's so drugged up he shouldn't even be conscious right now."

They're male, probably a doctor most likely and he assumes they're the ones holding him down.

There are arms over him, around him, touching him and eventually he feels straps around his wrists.

He doesn't realize he had already been thrashing until he begins to thrash even more violently, panic overtaking him once again.

He can hear familiar voices calling his name.

Nancy, Jonathan, the kids, Ms. Byers, Chief Hopper.

He hears them all, they're all here.

He feels someone touch his cheek gently and immediately he knows it's Nancy, would know her touch anywhere.

Immediately he starts to calm down. He turns to look at her and she's crying, sobbing and he hates it, hates seeing her cry, hates being the one to have caused it.

She's saying something to him but he can't hear her and it's just so frustrating. He tries to focus, he really does and finally her voice cuts through the fog of his loud brain.

"Steve, it's okay. Billy's okay, he's in the other room. You're both safe, you're both home."
Billy's okay.

Billy's safe.

Billy's alive.

The fight goes out of him and he feels relief wash over him in waves, making him go boneless, involuntary tears streaming down his face but he doesn't even care how it looks because Billy is safe. Nancy makes a choked out, broken noise. It's a sound he never wants to hear ever again in his life.

The pinprick of a needle in his arm is the next sensation that registers, they're injecting him with something, reattaching whatever he'd managed to disconnect from himself.

Jonathan is suddenly next to Nancy. He catches a glimpse of the others behind them and Jonathan rests a comforting hand on Nancy's shoulder. "Please Steve, just rest."

He's not sure who says it because the edges of his vision start to go black before he's consumed by the darkness once more.

So, he rests.

When he comes to again it's gentler, like he's waking from a good nights sleep.

As he looks around this time, far more aware than he's felt in a while he sees Nancy to his left. She's sitting in a chair, her arms tucked up underneath her head, laying the upper part of her body on his bed, fast asleep.

There's no helping the fond smile he gets on his face while looking down at her as he runs his fingers through her hair softly.

It feels nice, familiar, grounding and it's something he used to do for her after their long nights of studying together.

Or rather, the studying she would do while he would sit there trying to distract her, not paying attention at all.

Steve looks over at the chair in the corner of the room to see Jonathan perched awkwardly in it, also fast asleep.

He gulps, stopping dead in his tracks as he puts his hand back in his lap, that's not something he gets to do anymore, it's not reserved for him like it used to be.

Right.

He expects to feel that pang of sadness that he usually feels upon the realization, expects that yearning to come at him full force like it always does.
It doesn't.

Weird.

There's a strange absence yet an equally secure feeling tucked deep in his chest that wasn't there before.

Before what?

He's not sure and it hurts to try and remember, so he doesn't.

There's a couch next to the door leading out of the room, Mike and Dustin are sitting on it next to each other, talking quietly to themselves.

He snorts upon seeing them.

Some things never change.

The two small children suddenly stop talking to look up at him in alarm.

"Don't you people have somewhere to be?" He teases.

It comes out raspy, like he hasn't talked in months except he actually has no idea how long he's been out so he's not sure how accurate that might be.

Nancy stirs awake and Jonathan follows soon after.

They all crowd around him and Dustin is the first one to break the silence.

"You have no idea how glad we are to see you alive, man." Dustin lunges at him, plastering to Steve's right side as he starts to sob softly, surprising even himself at the sudden outburst of emotion.

Steve decides not to give him shit for it, understanding completely.

Mike follows soon after on his left and then Nancy and suddenly they're smothering him in hugs.

Jonathan rests a hand on his shoulder reassuringly, smiling down at him and Steve smiles back, averting his eyes away quickly.

"We thought we'd gotten you killed." Mike says through his own tears and Steve can't help the ones that well up in his own eyes.

He hadn't thought of how it might effect the kids.

He remembers how they were going to pull him up but he'd resisted and he hadn't even thought about how the kids might blame themselves.

Fuck, what if we'd died?

There was no point worrying about it now.

"Hey, hey, it's okay. I knew you guys would find a way." He reassures them.

It's the truth. It's what he'd been banking on and he had somehow been right.
"Yeah, but everything that must have happened..." Dustin says.

Steve's expression hardens. "Look at me, both of you look at me okay?" He says firmly.

They both get up and start to wipe the tears from their eyes, waiting for him to continue.

"Don't you ever blame yourselves for any of this. Do you understand me?" He stares them both down, not backing down until they both slowly nod their heads.

"It was my choice. Mine." He says, staring them down again to get his point across as he points his thumb at himself.

"Even if you had gotten me back up the hole, I'd have jumped right back down. You guys know that, it's why we all let go at once. It was going to happen no matter what and you both did the right thing." He assures them.

"But-" Dustin begins to say and Steve holds up his hand to stop him.

"You both knew you'd find a way to save me, that's why you let go. That's why I let go, because I trust both of you. You kids are capable of anything."

They all look at him and a new round of crying and hugs start up again.

For a moment Steve forgets and feels better than he's felt in a long time.

The two younger children eventually leave the room to go grab food from the vending machine.

Steve's face changes as he looks at both Jonathan and Nancy.

"How is he?" He asks, unsure if he even wants to know the answer.

Nancy breathes out slowly, like she's bracing herself which is kinda weird. "How much do you remember?" She asks and the question is even more strange to him.

*What does that matter?*

She seems to pick up on his confusion and nods. "I mean, what's the last thing you remember happening in the upside down?"

Steve purses his lips and starts to regret having asked at all.

"Billy, he knocked me out or something, that's all I remember."

Nancy breathes in deeply this time, nodding again and she's starting to make him feel nervous, like she's walking on eggshells around him and he doesn't like it.

"Ok, right so- ok, you don't remember anything after that?"

"No- or I dunno. I think I woke up here? I was trying to get up but you were all here and they strapped me down. You told me Billy's alive, he's alive right?" He asks a little desperately.

"Yes, yes he's alive." She says, holding out her hands as Jonathan puts a hand on him to keep him
down.

He hadn't realized he was trying to get up.

*That's new.*

He nods and rests himself back down.

Jonathan and Nancy share a look and he can't help the myriad of feelings that well up inside of him.

There's a lot of confusion and it's almost like his body remembers but every other part of him has no idea what's going on.

Like there are two different versions of himself but when he doesn't fight it that's what feels most natural so at this point he's just rolling with the punches.

Nancy looks around cautiously and Jonathan nods his head at her.

"El got back to that side, found you, and when she dragged you back to this side you were unconscious, but you must not have been when she found you." Nancy says furrowing her brow.

Steve finds himself furrowing his own, "What do you mean?"

---

*Nancy clings to Steve's unconscious body like a lifeline. Jonathan is a solid reassurance behind her as he rubs her back.*

*The guilt eats her alive with every second that passes by, every moment she spends holding onto the body of someone who's heart she broke.*

*This was her fault, all of it, so many things could have gone differently if she'd just-*

*Eleven turns back around to face the freshly opened gate, beginning to walk right back into it again.*

*"What the hell do you think you're doing kid?!" Hopper yells out as he grabs her by the shoulder.*

*Eleven turns to look at Steve's unconscious body and then back at Hopper again.*

*"His friend." She says before walking back inside, ignoring him completely.*

*Hopper almost goes in after her but Joyce stops him, reassuring Jim that he'd just be a burden in the long run.*

*It feels like an eternity, but eventually she emerges back through with Billy in tow, also unconscious.*

*The relief they all feel is tangible in the air as El closes the gate back up again. She staggers a bit afterwards and Nancy wonders how such a small girl is capable of such amazing things and can still keep herself upright after it all.*

*El turns towards them and looks down at Billy's body with a grimace.*

*"The Mind Flayer, it got him."*

*Panic zips through the room and Hopper leans down to check Billy's pulse.*
"He's still alive."

"We know how to do it now, we need to get it out of him." Joyce says, sounding panicked yet determined.

"We need to get them to the lab, we'll burn it out of him there." Hopper says, leaving no room for argument.

"What?!" Steve yells out. His heart rate goes up on the monitor again and Jonathan puts his hand on Steve's chest to keep him down, being a bit more forceful than last time with a look of 'I swear to god would you please just stop,' and Steve chastens.

"It's okay, they got it out of him." Nancy reassures him.

Jonathan and Nancy share yet another strange look, like they're not telling him something and Nancy turns back, a big smile on her face.

"They say you can go home soon. It's almost all out of your system."

Steve blinks rapidly.

Home.

His normal life, the life he'd had before he'd gotten himself trapped in the upside down.
Before everything that had happened while he was inside of that place, before Billy.
He feels like he's lived an entire lifetime and suddenly gets nervous.

"How long were we actually gone?" He asks, afraid of the answer.

"Three days."

He takes a deep breath.

Only three days?

"It felt longer than that." He says quietly as he looks down at his hands.

"Yeah, you're telling me." She says as she gets a far off look on her face.

He hadn't thought about how it must have been for everyone else.

It amazes him that still, it had never even occurred to him what it must have been like for the rest of them to have to deal with the aftermath of their disappearance.

"If I wasn't here, nobody would come to save you Billy. Not a single fucking person would give a shit if you were gone."

The memory of his own words come back to him, unbidden and vicious. Bile rises to the back of his throat and he grips the side of the hospital bed.
"I'm gonna be sick." He manages to get out in time and Nancy grabs the small satellite trashcan next to his bed, handing it to him as he unloads the contents of his stomach into it.

He knows they'll just assume it's from getting the upside down out of his system and maybe that's partially true but Steve knows better.

The guilt is eating him up inside.

"Hello Mr. Harrington, how are we feeling today?" A random doctor asks him and he hadn't even been paying attention, didn't hear him enter the room.

The man comes in to sit down next to him, clipboard in hand.

"Where's Dr. Owens?" Steve asks as he looks at Jonathan and Nancy who seem unbothered.

"Currently in the hospital. He was wounded from the attack on the lab and I am the one filling in for him. I'm Dr. Richards." The man responds.

Steve nods, accepting the answer for what it is yet still feeling a bit uneasy.

He'd only been cognitive in this place for about a day and he was already restless and agitated.

"So, I just wanted to discuss a few things before we release you and you sign off on some documents." Richards says.

Steve perks up at this, anything to get him out of this damn place.

"Now first, I'd like to discuss the episode you had when you first got here in which we had to sedate you."

Steve grimaces and nods. It hadn't really been an episode in his opinion. He'd merely freaked the fuck out because he'd woken up somewhere completely different after having been knocked out.

Not to mention his apparent huge loss of time he still couldn't seem to get back.

"Do you remember any of it feeling strange or different, anything we should take notice of?"

Steve ponders the question, wondering what he means.

"No, I was just confused from waking up in this place." He says and it's only partially true.

"Ok well, you were very heavily sedated. By all counts of logic, you should not have woken up."

The man states.

"Yeah, I remember one of the doctors saying something like that as they pinned me to a bed and strapped me down." Steve says, tone dark.

"You were screaming out in pain, Mr. Harrington. You had dislodged your IV's and you were a danger to yourself and the people around you." The doctor states plainly, completely unapologetic.

"Yeah, well it just freaked me out even more." He retorts, glaring at him.
"Mm yes well, you were screaming for Mr. Hargrove too." Richards says and his demeanor changes like he's looking for the slightest of reactions.

Steve was starting to feel a lot like a lab experiment to this guy.

Who the fuck is he?

"Billy was the last thing I saw before I got knocked out, next thing I know I'm in a hospital bed so yeah I can see how I'd do that." He's says, not entirely sure why he's withholding information from this man, but the whole thing was starting to make him uneasy.

Something was off about him.

The doctor sighs, putting his clipboard down as he stares long and hard at Steve.

"I understand that you don't want to talk about it, it's traumatizing. But we have your best interests in mind, I assure you. I know you aren't going to give me anything to work with so allow me to extend an olive branch toward the future." He says, tone serious.

"In my line of work there usually is no such thing as a coincidence. As we began the purging process of removing the virus from Mr. Hargrove, a heavily sedated patient-" he pauses and points at Steve, "Which was you by the way," he says like he's trying really hard to prove a point right now.

"Woke at the exact same moment the process began and behaved erratically, asking for said patient, saying he needed to see him and that he was going to die." The man pauses, most likely to allow that information to sink in and Steve starts to get anxious.

"At some point your heart rates began to rise in tandem with one another and were the exact same for a very long extended period of time until the virus was finally purged from his body. Only then did the newly administered sedatives begin to fully work on you."

Richards goes to pick up his clipboard and begins to write something down on it.

"The chances of two heightened heart rates being the exact same for the same amount of time under such a situation, I'm not sure there's a statistic for that, but for your peace of mind we'll assume there is and pretend to chalk it up to coincidence, shall we?" He says and Steve feels like he's being treated like a fool.

Quite honestly, he has no clue what to say to that, hadn't even known that's what had actually happened and he briefly remembers the confusion upon waking and seeing his own heart rate monitor being completely normal, yet hearing it going off.

Had he been hearing Billy's monitor at first?

"It's probably just a side effect of being in that place." Steve says mostly to himself because this was all starting to become too much, too quick.

"You might actually be correct, but I can't force you to say or do anything other than keep your mouth shut to the public, so please, if anything else occurs I'm begging you, come to us Mr. Harrington."

He knows what that means, can read between the lines.
'We'll be monitoring you without your say so, deal with it.'

Steve sighs and nods his head in understanding.

He doesn't get to see Billy and gets released a day later.

Billy doesn't, however and he's still stuck inside of the facility.

Steve doesn't even know if Billy was awake yet, hadn't been given any information and he'd refused to ask around because he didn't want them to start asking him more questions.

He almost marched back inside when Chief Hopper came to pick him up, informing him of the fact that Billy hadn't been released yet, but decided against it.

It would put them both in danger.

Also, he just wanted to go home, ever since getting back into his own dimension there was this awful tingling sensation beneath his skin.

They were going to be heavily monitored from now on, that Steve had no doubt about and he was not trying to give them more reasons to keep him on that list.

"You did good, keeping your mouth shut." Hopper says as they load into the car.

"I don't really know what you mean by that, I actually don't remember very much." He admits.

Hopper glances over at him before starting the car, clearly not believing him and he kind of doesn't believe himself.

There has been a lot left unsaid, a lot that needed to get discussed eventually.

"Neither one of you mentioned El, let's keep it that way." He says threateningly like somehow it's a necessary thing to say.

As if Steve is ever going to put her in any kind of danger after saving not just his life but Billy's as well.

Without her they'd be worse than dead.

He sighs and buckles himself in. "So what's the cover story Chief?"

"You've been staying over at Nancy's place. Luckily this all happened over the weekend so we've got less days to account for, but ultimately you just wanted to get away from home. She was able to keep your parents in the dark as well as her own so they're all none the wiser." He says while backing out of the facility parking spot.

"What about Billy?" He asks with trepidation.

Hopper gives him a look and shrugs. "I've already discussed it with him. He's going to say he needed time away from home after having found his stepsister and sending her home. His father seems to be a real piece of work, didn't make it all very easy but we're solid on that front."
Steve feels his stomach turn, wondering why Billy would put himself in a situation like that.

Perhaps to spite his father?

He remembers Billy mentioning them not getting along.

"So wait, Billy's awake?" He asks, realizing what the man just implied.

Hopper raises a brow at him. "Yeah, they didn't tell you?"

"I didn't ask. I didn't want them...asking more questions." He says truthfully, knowing he can trust Hopper.

The sheriff hits a button on his radio and sighs.

"Look kid, I dunno what's going on there or what happened, but you're both doing the right thing keeping quiet." Hopper assures him.

"Those white coat freaks mean well, but I don't trust them as far as I can throw them. I have no choice but to work with them, but you both don't owe that place anything." He continues, "I will say that if things get bad and it needs to get addressed you should probably go to them though."

Steve rubs a hand over his face and nods.

Hopper gets a concerned look on his face and grips the steering wheel tightly for a moment.

"Hey kid, it was probably just a side effect of that place, alright. Don't stress it." he says, trying to be reassuring.

Steve gives him a smile but he knows it looks fake, can't even muster up the energy to pretend he's fine. He looks out the window and loses himself to his own thoughts.

"Yeah, probably."

They both know it's not true.

Chapter End Notes

*2019 Ceru Log:*

Going back through this chapter over a year later was a wild ride my dudes, it was really my introduction into the penultimate turning point in which I just slammed a shit ton of foreshadowing into one spot and went from there.

Back then I'd have probably up to the chapter 30ish mark planned out in my head.

My ending or planned sequel hadn't popped up inside my noodle brain yet.

This time however that's not the case.
*SPOILERS, DON'T READ PAST THIS IF YOU'RE A NEW READER*

SRSLY, TURN AWAY.

GO NOW WHILE YOU CAN.

Ok so for anyone reading this and you've been here since before Broken Pieces 2.0 you know that I mention the fact that a sequel was planned for this.

I may have hidden a small, miniscule part of it inside this chapter for my old readers.

Love you guys, still dunno why you're still here to this day, y'all the best kind of wack. <3

ALSO

The chains.

Old readers will know that there's one specific instance where Steve's chains begin to break later in this fic, back then i had a general idea of the kind of ability I wanted Steve to have manifest eventually.

For Billy it's compulsion, for Steve you guys never actually got to find out what he could do, or what he can do.

Yet.

As of me writing this, the fic is still stuck at chapter 54, I feel like I stopped there because it was right before a full blown shit ton of plot was about to be dumped on top of everyone & I knew if I posted it I'd never be able to turn back but I got so burned out that I had to walk away.

For over a year.

Lolsorry.

Anyway, count yourselves lucky i stopped before a bunch of huge reveals cause y'all would have hated me even more lol.

Specifically the reveal of Steve's power.

Anyway, hopefully one day I get to actually post that part of the story cause it's actually pretty dope and I still haven't fully decided on which scene im going to go with for that particular reveal.

Long story short I decided to throw the foreshadow in this chapter because I feel like it could have been hinted at much earlier with the whole "oh wow, Steve has chains wrapped around his psyche, he must be super powerful or something."

*Spoiler alert*

He is, he's fucking terrifying and makes Billy's compulsion power look like child's play and I wanted it to be a really REALLY slow progression of that power unleashing and just finally causing all kinds of havoc.

It's so great, I can't wait lol.
First I gotta revise this monster i wrote a year ago and put lipstick on this pig.

ANYWAY YEAH.

Currently im really enjoying going back through this thing, it has been a very enlightening experience.
Selective Memory

Chapter Summary

Beta'd By G_R12

Chapter Notes

Oh look, I finally get to write Billy's perspective!

*2019 Ceru Log*

Over a year later & I still get giddy from the mere thought of writing from Mr. Hargroves perspective.

Some things never change.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Billy's about ready to lose his fucking shit in this fucking shit hole lab and take everyone down with him.

He'd been done the moment he'd finally woken up after having the poor excuses for scientists, parading around as if they're doctors, burn the virus out of him.

He wonders if they were trying to make it as painful as possible on purpose just to see what would happen.

After he recovers enough to be coherent it just gets worse from there.

He actually starts to wish he was back in the other dimension instead, still possessed by that crazy shadow demon.

At least that thing had decent manners.

The first doctor that tries to question him he tells to fuck off.

The second doctor makes the mistake of trying to question him when he's not bedridden anymore, so he tricks the guy into getting closer and punches him in his ugly fucking face.

The third doctor walks through the door, seeming a bit more cheerful than the others after they've strapped Billy down to the hospital bed like he's some sort of wild, caged animal.

*I'll show them a wild fucking animal.*

He thinks to himself as he pins the new doctor with a glare.
"Hello Mr. Hargrove, I'm Dr. Richards. You seem like you're doing well today." He says like he's a regular ole' Mary fuckin' Poppins.

Another man enters the room behind him and it's a second doctor.

He feels like things might go better this time and bites his tongue, waiting them both out.

Thing 1 looks over at Thing 2 and they both nod at each other, like they've both come up in here with some shitty excuse for a plan.

"We need you to understand that you're not being held against your will, but that we're merely taking precautions to protect the faculty." Dick says like he's trying to fake professionalism and failing terribly at it.

"How about you merry men in white let me sign those forms and I be on my way? Oh, and numero dos over there gets me the fuck away from here, how does that sound?" He asks, hoping maybe they'll just get tired of dealing with him and take him up on the offer.

If there's anything he's good at, it's driving people into a corner.

"Absolutely. I see no problem with that do you, Dr. Rodriguez?" Dickhole says.

The second doctor nods, leaving the room before casting a glare at Billy, which only causes him to smirk back, feeling victorious.

Richards turns back to Billy. "I can get you those documents, but while we wait do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?"

Billy rolls his eyes and groans, hitting his head back against the wall. "I'm really not in the mood to play this game right now, Dick. Go bother someone else."

"Oh, well yes I already have. Mr. Harrington was fairly cooperative, in comparison to you of course."

Billy purses his lips and stares the man down, wishing more than anything that his restraints weren't around his wrists so he could wring the man's neck.

"So, sleeping beauty finally woke up, eh?" He says, trying to taunt him.

Richards takes a deep breath and Billy feels pleased with himself, knowing he was starting to get the guy bent out of shape.

"You weren't aware?" He asks and Billy gives him a look that he hopes gets across the message of 'are you aware you're an idiot?'

"How the fuck would I know that when I'm strapped to a bed?" He finally asks because the guy seems pretty content just staring at him like he's something to be dissected.

"I'm just curious about the nature of the connection that you and Mr. Harrington seem to share." The doctor finally says and there it is.

*Ding, ding, ding!*
Let round one begin, fighters in their corners.

Billy likes to think he has a pretty decent poker face when it's absolutely necessary and gives the doctor a look of disgust.

"Pretty boy and I don't have a connection unless we're talking about the fact that I had to suffer through his company in that god forsaken place."

The doctor nods and starts jotting something down on his handy dandy clipboard and Billy can't find it within himself to care.

"Well, I more meant when you started screaming his name as he started to scream yours while your heart rates matched together during the purging process at the exact same time." He states, the cheerful tone packing a bag and leaving completely all of a sudden without even leaving him a goodbye note.

Billy realizes very quickly that this guy was not fucking around anymore, clearly having lost his patience.

The mask was slipping.

They'd just skipped all the way to round twelve and the guy hadn't even tried to wine and dine him.

*Rude.*

Billy thinks absently before he lets out an exasperated sigh.

"Fine, what can I say? Just can't get him outta my head. We were stuck in another dimension doc, it was traumatic. You really shoulda' been there." Billy laughs out.

Richards rubs at his temple and slaps his clipboard onto the stand beside Billy's bed, the action causing him to smirk once again.

"I'm going to tell you the same thing I told Mr. Harrington." He says as he attempts to visibly compose himself.

Which is to say that he recovers very poorly.

"I understand that you don't want to talk about it." He continues, staring Billy down.

"If anything else occurs between yourself and Mr. Harrington, please for the love of god, come to us so we can help you both."

"You got it. Doctor's orders and all that and Oh, that's right!" Billy says, pulling at his restraints to point his fingers at the man.

"Your couple of questions was up a long fucking time ago so how about you go get me those forms?"

The next person to visit Billy is Chief Jim Hopper, alone.

He'd be lying if he said he didn't already like the guy. There was clearly more to him than he liked to
let on.

One of the doctors had tried to call the guy Jim and he'd hit him with a *don't call me Jim.* before telling the guy nice and sweet to essentially fuck off.

It had caused Billy to snort as the door closed on his way out.

"We need to get a cover story together for you before they can release you."

Billy sighs, knowing the release had been too good to be true.

"Alright, just put me down as needing some fresh air so I took off for a while with someone I usually fuck or something." He says with a wave of his hand.

"Be serious."

"I am, you can even make someone up if you'd like, whatever gets me out of this fucking place faster."

"How well can it be sold?"

"Well, considering the last conversation I had with my pops was him telling me to cancel my date to find Max, I'd say pretty good. Just be careful of the old man, he's insufferable." He tells him honestly.

The Chief nods in understanding at him for a few moments.

"I'll get Max to help with the cover story." He mumbles out as he gets up to leave, but before he does he turns back to Billy.

"Steve's being released today."

Billy's fist clenches at his side involuntarily.

He sees Hopper look down at it before looking back up at Billy's face again and knows he's not fooling the Chief but still tries anyway.

"Okay." Billy finally responds with as much disinterest as he can muster, not meeting the man’s eyes.

Instead he stares at the white wall across the room like it's the most interesting thing he's ever seen.

Jim Hopper stands at the doorway for a few more moments to continue staring at Billy for an uncomfortably long amount of time before finally leaving.

Fuck.

Billy doesn’t sleep well that night. It's his last night before getting released and he prides himself on a job well done, all things considered.

He knows he's not out of the clear just yet, knows he'll be wire tapped and followed after all of this is said and done.
It's what he would do in their position.

This whole situation was nuts, had reached so far beyond anything Billy had ever thought he’d one day experience in his life.

*May as well take this shit a day at a time.*

He curls up into a ball on the bed and silently curses Steve fucking Harrington for existing, for *everything*, for nothing, for uprooting his entire life, for making him give a shit.

Realistically it's all his own damn fault, it's just easier to blame someone else, especially if that someone else is Harrington.

They weren't telling him anything about Steve which was making him restless, probably to see which one of them would crack first but he's pretty sure neither one of them was willing to say too much in fear of becoming lab experiments.

It didn't stop his desire to physically lay his eyes on Steve, to get tangible proof that he'd succeeded, he'd protected him.

Steve was safe.

The awful feeling in the pit of his stomach didn't seem to give a fuck about logic though.

If the Chief says Harrington is getting released that means he's just fine, will be back to his normal life that Billy has no place in.

What the fuck even happens now?

He tries not to think about it and he knows he'll have to be careful and lay low because he still has no idea what the fuck *deep, dark, and deadly* had actually done to them after having been bailed out by a little girl.

---

*Billy props Steve up against the wall and sighs.*

"*The things I do for you."* He mumbles under his breath as he rolls his eyes.

*He walks out into the middle of the road and catches the attention of the creature, leading it a few miles to the south, wherever is away from Steve as he braces himself.*

*It's an eternity before the shadow looms over him as he offers himself up, not really knowing what was about to transpire and not even really caring anymore.*

*He'd given up on surviving this a long while back, it was pretty clear that the universe was finally rightfully punishing him for all the things he'd done.*

*He wonders absently if Steve and Max will miss him.*

*Max is young and naive so at the very least Billy knows she'll feel bad, even after all they'd been through.*

*But Steve?*
He had said no one would miss him but Billy knows the guy is just one huge bag of emotions rolled into one.

Not to mention he also likes to think they've been through enough together that he'd made some sort of impact on Harrington's life and maybe not all of it had been entirely awful.

Mostly.

The guy is just too nice.

Billy hates it. He hates Steve's compassion, his words, that fucking mouth that spouts shit for no reason because he doesn't think before he speaks.

It had hurt, hearing what he'd already known to be true, he'll admit that much. But Harrington hadn't needed to rub it in his face.

By the same token he can't blame the guy because he'd deserved it.

The least he can do is take one for the team. If anyone deserves to survive it's Steve.

Billy sighs, closing his eyes, preparing himself as the darkness overtakes him.

The first thing Steve does after he gets home is look in the mirror but he doesn't recognize himself, if anything he looks anorexic and he'd already been a pretty lanky guy.

How is he supposed to explain this shit away?

Luckily neither one of his parents were home, the only upside to them not really giving a shit about what he does.

Three days.

Only three?

It's still unbelievable, he'd just had his entire world tilted on its axis and nobody would ever know other than one person.

Billy Hargrove.

Sure, Nancy and everyone else had been there for the aftermath but none of them knew what they'd been through.

Well, Eleven certainly had a pretty good idea of course but even he was still struggling to piece all of it together in his head.

Steve sighs and takes a long drawn out bath and it's probably the best thing he's ever done. His muscles relax, his mind goes blank and it's complete and utter bliss.

Until it's not.

He suddenly hears his bedroom window open.

Billy?
He thinks, but then mentally slaps himself in the face as he remembers that he's still at the lab until tomorrow. He starts to worry after that, wondering who the fuck would break in through his window late at night and throws a towel around his waist.

He slowly cracks open his bathroom door and lets out a frustrated grunt, swinging it open instead after not being able to see or hear anything anymore.

He makes an undignified and horrific sound he'll deny ever having made, ever.

Max is in his room sitting on his bed. She sees him half naked and covers her eyes.

"Oh my god. You're naked!" She squeaks.

"Keep your voice down!" He exclaims before turning back around, going into the bathroom and shutting the door.

Even though nobody was home with him he still wasn't sure if his house was bugged or not.

"Why did you break into my house?!" He half whispers, half yells.

"I'm sorry, but Billy asked me to come!" She says through the door.

He's never going to live this down and feels like the worst human on the planet for traumatizing a little girl. He's never been more embarrassed in his life and eventually he goes back out, fully clothed this time.

"I'm so sorry that just happened." He says, running a hand over his face.

"Well, I did break in. Kind of my own fault and don't worry, I have a step brother, remember?" She says, shrugging it off.

"Why didn't you just use the front door?!" He asks in exasperation, ignoring her step brother comment.

"Because it would look weird to have a little girl come to your house and ask to speak privately." She states.

Steve pulls at his hair and fumes, "You broke in through my bedroom window, sat on my bed and watched me walk out of my bathroom half naked. I'd be arrested right now as we speak, Max!"

She puts her hands up and has the audacity to look sheepish.

"I'll admit this isn't my proudest moment." She says and suddenly his vision goes dark at the corners of his eyes and Steve can't breathe.

"Don't get too excited pretty boy, I slipped and fell. I'll admit, it wasn't my proudest moment."

It feels like he's going to die and all he can see is the upside down. He knows it isn't real, knows he's just imagining things, but it’s so hard to breathe. He somehow ends up sitting on the floor with his back leaned against the wall and he puts his head between his legs and tries to get a grip.
He's not sure how long he stays there but when it all finally passes he looks up and Max is sitting next to him with a look of concern on her face.

"I'm so sorry Max, I-" he goes to say and Max shakes her head.

"It's okay, my room is right next to Billy's. He has panic attacks sometimes too, I'm used to it."

Steve's heart aches and he sucks in a breath. He's sad for Max, but he's sad for Billy too. The implications are horrific and Steve blocks it from his mind to be reviewed at a later date and gets up off the floor.

"Anyways, so why are you here again?" He asks, still trying to shake it all off but feeling more exhausted than he's felt since being in the other dimension.

"Billy, he has a message." She says perking up.

"Billy is still stuck at the lab." He states, eyebrow raised.

"Yeah, and I went to see him. Cover stories and stuff." She says with a wave of her hand.

"Okay, so what does he want to tell me then?"

"He says, and I quote, 'stay the fuck away from me, Harrington. Lay low until we get these freaks off of our backs.'"

Steve blinks and furrows his brow. "Should you be cursing?" He asks.

"Should you be letting a little girl into your room?" She retorts.

"Oh my god. Get out and go home Max!" He yells out as quietly as he can.

She laughs, dashing back out the window, but stops and turns around right as she's about to jump out.

"Hey, Steve?" She asks quietly and he almost doesn't hear her.

"Yeah?"

"I'm glad you're both alive, even Billy a little bit." She says, giving him a smile.

Seeing the kids happy, alive, safe and enjoying themselves, it makes it all worth it.

He smiles back. "Thanks Max, that means a lot."

She waves, leaving Steve to his own thoughts and he silently starts hoping that recovering his memories won't be too difficult as he watches her slowly disappear from sight on her bike.

---

_It's painful, so much more painful than he had been expecting, and he'd expected it to be pretty bad._

_Billy's head feels like it's going to explode as the creature takes over and he feels every moment, sees things he shouldn't be seeing, knows things he should never know._
It's too much all at once. It's like he's suffocating in every single way, but then suddenly he feels.

Feels the rip in the fabric of time and space form, feels himself being pulled toward it like a magnet.

Then he feels fear, except he starts to realize it's not his fear.

The creature is afraid.

The girl, she's was coming. She'll ruin everything.

He feels it panic, feels himself panic and wonders where it ends and he begins.

Hide them.

But it's not his thought.

He feels something different start to happen, like he's being pulled through to somewhere else.

Have to hide them.

Somehow, the overload of information in his head rationalizes for a moment and he knows the creature has pulled him outside of time.

Too much, too much, too much.

The girl won't find you.

He hears it say but there was something else, some other kind of pull that Billy had felt but he can't seem to focus on one thing at a time anymore.

Suddenly, he's breathing heavily on his hands and knees, pure darkness around him, and when he lifts his head he sees Steve standing a good ten feet away with his back to Billy.

Billy panics. The other pull he'd felt was Steve.

Except he knows he's still missing something, but the panic he feels is too overwhelming.

No, no, no.

He thinks and wants nothing more than to run far away.

Sleeping minds are easy to manipulate.

It's the creature’s thoughts again and Billy can feel the dark tendrils begin to surround them. It's going to consume them, consume them both. It had used Steve's unconscious state to trap them outside of time.

Stop thinking, don't let it in.

The darkness stills suddenly.
Billy and the creature become one for a moment and they feel something like a frayed tendril. It intrigues them both and they follow it and he feels when they reach the end. He looks past Steve and suddenly, he sees the kids. They're in the arcade surrounding a machine and he sees the back of Max's head. He tries to open his mouth but he can't, nothing comes out.

The Byers kid.

Will?

Try to remember.

The kid turns around, like somehow he'd heard Billy, and starts walking towards them.

He hears the creature howl and it reaches for Will, but he's too far outside of its domain.

Will stands there, frozen in place with a look of terror.

"It's coming."

They all disappear, Steve, the kids, Will. They're all gone and Billy is suspended alone in darkness again.

He feels the girl, she's searching.

Searching for them.

She's not skilled enough.

Billy fumes, pounding his fists down, can feel tears falling down his face out of pure frustration.

This isn't what he wanted.

Steve.

It found him. It found him and he feels the creature start to reach inside of Steve.

Billy has never been more terrified in his life, not even compared to all of those times with his own father.

That utterly decapitating feeling of hopelessness consuming him.

"What did we talk about?" He hears his father say.

No! Shut up, shut up, just shut the fuck up!

"Respect and responsibility." His father says back and it all hits Billy.

It's trying to distract him by using his own mind against him, trying to trap him inside of his own insecurities. Billy snarls and stand ups, facing the darkness all around him.

"Gonna have to try harder than that you shadow son of a bitch!"
If this thing was going to try and out crazy Billy, it was going to need to improve its tactics real fucking fast because that shit was just not gonna fly.

He can still feel it reaching for Steve but it's being cautious. It doesn't want to make the wrong move. It's trying to evade the girl.

There's a lull, it stills and then starts reaching out again and Billy panics.

It can't fucking get him, it won't get him.

Billy goes off of pure instinct, reaching deep inside of himself, losing himself to the feeling.

He feels himself reach out towards Steve, following the dark tendrils towards him too.

It becomes a race and the creature is trying to beat him to the punch.

Oh no you don't.

Sheer willpower keeps him going, giving him one final push.

Billy reaches Steve first.

It's an explosion of feeling, of thoughts, memories, like he's being pulled in, welcomed, wrapped in warmth. A stark contrast to the cold that had previously overtaken him.

It feels like he's come home.

Like he's whole.

Every piece of him that had been tainted by the creature being completely healed, like he's one big gaping wound being closed shut.

It's nothing like he's ever experienced before and he feels like it's something precious. He doesn't deserve it, it's too much.

He tries to pull away, but it holds tight, refuses to let him go like it's shaking him and screaming in his face.

Don't you dare, you're stuck with me now.

He wants to cry. It's so overwhelming and he feels himself crying, his soul, his essence, but then he's back inside of the darkness again. This time Steve is standing across from him.

They stare at each other.

"Billy?" Steve asks in disbelief, like he has no idea what's going on.

Billy gapes. Can't say anything, can't speak, doesn't even know what to say.

He doesn't have to when all of a sudden the girl, Eleven, appears next to them.

The creature is still connected to him. It's still there, a sliver of it in the back of his mind but it's
Billy doubles over in pain, feels the dark tendrils start to surround and consume him again as he hears himself and Steve scream.

It had tricked them, had wanted them all to find each other so it could make its move.

It wanted to have them all in one place.

He feels Steve crouch down next to him, fighting through the feeling of being torn apart from the inside out. He can hear him calling out his name, but he shuts it out and shakes his head.

He looks back up, but this time he stares at the girl.

"Take him and go. It's trying to trap us, I can't hold it back." He says, grabbing onto her wrist.

She gasps and understanding dawns in her eyes as she looks between the two of them.

She nods and holds her hand out.

It's a tangible feeling that he knows he can feel only because he's connected to the monster.

The girl creates a tear, makes a way out of this place, forces her way through, ripping the darkness apart.

All three of them, him, Steve, the creature, they feel the pain of the tear as if it's their own and it feels like shards of glass cutting their way into them as they all collectively scream.

He sees Steve drop to the ground and fall completely unconscious.

Billy continues to fight off the virus, holding out for as long as he can, seeing Eleven stagger a bit.

When she finally recovers she kneels down to place a hand on Steve's shoulder.

"Okay." she whispers and suddenly they're both gone.

Billy feels relief wash over him but then the creature is reaching for the open gate that still wasn't closing and he feels himself start to panic before getting a grip.

It was going to get out. It can't get out! Why wasn't she closing the gate?!

He curls in on himself and holds his hands to his head, that feeling of helplessness rushing back over him.

He feels the girl enter back through the gate and gasps. He props himself back up and wants to yell at her, tell her to get the fuck out.

Why don't these kids ever fucking listen?

She holds her hands out and he feels the tendrils reach out for her violently, angrily and he feels the creature’s frustration and anger like it's his own.
It crashes against an invisible force and she screams.

Billy feels the creature cower, unsure of itself and sees the memory of the girl fighting it off from before as if it's his own.

He sees it all happen through the mind’s eye of the shadow.

It's a strange feeling like he's weightless, a passenger.

He sees them on the lift, Jim Hopper standing next to her with a rifle in hand as she starts levitating off the ground, all fury and power right at her fingertips.

The creature is afraid, knows it can’t beat her because she’d done this before.

"You have to knock me out!" Billy yells, remembering what Steve had told him about purging the virus from Will.

She seems to understand because in the next moment everything goes black.

Chapter End Notes

So I had to repost this chapter and part of the end got deleted, it wasn't much but if you read the original ending congrats, you're one of the chosen.

Nothing too different, just shortened a bit.
When Billy finally gets released from the lab, Chief Hopper is the one waiting for him.

Before he gets into the passenger’s side he turns back toward the lab and sees a few doctors looking at them as they leave.

So, naturally the only option he has is to lift both of his hands into the air, flipping them off with his tongue sticking out for good measure, because he can.

They grimace, turning away and fuck does that feel good. Hopper doesn't say anything and Billy's starting to get the feeling that the guy doesn't like them almost as much as he doesn't, if not more.

doesn't take a genius to figure out why. This guy was clearly that girl's caretaker or something, otherwise he probably wouldn't have been standing next to her in a lift with a rifle as she closed a gate from hell.

Yikes.

Billy buckles himself in and looks around before turning his head to look at the lab again. The Chief seems to catch on to his paranoia and waves a hand in the air.
"The car is clean, no bugs."

Billy nods.

"I'm not gonna say anything about the girl, just so we're clear." He tells him, trying to make it as obvious as possible that he has no intentions of rocking the boat because for all intents and purposes he owes her his life, he's just incurred a huge fucking debt he intends to spend the rest of his life repaying.

She had saved them, was the reason Billy was even here right now and not stuck in the upside down still possessed by that shadow demon.

Also, it was pretty clear she was not some little girl you'd ever wanna fuck with.

*Ever.*

Jim takes in a deep breath and looks at Billy like he's reevaluating him.

"What happened in there, kid?" He asks quietly, like he doesn't really want to know the answer but asks anyway because his curiosity had won out in the end.

Billy's jaw clenches and he shrugs.

"What, Harrington didn't talk your ear off yet?" He says, trying to keep the mood light and less awkward.

Hopper grips the steering wheel with one hand and starts the car with the other, glancing at Billy. It immediately makes him uneasy because he knows he's probably about to hear something he doesn't want to.

"I've talked to him and I've talked to everyone that has talked to Steve. The last thing he remembers is you knocking him out." Hopper says like he's walking on eggshells.

Billy can't help the sharp intake of breath and the grip he gets onto the arm of his seat, like he's ready to rip it off.

It feels like a physical punch to the gut and he can't even bring himself to put up a front or pretend it hadn't figuratively knocked him off his feet.

How fucking convenient for Steve, to have the most inopportune, randomly inconvenient case of amnesia.

It just fucking figures, after everything they'd been through, the one thing Steve can't remember is all of *that*.

Had he really not felt it?

Any of it?

Was he simply lying to save face?

Perhaps Steve thought that by denying the whole thing they'd be better protected. It just didn't make sense, it couldn't be possible.
Billy shakes his head, refusing to believe that there wasn't at least something.

"You're sure he doesn't remember anything?" Billy asks after clearing his throat.

Hopper pauses for a long time, like he's trying to see if maybe he's missed something, replaying it back in his own head.

"He definitely remembers the purge, almost got up out of the bed, took out all of his IV's. He shouldn't have woken up, it's not humanely possible but he did and no matter what they injected him with he just screamed. He mostly screamed out for you." The old man finally says.

There's a sick, twisted part of Billy that feels relieved to hear that, to know he wasn't completely alone experiencing something he can't even properly put into words, can barely allow himself to think about because it just feels like a huge gaping wound that's bleeding out everywhere.

---

When Billy wakes up after telling Eleven to knock him out he realizes quickly that he's strapped down to a hospital bed that's connected to what looks like a specialized heart monitor.

He's encased in some sort of glass room. Men in specialized hazmat suits have him surrounded from the inside and out.

They've put something in his mouth and through the panic of it all his brain finally supplies him with enough cognizance to put one plus one together.

It's a mouth guard.

They don't want him to bite his tongue off or swallow it most likely.

He turns his head and can see past the glass. There are men in lab coats with clipboards, watching, waiting, like he's some sort of fancy science fair project.

Billy knows what's about to happen but he can't help the involuntary feeling of fear that creeps up inside of him as he starts to realize it's not just his own fear he's feeling.

It's also his fear.

'Hasta la vista motherfucker.' He thinks to it, not knowing if it can even understand him and not really caring.

It thrashes around violently inside of him, can feel what's about to happen and Billy braces. They seem to notice that it's awake inside of him and one of the suits leans down to hover over him.

"I'm going to take this mouth piece out. Tell me what you feel." He says.

"I feel like you need to get this fucking thing out of me." He spits out.

A voice suddenly comes out over an intercom system, loud and blaring.

"We just want to know as much as possible about the creature, Mr. Hargrove. I hope you can understand that." It says.
Billy pulls at his restraints and feels white hot anger wash over him and he's one with the creature for a moment as he stares up at the man hovering just above him.

"I'm going to consume all of you, every last one." He hisses out, can hear the creature's voice come out along with his own.

The suit takes a step back and turns his head to look at one of the white coats.

"What is it that you want exactly?" The disembodied voice asks this time.

"To consume." It says through Billy.

"To consume what?"

"Everything."

The lights begin to flicker inside the room and he hears his heart rate monitor start to blare.

"Get it out! Get it out now!" He yells fantically, desperately.

He almost thinks they might just keep him here, thinks for a moment that they might hold him captive to poke and prod at him but when he turns his head he sees the doctors yelling at each other behind the glass and wonders if they're discussing whether or not to turn him into a lab rat.

Whatever ends up happening, one of the doctors seems to get fed up with the conversation and walks over to one of the panels, slamming his hand down onto it.

Billy is forced to close his eyes.

He feels someone put something over his face and realizes it's a blindfold, he feels the onslaught of a panic attack slam into him full force.

"No please, don't!" He cries out.

He doesn't want to be in the dark again, can't handle being in the dark again.

'Please god no.'

They ignore him. They ignore his screams, his begging and pleading and he feels like he's dying, except death would be better than this.

He wants to die.

'Just end it for the love of god just end it.'

It's a lot like losing your mind and the heat starts to engulf him as it feels like he's burning alive.

It's a constant feedback loop of his fear and pain as the creature feels its own set of pain from being purged. They feed it back into each other like an endless cycle.

Billy loses himself in it.
It goes on for an eternity, endlessly. But then there's something there, like it's being uncovered, like he's been reaching out to grab hold of something but couldn't quite reach it.

Except suddenly he can.

Billy clings to it, latches onto it greedily like it's a lifeline and it may as well have been because the pain dulls and he feels the connection explode back to life, like a wound healing itself.

**Steve.**

It only lasts for a moment, the feeling of being whole again, until they're both thrown into the pain this time.

He can hear Steve screaming, knows that they're calling out to each other.

**It hurts, it hurts.**

Billy isn't sure if it's himself thinking it or Steve, or maybe even the creature, but he can't find it within himself to care.

He's afraid.

Afraid for Steve. Billy hadn't wanted this, hadn't wanted Steve to feel this and he tries to pull away, tries to shut it off and shut it out, but it's useless because Steve is reaching out for him too, won't let him go and Billy knows he's sobbing. It's just all too much.

In the midst of it all he feels a hand on his cheek and it takes him longer than it should to realize it's not his own cheek, someone is resting it against Steve's.

**Nancy.**

Billy feels Steve's emotions wash over him. Nancy's presence is a grounding comfort as Billy sees her face through Steve's eyes. She's crying for him, crying for Steve and he feels Steve's relief at seeing her.

He also feels that Steve is disgusted with himself for making her cry and a foray of emotions crash into Steve as it feeds back into Billy.

He feels something broken, guilty, and insecure inside of Steve and it makes Billy cry out.

**Why, why, why?**

Billy thinks to himself endlessly. Why does Steve have to feel things so strongly? It's too much and he hates it, wants to cut it out, rip every godforsaken piece of Steve out of himself and tear it to shreds, but it's too late. He knows it's too late.

Steve has carved himself inside of Billy, slotting neatly into place and Billy knows there's no going back.

"Steve it's okay. Billy's okay, he's in the other room. You're both safe, you're both home."
The relief Billy feels wash over the bond, coming from Steve this time is far more overwhelming and it enraptures him, like the only thing Harrington had cared about was knowing that Billy was safe.

Billy feels some dead, deeply buried part of himself claw its way to the surface, shying away from it, doesn't want it, doesn't deserve it.

This shouldn't be happening.

Billy is nothing. He's a broken sad excuse for a human. Nobody really cares about him, they wouldn't care if he was gone. He could just float away right now and everyone's lives would be so much better.

He's all of the things his father says he is and he isn't.

Apparently Steve doesn't appreciate the self-deprecation feeding itself into his side of the connection because Billy feels himself get wrapped in warmth again, hiding him, shielding him away like he's something precious and fragile to be kept and held gently and god what a hopeless fucking romantic Steve seemed to be.

He gets angry, angry at Steve.

Get out, get out! Please, it's too much, too much.

Suddenly it's almost as if his prayers have been answered because he feels the moment the creature is purged out of him and Steve must feel it too because suddenly he's gone.

Billy can't feel him anymore.

It's like he had been there one second and gone the next and it's agonizing, like he's just lost a limb.

No, no, come back, come back! I take it back!

He screams out but he knows it's on deaf ears. He's back to feeling only himself again and he doesn't even care about anything anymore as the men take off his blindfold.

Billy just lays there, sobbing until the doctors finally sedate him.

Billy realizes Hopper had been talking to him and tries to focus on what the man had just said, rewinding it back to himself.

"Pretty much everyone I've talked to seems to think it was a side effect and maybe it happened because you were both in such close vicinity with that thing for an extended period of time."

Billy purses his lips and looks out the window.

"Yeah, probably."

He forces himself not to think about it.

Two days later there's a knock at Steve's front door and when he opens it, it's Will and Joyce Byers.
"Hi sweetie, sorry to bother you but Will wanted to talk if that's okay." Joyce says with a warm smile.

"Oh uh- yeah sure of course, come in. My parents aren't home." He says, stepping aside to let them through.

"I know. I had Mike ask Nancy about when they wouldn't be here." Will says nonchalantly.

Steve almost asks how they'd managed that but stops himself because it's not really all that surprising. They'd probably tricked Nancy into answering.

Little shits.

He thinks fondly to himself.

"Alright well, take a seat. Does anyone want anything to drink?" He asks as they sit down on his couch in the living room.

"I'm good dear." Joyce says and Will just shakes his head no.

Steve shrugs and aborts his mission to the kitchen to turn around and sit across from them. There's an awkward silence as they all sit there and stare at each other and he's not sure if he should be the one to talk first.

"How are you doing Steve?" Joyce asks, breaking the silence and deciding for him before reaching across the small table between them to take his hand into hers.

It feels nice, human contact in general felt more grounding than usual.

He tries not to think about that too much.

"I'm good, Ms. Byers, alive." He says, laughing out nervously, meaning it as a joke before realizing how funny it isn't, not even to himself.

"Yes, alive. That's good. We just wanted to compare notes a little bit if that's okay." Joyce says soothingly as if he's going to bolt at any moment and Steve sees the maternal care in her eyes.

If only his own parents showed a side like this to him.

"Yeah sure, no problem. Anything you wanna know, ask away."

"Do you remember seeing me at the arcade from inside the darkness Steve?" Will finally asks.

Steve takes in a sharp breath and sits back, removing his hand from Joyce's to stare at Will.

"I thought I dreamed that." He replies quietly, almost to himself.

"I did too at first but it felt real. I saw both of you and I saw it coming for you." Will says while wringing his hands together.

"Yeah, I heard you. You told me it was coming wait- both, what do you mean by both?" Steve asks furrowing his brow.
"You and Billy. He was behind you, he looked like he was in pain." Will says in surprised confusion.

"I- I didn't even see him. Like I said, it felt like I was dreaming but inside of my own dreams if that makes any sense." He says in disbelief, not really knowing how to explain it, feeling a lot like he was doing a pretty poor job of it.

"Oh, well it only happened for a moment and then you were both gone." Will says with a shrug.

Steve's mind races from the onslaught of information and if that had really been what happened, what else had actually happened from his dreams that weren't really dreams?

Had Eleven been real?

That feeling of euphoria. What had that been?

Was that real too?

Where had it come from?

He tries to think but it still just hurts the more he tries to look back on it and his head starts pounding viciously.

"Hey, hey, sweetheart it's okay. You don't have to remember. We just wanted to know if it was real, if it had tried to reach out to Will through the both of you." Joyce says and suddenly she's sitting next to him, rubbing circles into his back.

"I don't know, I just don't remember." He says, frustration welling up inside of him.

He knows there's still a loss of time, that he's missing something important but he can't seem to get it back.

She shushes him, starts speaking to him in reassuring tone and it actually helps because eventually he finally calms down.

They try to help keep his mind off of things and talk about mundane topics that Steve had missed out on. How everyone was doing, random occurrences in town, until they finally begin to take their leave. But before they do, Joyce turns to him and smiles.

"So, I'm going to invite everyone to my place for a dinner to celebrate in a few days. It's for...all of us surviving and remembering Bob. We'd all love if you'd come. I'll have Max invite Billy too."

She says and Steve feels his hands clench, bunching up into the fabric of the couch at hearing Billy's name for some reason, at the mere thought of him.

"Just think about it okay?" She says, not waiting for a reply as she looks down at his clenched hands. Her smile wavers but she recovers quickly, waving goodbye to him.

He isn't sure how he feels, or rather, he knows he feels anxious, but doesn't know why the idea of seeing Billy makes his stomach turn.
Maybe because you still haven't apologized.

He thinks with a grimace, but it's more than that and he knows it is. He feels guilty sure but he also isn't sure if Billy even wants to see him. Max had told him that he'd said to stay the fuck away and lay low, so what right did Steve have in seeking the guy out?

If Billy needed time to himself who was Steve to deny him that?

Billy probably hated him for all Steve knew and wanted nothing to do with him.

Maybe just seeing Steve would bring back too many bad memories. Maybe he was just one huge, awful association with the upside down at this point and, as that thought occurs to him, he can't say he'd blame Billy if that's actually the case.

He absently wonders if Billy will even show up.

Chapter End Notes

I stayed up until the wee hours of the morning to get this one out to you guys because I'll be busy and it was a rough one to write, pretty damn heavy and I actually felt bad for Billy.

Anyway, today is my soulmates birthday and today, the 5th, and the 6th are my days off and I will be in full on party mode getting drunk off my ass celebrating with her until I finally have to go back to work so I don't think I'll be keeping up with the regular schedule of posting a chapter nearly every day lol.

I still have no idea how I've managed to get this much of it up to you guys but I can't help myself I just get so excited at the thought of sharing this with all of you!

I'm sure I'll be sitting in my hotel room writing on my phone though like I'm some sort of crazy addict, which I am so I'll probably have plenty to post when I have the time.
I'm back!

Thank you all so much for the well wishes, her birthday was phenomenal and I am happy to announce that my soulmate is getting married to her now fiance and we are very excited to be engaged. (Yes I know how that sounds but sorry not sorry it's totally true)

He tried to keep it a surprise from me as well but caved halfway through the night and I had to keep my big mouth shut.

It was so much fun!

Anyway, here's the new chapter that I've had to rewrite multiple scenes for because I wrote half of them drunk and apparently I get really fucking sappy when I'm drunk and that just can't really fly for where the story is currently at.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Billy doesn't show up.

Steve is as far from shocked as he can be. He'd have been more surprised if Billy had shown up, if he's being honest with himself. There's too many people and everyone is a cross between being joyful and somber all at once.

Billy would hate it.

There was also the fact that Billy wasn't a huge fan of almost more than half the people attending and he's envious that the guy can get away with it because one look at Dustin the other night had him realizing he didn't have a choice but to come. The kid actually looked sad for once, like it was all starting to hit him and Steve couldn't let him face this dinner alone, much less any of the other kids.

It's about as awkward as he expects when they all sit down to eat. The table isn't big enough so some of them are moved into the living room. He notices absently that they were even able to get Eleven here without complication and he feels happy for Mike.

The kid looks at that girl with so much fondness, Steve can't help but think they're it for each other. But he knows how much of a total sap he can be and they've been through so much.

All of them had been through a lot.
He avoids talking to Max, who had apparently been driven here by her mother. He finds himself not really wanting to think about Billy for as long as he can. There's just far too much going on there.

He's got a forkful of mashed potatoes with corn and gravy shoveling its way into his mouth when he looks up.

Nancy has been staring at him all night.

Before being stuck in the upside down, Steve would have been elated to see her so fixated on him, but now?

Now, he just wanted her to stop lying to herself because he knows the look on her face is one of guilt and he likes to think he knows that she's just trying to fool herself into thinking she wants Steve, just like how she'd tried to convince herself of it before. By the same token, he'd be lying if he said there wasn't some small part of him that wanted to just throw caution to the wind and get her back.

It was tempting.

Very tempting.

The desire to chase after some form of normalcy and get his life back on track had almost been enough of an appeal but one look at Jonathan and Nancy staring at each other brought all of those insecurities back to rear their ugly heads. Not to mention there was something within him that just couldn't muster the effort to want to go through with it and he also had no intention of hurting Jonathan.

Also, what was the point in chasing after her when it had been so blatantly clear for so long that she wanted Jonathan?

Perhaps Steve had been Nancy's attempt at obtaining normalcy after what had happened to her and Steve's heart aches because even with that possibility it doesn't stop him from wanting.

One sided love is fucking awful and he feels upset with himself because he gets the feeling that if Nancy pushed hard enough he'd give in and fall right back into her orbit.

*I'm so pathetic.*

He thinks to himself as he gets up to go grab a water from the fridge.

The fridge where it had all begun.

He'd pushed Billy into it and the rest was history and he couldn't help feeling responsible and completely at fault. If he hadn't pushed him, then Billy would have never gotten caught up in any of this and before he can go further down that depressing rabbit hole, Nancy comes up behind him and rests a gentle hand on his arm.

"Can we talk alone?" She asks quietly, like she's unsure of herself.

Steve stares at her for a moment before nodding and they head outside. He spares a glance at Jonathan, who's in the living room and their eyes lock for a moment.
Jonathan has a look of resigned acceptance on his face.

*Oh boy, here we go.*

It's chilly outside and Nancy crosses her arms over her chest to stave off the cold. Steve doesn't wait for her to speak first and jumps right in.

"How are you Nance?" He asks, genuinely wanting to know.

She has bags under her eyes and looks frazzled. Nothing like his usual well-kept completely in control Nancy.

She's silent for a long while, biting at her bottom lip, a typical gesture he'd gotten used to through knowing her. She would do it when she was deep in thought, trying to collect herself.

"I feel like it's my fault." She finally says and he can tell she's barely holding it together and Steve stills, not having expected *that* at all.

He'd been expecting an admission of guilt from her for the way things had ended between them, but not this kind of guilt.

"Wait, what's your fault?" He asks, completely confused.

"You getting stuck in that place, Steve!" She yells in exasperation.

"Wha- Nancy you weren't even there." He laughs out and he's never been more confused in his life.

"That's exactly the problem. I shouldn't have gone with Jonathan. I should have stayed with you, maybe I could have done something." Tears start streaming down her face and she doesn't seem to care about the cold anymore as she extends her arms out to flail them a bit towards him to emphasize how upset she is.

Steve's heart breaks a little bit more for her and he wipes both of his hands over his face and closes his eyes for a moment before letting out a shaky breath.

The thought hadn't even *occurred* to him that Nancy would try to blame herself but he supposes it should have because she seemed to have a tendency to blame herself for things that weren't even remotely her fault. He goes to Nancy and pulls her into a hug, knowing she needs it just as much as he does.

"Jesus Nance, it's not your fault. Just like Barb wasn't your fault, okay?" He says gently, attempting to soothe her while also trying to get it through her thick stubborn skull.

"No, no, you're wrong." She sobs out while hitting at his chest weakly.

He grabs her by her shoulders and then cups her face with his hands, wiping some of the tears away with his thumbs as she hiccups a bit.

"I sat there staring at that fridge before you pulled me out here blaming myself too. Do you know that?" He says, trying to make her understand.

She shakes her head in response and looks at him in confusion.
"See? You think I shouldn't blame myself right?"

Nancy swallows hard and looks up at him with her big doe eyes.

"Well, I do blame myself. If I hadn't pushed Billy into that fridge none of this would have happened." He says and goes back to gripping her shoulders.

"You don't know that Steve."

"Exactly, just like how you don't know if staying would have made a difference or not and it's the same thing with Barb. You just don't know." He says, gripping her shoulders a bit tighter and understanding seems to dawn on her face as she pulls away and takes a couple of steps back.

Steve's arms drop back to his sides and they both stare at each other for a while, lost in their own thoughts until Steve breaks it.

"Nance, maybe we should just stop trying to blame ourselves for stuff that's out of our control." He says, his own realization dawning.

She gives him a sad smile and looks at the ground for a bit before looking back up at him and he knows there's still a part of her that will always sit there and blame herself. He knows there's nothing he can say or do that will change that because even now after all they've said so far, there's still a small part of himself that feels the guilt.

"You know Steve, I do love you. I need you to know that." She says, cutting him away from his own thoughts and Steve can't help the look of sadness that falls over his face, wouldn't be able to hide it if he tried.

"Yeah, but you're not in love with me." He whispers, almost not wanting to admit it to himself.

She blinks and opens her mouth to gape at him, "Steve I-

He holds up a hand, cutting her off.

"I already told you it's fine. I meant it then and I mean it now."

She shakes her head and moves into his space, reaching up to rest her hand on his cheek. "I almost lost you Steve. I thought I had lost you."

"I know Nance, I know. It's okay, seriously. Gonna have to try harder than that to get rid of me." He says, chuckling a bit to reassure her, leaning into her touch and closing his eyes, knowing his smile is more somber than anything and allowing himself to bask in the feeling of fleeting bliss.

He missed her so, so much. He had started to forget what her faced looked like, the way her voice had sounded, all of it had started becoming something like a distant memory.

It's those feelings, being far more invested than she is or ever will be, knowing it'll never be reciprocated in the long run. It's why the next thing he does is pull away and Nancy looks dejected for a moment before recovering quickly.

*That's my girl.*
He thinks to himself fondly.

"Does Jonathan know all of these things you're saying to me right now?" He asks, looking away from her face.

"He suggested I talk to you actually. He told me to do what I felt I needed to do."

"Well you got played because if you think Jonathan doesn't want to march out here right now, beat the shit out of me and drag you away then you don't know guys very well." Steve says with a scoff.

"And why do you say that?" She asks putting a hand on her hip defiantly, demeanor changing completely.

"Because it's exactly what I would do. He's just telling you what you wanna hear. We both know there's no stopping you when you get something in your head."

"And what do I have in my head?" She asks, tone challenging.

Steve walks up to her, taking her hand into his own.

"You feel guilty because you almost lost me after we ended things and you blame yourself for it." He says as he interlocks their fingers and moves a bit closer.

"It doesn't change reality though Nancy, near death experience or not." He continues resting his forehead against hers.

"As much as I wish it did change things, we both know the truth. You will never feel for me what you feel for Jonathan, so please, do us both a favor and don't do this to him. Don't do this to yourself."

*Don't do this to me.*

He thinks to himself as he moves back to brush a lock of hair behind her ear and he knows that this is it. He takes in the memory of her, of her face, of feeling the softness of her hair, the feeling of her skin.

It'll probably be the last time they ever get a moment like this.

She stares up at him for a long while and he sees the moment it all hits her because her eyes begin to water and she grips at his shirt, bunching the fabric into her fingers and buries her face into his shoulder and starts sobbing.

"I'm sorry Steve. I'm so, so sorry for everything." She says, voice full of regret and sorrow.

Steve holds her there for a long time, let's her cry it out while whispering comforting reassurances for as long as she needs before she composes herself and they head back inside.

If you asked what happened afterward Steve wouldn't be able to tell you. He remembers talking to everyone before he leaves. He hugs Joyce, gives a firm handshake to Hopper, ruffles Dustin's hair and says his goodbyes.
The rest is a blur. He's not himself, shuts himself off, shuts it all out, puts himself on auto pilot and when he finally leaves the party he doesn't even remember driving home.

He comes back to himself when he gets into his driveway and turns off the car, catching a glimpse of himself in the rear view mirror.

It's seeing himself that does it.

In that moment it all becomes too much, surviving the upside down, everything with Billy, letting go of Nancy, all of it.

He bangs his fists against the steering wheel and finally allows himself to break down.

When he composes himself and goes inside of his house he avoids looking at his parents and quickly walks past them while saying his good nights because he knows his face is red and blotchy and he really doesn't feel like explaining why.

He'd just have to lie anyway.

Partially.

He can tell the moment that his father notices anyway because he notices everything but of course he says nothing about it.

Absolutely nothing.

*It's better this way.*

He could easily get away with using Nancy as an excuse because it's pathetically the hardest hitting thing to him but there's no point.

It's not like they'd *actually* give a fuck.

When he opens the door to his bedroom he nearly trips over himself and freaks the fuck out and he's pretty sure he turns in a strange full circle like an idiot before closing his door as quickly as he can.

The sorrow washes away in an instant upon seeing *him* and it feels like his heart is going to beat out of its chest and he's trying to register why the fuck Billy is just casually laying on his bed smoking a cigarette like he owns the damn place.

"What the hell Billy!" He yells a little too loud, wincing and he hopes his parents haven't heard him.

Billy must have been lost in thought or something because he slowly turns his head from staring blankly at the ceiling to look at Steve, raising his brow as if somehow *Steve* is the one intruding even though it's *his* room.

"Ah, the princess finally returns to the castle." He says, putting out his cigarette on the leg of his side table.

"Really?" Steve says as he rolls eyes at the tasteless comment, pinching the bridge of his nose. "How the hell am I supposed to get that smell out of here?"
He'd learned rather quickly that when dealing with Billy it's best to focus on one thing at a time, ignoring the fact that he had just used his side table as an ashtray.

*Always looking for a fight.*

Steve knew better at this point than to give him an inch because Billy Hargrove would most definitely take a mile.

"The window is open, it'll air out eventually." Billy says with a shrug, waving his hand in the air as he sits up and scoots himself to the edge of the bed, facing towards Steve who was still standing with his back to the door, arms crossed.

"What is it with you people breaking in through my window?" Steve asks wondering why Billy apparently wanted to be particularly difficult for no damn reason.

Instead of answering Billy simply stares him down like he's taking a good long, look at him and his face is completely unreadable.

Steve actually starts to fidget uncomfortably.

It starts to hit him then that this is the first time he's seen or talked to Billy since being in the upside down and vice versa, wondering if Billy was thinking the same thing.

"You look like shit." Billy finally says after he's done with his drawn out, silent evaluation of all things Steve and he's suddenly reminded of the fact that he looks like he's had one good, long cry.

The last thing he needs right now is *Billy* of all people pitying him.

"Gee thanks Billy. M' fine though, thanks for asking." He says with a hint of sarcasm as he averts his eyes and shrugs.

"Yeah?" Billy asks as he gets up off the bed and starts crowding closer to Steve. "Dinner not go well?"

He stops just barely outside of Steve's personal space and he can't help but feel like a cornered animal all of a sudden.

"It went well, it was nice to see everyone. Why didn't you come?"

"Not really my crowd." Billy responds with a shrug.

"Mm, I thought you wanted me to stay the fuck away and lay low, Hargrove?" He taunts, not knowing why the message Max had passed on to him was slowly starting to offend him over the last few days and is partially the reason he'd tried to not think about the guy.

Billy blatantly ignores him.

"Seriously Harrington, what happened?"

Steve purses his lips and runs a hand through his hair and when he still doesn't respond, Billy continues to bombard him.

"Was it Nancy?"
Steve physically startles because *how the fuck* could Billy possibly know that?

"What makes you say that?" Steve chooses to ask, even though he's pretty sure that if the physical reaction hadn't given him away, the shake in his voice definitely did.

"You really aren't fooling anyone." Billy responds like it's the most obvious thing in the world and maybe it actually is. His history with Nancy isn't exactly some huge secret.

Steve clenches his jaw and moves past Billy to sit on the edge of his *own* bed, ignoring him because yes, he *is* that petty.

Billy turns to him and goes to lean against the wall to simply stare at him again and say nothing.

It was starting to get very old, very fast.

"She just wanted to talk. We worked it out."

He wishes Billy would just drop it.

"So the king and queen are back together again?" He asks with a hint of sarcasm in his voice and something else Steve can't identify as he puts his hands in his pockets.

"No, no, the opposite." Steve says, shaking his head and waving a hand in the air.

"You had a prime opportunity there, bucko. You go missing in another dimension and she suddenly realizes all that she's lost and cries by your bedside and you turned her down?" Billy says, shaking his head like he's disappointed in him.

"I let her go. There's a difference." Steve says, not knowing what point he's trying to prove.

Billy gets a look in his eyes and takes a hand out of his pocket to wipe at his nose and sniffs. "Well, like I said, there's plenty of bitches in the sea."

Steve huffs out a small laugh and falls back on his bed. "Can we not talk about my continuously failing, non-existent love life?"

"Is that all our little holiday getaway was to you? You wound me Harrington." Billy says, putting a hand over his own chest, feigning a look of hurt.

Steve lifts his head up and makes a face of disgust at him. "Don't even joke like that man."

Billy shrugs and Steve let's his head fall back down and stares at the ceiling. There's a strangely comfortable silence for a while as they just bask in each other's presence and for some reason, Steve feels infinitely better, even though Billy is positively unbearable to be around at times.

Somehow a part of him knew that seeing Billy would make him feel better.

He just doesn't understand why.

This is it he realizes though. He can finally address the thing that's been eating away at him, the overwhelming guilt that has been building inside of him for far too long.
"If I wasn't here, nobody would come to save you Billy. Not a single fucking person would give a shit if you were gone."

"Billy." He says, still staring up, not taking his eyes off of the ceiling, getting lost in the memory of it. He eventually hears Billy make a questioning 'hm?' sound.

"I wanted you to know- It's just, I'm sorry for what I said to you, I didn't mean it. I was just so angry about everything and I took it out on you and you didn't deserve that, none of it."

There it was, he finally said it. The apology had been made and Billy could do whatever he pleased with it.

There's silence for a long time and Steve almost lifts his head again until he hears Billy shuffle around a bit and feels the bed dip as the guy sits down beside him. He realizes he can now turn his head a bit without needing to lift it and sees Billy's back.

"Yes, you did." Billy finally says and Steve frowns, pushing himself to sit up and they're side by side, shoulders brushing.

"Excuse me?" He asks quietly as he turns his head to look at Billy.

"At the time, you meant it. No point in blowing smoke up my ass about it." Billy says frankly, staring ahead not even looking at Steve and there was no helping the feeling of being utterly offended, even if he tried.

"I'm not blowing smoke up your ass." Steve says frowning and getting increasingly more upset that if anything, Billy won't even look at him.

"Trust me Harrington, we both know it's exactly what you meant in the moment and I know it's not how you feel now, so the point is pretty moot but you don't have to say sorry to me." Billy says as he rests his elbows on his knees and still won't look at Steve.

"Yeah, well I shouldn't have said it." He says and he knows it sounds a lot like pouting. Billy rubs a hand over his face and lets out a big long heavy sigh like this whole conversation was simply tedious to him. Steve finally turns to look away from Billy, feeling even more offended if that was even possible.

"That's seriously just- It literally doesn't even matter. You've been getting yourself worked up for absolutely nothing, do you understand that?" Billy says like he's talking to a petulant child.

"Yeah well, I'm fucking sorry for wanting to try and make things right." Steve hisses and he goes to get up, to move away from Billy. He just doesn't even want to be near the guy anymore.

Billy jolts his hand out and grabs Steve by his upper arm to keep him from getting up completely and Steve is forced to sit back down as they turn towards one another, knees knocking.

"Can you stop being so fucking sensitive about everything?" Billy says, gripping him tighter and Steve tries to pull away but he just won't let go.

"You know, it has been a long fucking day and I don't need your stupid fucking jabs and
stupid fucking comments about every fucking thing!" He spits out, trying to still keep his voice down as he uses his free hand to push at Billy's chest.

Billy still doesn't budge and instead grabs Steve's other arm, holding him in place.

"It's not my fault you turned her down." Billy says, angrily shaking him a bit.

"What else am I supposed to do, Billy, huh?!” He says hysterically.

Oh god.

Steve can feel his own eyes start to water a bit. He does not need to start crying like a little bitch in front of Billy but he's on the brink of it and finally being able to see him is quickly reopening some sort of floodgate and he's finding it hard to stop himself.

"I'm supposed to just lay next to her in bed again knowing she's in love with another man and pretend it's okay?" He says and it comes out sounding far more broken than he'd intended.

Billy's grip gentles and he slides his hands down to cup his elbows and Steve takes the opportunity to pull away, get up off the bed and start pacing back and forth, running his hands through his hair like he's manic and maybe he is but that's something to be evaluated for another time.

"No, nope, fuck that. Fuck Nancy and you know what?" He says, stopping to point accusingly at Billy.

"Fuck you too, Billy. Seriously, go fuck yourself because I didn't ask you to save me. I didn't ask you to knock me out and turn yourself into a god damn martyr!"

Multiple things happen at once and one second Steve is up, pointing an accusing finger at him and the next Billy gets that look in his eyes, the one Steve has become incredibly familiar with.

He wants a fight.

Billy grabs onto his wrist with one hand and uses the other to get a firm hold onto Steve's shirt and yanks hard and suddenly they're on the bed, Billy hovering just above him as he lays his arm across Steve's chest to keep him pinned down.

Steve struggles against him, knowing he's the one at a disadvantage here but if he can dislodge him or get one good kick in between Billy's legs, he'll be home free.

Apparently, Billy knows this as he slides them both further up onto the bed, forcing Steve's feet to dangle so he can' find purchase on the floor anymore.

Billy quickly takes the opportunity to maneuver himself up over his flailing legs and he eventually manages to straddle Steve's waist. He likes to think that he has decent lower body strength, but when he goes to lift himself up to get Billy over him, it's apparently a mistake.

It gives Billy the opportunity to adjust himself and lock his own legs up underneath Steve's to keep himself in place, effectively keeping Steve from being able to get him off and how the fuck does Billy react so quickly all the damn time?
Billy uses both of his hands to pin Steve's wrists above him to the bed and he struggles uselessly for a bit before letting out a grunt of frustration as the fight starts to leave him. He still manages to look up at Billy defiantly, staring him down even though he's fully aware he's at Billy's mercy by this point.

They lock eyes, glaring at each other for a while and all Steve can hear is their heavy breathing.

"What the fuck do you think you know, Harrington?" Billy manages to get out between labored breaths before continuing.

"You don't even fucking remember any of it. I remember every agonizing second of it, of that thing being inside of me, getting strapped to a bed, having it burned out of me." He says like it's being punched out of him through clenched teeth and Steve winces as the grip on his wrists tighten to the point of being painful.

"Fuck you Billy, I felt it too. It was unbearable. It felt like I was being burned alive." Steve spits out at him and it's all anger and aggression.

"Oh fuck off Steve. I already know that's the only thing you remember. You have no god damn clue what we really went through." Billy says with a scoff and his grip loosens on Steve's wrists.

He uses this opportunity to get one hand free and they struggle a bit more. Steve wants to get one good hit into his stupid fucking face, but ultimately he loses the struggle yet again and Billy gets a hold back onto his wrist and they're right back to square one.

Steve let's out a series of frustrated sighs before he finally just lays there looking up at Billy again. "I-" he goes to say breathlessly but stops himself because he realizes in that moment Billy's right.

He can't remember, doesn't remember.

The only thing he really had to go off of were the feelings.

He had felt so much.

"Yeah that's what I thought. Why don't you ever think before you fucking speak?" Billy asks, sneering down at him.

Steve goes boneless and knows he has a vulnerable look on his face because Billy's own changes from anger to a curious suspicion, probably thinking that Steve is trying to fake him out.

Part of him wishes that was true.

He can't help himself as he gets a far off look in his eyes before finding it within himself to speak again.

"I- Mostly I just felt but I remember seeing certain things too. I saw Will and he saw us but I didn't see you. I could only ever feel you and you kept getting further away and it hurt god, Billy-" he lets out an involuntary sob that wracks through his whole body, feels the tears start to stream down his face and he doesn't care anymore if Billy sees him cry because the memory of it is too overwhelming.

He gets lost inside of it as it all comes crashing back into him because he had repressed it. He had
refused to think about it.

It was just too much to handle, to even think about.

"It hurt so fucking bad. It was so much worse than the feeling of that thing inside of us." He gets out and closes his eyes like somehow it'll help, but it's almost like if he thinks about it hard enough he can feel it again.

Billy's grip has loosened on Steve's wrists again at this point, completely caught off guard and it would be so easy to get the guy off of him but Steve can't bring himself to fight him anymore.

"Feeling you being ripped away from me, it was too much and I couldn't get you back-" Steve says and he wants to say more, goes to say more but he's sobbing again, can't speak, can't find the proper words.

He eventually calms a bit before he continues and Billy is stock still above him like he's completely petrified or in some sort of trance, like maybe he's reliving it too.

"I saw El. I begged her to save you. I could feel that you were in danger and I felt helpless. There was nothing I could do and then she said 'okay' and the next thing I know I'm in that hospital bed and I'm burning alive and I can hear you."

Billy takes in a sharp, deep breath and shakes his head like he doesn't believe Steve or maybe he doesn't want to.

"That doesn't- you were..." Billy mumbles quietly like he's talking to himself.

Steve allows Billy to go through whatever crisis he seems to be going through and eventually he composes himself again.

"Do you think it's still there, the connection?" Steve asks quietly when he knows he has Billy back with him and he's afraid.

Afraid if it is.

Afraid if it isn't.

What if the connection had only been there because the creature was there?

What if now that the creature was out of Billy it was gone?

Billy gives him a look like maybe he's thinking exactly those things as well and Steve feels his heart ache, feels confused, doesn't know what to do with himself.

"I don't know." Billy finally says and it's the first time he feels like he's gotten through to Billy in some way, seen the real Billy.

He'd seen it for a moment when Billy had tried to open up to him about his father but this was so much more.

Apparently, Billy realizes this as well because it's like a gate slamming shut like Billy realizes he's shown too much of himself, shown too much vulnerability because his expression hardens like he's
sliding a mask right back onto his face, hiding himself from the world again.

Steve's heart aches for him in that moment because that's how he used to be too.

He'd put up a front for the whole world to see for so long and it had started to destroy him from the inside out, destroyed his relationships, gotten him into bad ones. The list went on and on until he'd finally allowed himself to stop hiding, to stop being such an asshole and sure, Nancy and Jonathan had helped him but ultimately he had done it for himself.

Billy slowly gets up off of Steve and puts his hands in his pockets and for a moment it's like he doesn't know what to do with himself.

Steve sits up on the bed and waits, waits for whatever is going to happen next, putting the ball in Billy's court because Steve knows if he makes one wrong move the gate might stay closed forever.

He's already fucked things up with Billy enough as it was.

Billy clears his throat and looks at Steve with indifference.

"Regardless of anything, I meant what I said. Stay the fuck away from me, Harrington. We don't need to get taken into that fucking lab to be dissected." Billy huffs out as he refuses to meet Steve's eyes.

He's not surprised.

It's ultimately not that shocking to hear but that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt to hear him say it, to tell him to stay away like Steve was somehow going to follow him around like a fucking puppy or something.

He feels anger, sorrow, rejection and so many other things as they wash over him.

He picks at a loose thread on his comforter after nodding his head in understanding, not knowing what to say yet wanting to say so many things, yet choosing to say nothing at all.

Yeah well fuck you too.

It's not like I actually give a shit about you either.

What makes you think I wanted to be around you willingly anyway?

His mind starts going a dark route and he tries to shake it off but can't help himself.

Steve knows he's being sensitive and shouldn't care about Billy fucking Hargrove of all people but he just feels upset and he realizes pathetically that more than anything he feels unwanted.

When had that happened?

Why did it even fucking matter?

When he finally looks back up again Billy is gone.

Chapter End Notes
I'm so sorry to all of you who have been saying things like "Ahhh Billy better show up, can't wait until they reunite!"

I cringed and was like "Aw crap well have I got a chapter for you >.<"

It probably shows through my writing but I really do like Nancy a lot and I think she's a very important piece of Steve's life and I refuse to downplay the feelings he has for her and will most likely always have for her, they're all young and dumb teenagers, everything is so dramatic during those teenage years lol

As for the reunion between Billy and Steve I had like 5 different scene's written out and they all went completely different branched out ways, I even had one that was all happy and shit because again, I was drunk and when I read it the next day I was like oh yeah no, jumping the gun here, calm down girl, bring it down a few notches, 'you are way up here, we need to be all the way down here' sorta deal.

This is the one I ultimately decided to go with because I feel like it captures them as realistically as possible all things considered and I hope you all are enjoying this as much as I am and thank you all for your continued support and just overall amazing comments, they put a smile on my face every time I see them, they're like my form of cocaine. :)

Soulbound

Chapter Summary

Beta'd By G_R12

Chapter Notes

I feel like it being Chapter 10 makes this the perfect transition point into the next big arc of the story and I'm so excited to get it all started for you all to read!

Also holy shit I did not realize how long this chapter is compared to some of the others until after posting it and seeing the word count go up.

I swear I have a life, I have a full time job and everything I just consider this my hobby and I'm at a really good place in my life!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Some Time In The Future

The opening of the door is grating to Billy’s ears as a large man built of all muscle enters the room to stand behind the piece of shit Billy had started to become firmly acquainted with.

Fuckface walks forward with his finely tailored suit on like he's straight out of 'The Godfather' and Billy can't help his involuntary eye roll.

The only thing he's missing is the damn cat.

"Hello Billy, shall we try again today?" He asks, calm and collected like a shitty cliché movie villain and it just gives Billy even more incentive to sneer at the man.

"You gonna get tall, dark and brooding over there to do your dirty work for you this time?" Billy asks, sarcasm dripping from his voice.

The man ignores him and merely stands there like a brick wall, smirking.

Probably because Billy was currently tied to a metal chair bolted to the ground in the middle of a completely white room.

Everything is white.

His chair, the door, even every single fucking handle in the room is white like it's a particularly savage torture tactic and Billy is partially impressed.

There's also nothing substantial inside of the room either, it's just himself, the chair and the two men hovering over him menacingly.
"Hey now, it's alright, I understand. Don't wanna get that expensive suit dirtied up, priorities and all." Billy says with an amused tilt of his head.

"This doesn't need to be as difficult as you're making it out to be. Tell us where Steve is and the pain will end." He states plainly, like he's some sort of robot and at this point Billy wouldn't be shocked if that's what was really going on here.

Nothing shocked him anymore.

"Even if I knew where he was I sure as fuck wouldn't tell you." Billy says with a shrug.

"Very well." 'Don Corleone' says as he steps aside and the larger man comes to stand in front of Billy instead.

Getting back-handed isn't new by any means but it still sends a pretty harsh jolt through the system.

The guy doing it is also really fucking built so his vision blacks out for a moment and Billy can taste the copper tang of blood in his mouth.

He laughs out as blood and drool drip from the side of his mouth as he swipes his tongue out, knowing how insane he looks.

That is the point after all.

"That the best you got? My daddy hits me harder than that." Billy taunts and he ignores the burly bear of a man in front of him, choosing to spit out at the smaller one beside him instead, getting blood and saliva all over that pretty little suit and Billy feels pleased with himself.

The man merely sighs and takes a small cloth out of his pocket, wiping at the new stain while holding a hand up to stop the muscle boy, who had been ready to hit him again.

"It's interesting, Billy. I was able to finally get a hold of the footage and case file report of when they burned the virus out of you at Hawkins lab. It helps to have certain kinds of friends in this world." He goes on to say and when he's done wiping at his suit he kneels down so he's face to face with Billy, taking a fistful of his hair in his hand, forcing them to lock eyes with one another.

"So, it's suffice to say that the connection is born of pain. I wonder how much pain I have to put you through until our poor, darling Steve can feel it. I'm very interested to find out." He says slowly, meticulously and he lets go of Billy to pat him on the cheek lightly before standing back up to wipe at his jacket like he's brushing dust away before putting his hands in the pockets of his expensive dress pants to simply stare.

Watching.

Waiting.

Billy likes to think he's grown at least a little bit as a person since being stuck in another dimension, fighting otherworldly creatures, being possessed by them and lastly the fact of simply knowing one Steve Harrington.
The old Billy would have seen red, thrashed against his restraints, cursed the man into oblivion while threatening to kill him but he knows they're trying to get a rise out of him, trying to watch his every move to find his weaknesses and use them against him.

The nearly overwhelming need to tear the two men in front of him apart, crush in their skulls and make them scream is so fucking tempting he almost gives himself over to it.

But he has to think of Steve, has to buy them all time, can't just think of only himself anymore, he needs to trust the people around him.

God, Steve was starting to rub off on him.

Billy was really starting to hate it.

There's also the fact that he's dealt with men like this his entire life.

His father, who has constantly tried to impose himself and control Billy, mold him into whatever way he wants him to be, forcing him into roles he wasn't ready for, needing things to be exactly the way he needed them to be because everyone else be damned and if you didn't conform he would beat it into you instead.

It's just another day at the office for Billy and he realizes it's pretty much just the same man, different face standing in front of him.

So, instead of doing what he would normally do he just smirks at him like they're having a casual conversation, letting himself go lax and lounge in the chair he's been tied down to like none of it bothers him at all, like he's the one in control.

"Looking forward to it, Mr. K." Billy says with a wink.

In that moment, he knows the gauntlet has been thrown.

---

**Present Day**

Two days after Billy sees Steve he now finds himself standing in front of the Byers house, mentally preparing himself to get the door slammed shut in his face when they see him.

Here's the thing, Billy isn't an idiot.

He knows the only reason these people had invited him to that party a few days ago was because of his association with Steve and the pity they felt for him.

They seemed to all have it in their heads now that because he'd experienced something similar to what they had all gone through he was 'one of them' now or something.

But he's not.
He's an outcast and knows it, they don't actually want to have anything to do with him if they don't have to.

Which is fine with Billy but there's too many loose ends, too much to ignore and he can't help but follow those loose threads to see where they end.

He needs answers.

The events of the other night with Steve replays in his head over and over again for a multitude of reasons, many of which he's choosing to conveniently ignore because he hadn't fully expected what it would feel like to finally see Steve again, to lay his eyes on him and be in the same room with him after everything they'd been through.

They'd somehow survived and Billy still couldn't believe it, still felt like the other shoe was going to drop and it was all a dream.

Most of all he'd found the whole ordeal to be partially exhilarating on top of absolutely terrifying.

The elephant in the room is much harder to address.

The connection doesn't seem to be strong anymore but the memory of it is still fresh in his brain like a brand, taunting him.

He doesn't know if the connection is gone or not, it's hard to tell and he couldn't really ask Steve because while he seemed to have a general idea of what happened he still seemed to be dealing with a bit of amnesia.

That part was probably concerning but Billy isn't even sure how to bring it up or who to bring it up to.

He hadn't been lying to Steve when he said he wasn't sure about the connection and he isn't too keen on testing different theories out for safety reasons.

If they really are being watched they've gotta keep this shit quiet.

Oh man, did Billy have plenty of theories though.

Upon first hearing Steve's voice that night he'd been unable to help the feeling of want that had washed over him.

Sure, he'd always found Steve to be physically attractive since the very first moment he'd laid eyes on him, maybe even before that.

There had already been an appeal after he'd been told about 'King Steve' and there was always just something about him.

That had never gone away.

Things had just gotten so complicated now, that was the main fucking problem.

One moment he's thinking pretty boy is a pedophile creeping on his stepsister and the next he's got a dead dimensional plant on his lap.
Now?

Now his whole world is different, nothing makes sense anymore and if you'd told Billy this was where he'd be in his life he'd laugh in that person's face.

An irrational part of his brain had wanted to slam Steve against the wall that night and have his way with him, tear him apart little by little, find out what makes him tick, what makes him go boneless and draw as many filthy sounds out of him as he could until Steve was a ruined mess for only Billy to see, to hear, to feel.

The thing is, at Billy's core he's a sexual creature.

Sex is fun, it's what he's familiar with and it's something normal for him, a comfort in the storm that is his fucked up life and his own personal drug of choice.

Trouble with the old man?

Go fuck one of those dumbass high school girls for the night.

Everyone pissing him off to the point of wanting to smash everything around him and he knows he won't get away with it?

Find one of the guys at school that can keep their damn mouth shut and take his frustrations out on them instead.

Sex was his release. He liked it, reveled in it. There was no talking necessary and he could get what he wanted and so could the other person and they'd both move on with their lives.

But this was Steve.

He'd felt his soul and now he knew what it was like to have a connection beyond something physical with another human being.

It was addictive and downright scary.

Regardless, one look at Steve's face had stopped all of those thoughts dead in their tracks, killing any mood there effectively could have been and the rest of it had just turned to shit from there.

Billy couldn't have helped himself if he'd tried when Steve had gotten to get up, to move away.

It was instinctive, the need to touch him in some way that made him feel like his body wasn't his own anymore and when Steve had eventually pushed too far and opened that fucking mouth of his he'd gotten Steve onto the bed in retaliation.

Billy didn't care how he got it, how to scratch that itch beneath his skin he just knew he needed it, didn't care that it had turned into something much darker, turned into Steve getting that look in his eyes, that desire to fight.

He could handle that as long as it meant he could keep Steve beneath him and the rest was a welcome distraction from the tumultuous nature of Billy's fucked up brain.

It's the fear he felt that had given him pause though, shaken him to his core.
The crying.

Seeing Steve cry was something Billy had very quickly found out he didn't like and that raw, open vulnerability had been too much.

They had shared their souls with one another, sure. In the moment it had felt natural.

Steve's emotions came to him like they were his own but most of all was that stupid unrequited love Steve still felt for Nancy fucking Wheeler.

Billy knew the dinner hadn't gone well, knew it the moment he'd seen Steve, like the guy had been crying for a long time, much too long.

The only person that can get a reaction like that out of him was her.

If Billy was being honest with himself, he'd been expecting to feel far more jealous but he knew Steve felt things that he just flat out didn't want to admit to himself and had them buried deep beneath the surface.

He probably didn't even realize it yet and Billy couldn't blame the guy.

The only reason he knew all of this for a fact was because he'd felt it for himself.

It's kind of hard to ignore something like that when someone's soul is laid out bare, completely open for you to see.

Lying doesn't exist at that point, you have to just roll with the punches.

In the moment when the connection had been alive they'd only cared about each other's safety.

There was no way either one of them could deny that it happened, even with Steve's amnesia.

So, he allows Steve to live in denial.

He allows himself to follow suit because if that's what it takes to keep Steve safe, to keep them both safe and under the radar then fuck it, Billy could entertain it, could keep Steve at a distance because ultimately he knows he doesn't deserve to entertain the idea of Steve, of getting closer to him, allowing him to get closer.

He's still not even sure what he would really want from Steve.

It's just too fucking dangerous for way too many fucking reasons.

The thing Billy fears the most though is Steve remembering everything.

Not just snippets, not only the feelings of it.

He worries that he might remember every last detail just like Billy could because he knew there would be no turning back.

He knew Steve intimately at this point, hadn't had a choice otherwise and he'd learned very quickly the guy was the biggest fucking sap Billy had ever met in his entire life and it was fucking disgusting.
He remembers the way Steve's soul had instinctively reached out to his, curling around him protectively and refusing to budge no matter how hard Billy had tried to shut him out.

Steve had obviously felt it to some degree too judging from the part breakdown, part confession he'd had underneath Billy that night.

No matter how unaware Steve was to the extent of it all he'd still felt it and his instincts had raged strong.

But.

Knowing is different and there's no confusion on Billy's side. It's all clear as day to him, but to Steve?

He's only got muddled memories, dreams and feelings to keep him preoccupied and Billy hopes it stays that way because if that's how Steve is when he's unaware, what is he like when he's aware?

What if the connection is actually still there simmering beneath the surface?

What if it's not?

What if Steve remembers?

It all just added up to one big, huge, fucked up equation and the only solution to him at the time was getting the fuck out of there and telling Steve to stay the fuck away from him.

It was too dangerous, Steve was too dangerous.

He'd almost changed his mind though.

The look on Steve's face as he nodded at Billy without even looking into his eyes was almost worse than watching him cry.

It made something stir deep inside of him. It was the same feeling he couldn't put a name to that had made him sob in his bed uncontrollably after he'd been purged of the virus and he couldn't feel Steve anymore.

But as usual, he'd chosen to ignore it like he does everything else and had simply left.

Like none of it had ever mattered.

Except for the fact that all of it did matter.

He shakes his head, putting it all out of his mind as he throws his cigarette onto the patio of the Byers house, snuffing it out with the heel of his shoe as he finally knocks on the door.

Nobody answers for the longest time and he's about ready to turn around and leave when it finally opens and Jonathan Byers looks at him in surprise.

"Billy?" Jonathan asks in confusion, clearly not expecting him.

Billy was probably the last person he'd expected to see.
"Hey, your mom home?" He asks, knowing Joyce Byers has little Will on lock down.

As she should.

"What do you want with my mom?" Jonathan asks suspiciously.

Billy rolls his eyes. "I actually want to talk to the kid but I've heard I need to make an appointment." He says in a joking tone.

Jonathan gets a look of disgust, not liking the comment, holding his hand up and telling him to wait a moment.

Within the next few minutes Joyce is at the door.

Immediately there's an overwhelming feeling of bashfulness he can't help but have at the sight of her.

Everything Steve had said when he'd given Billy the run down painted a pretty clear picture of who Joyce Byers is as a person.

He'd caught glimpses of things when he was connected to the shadow fucker too, glimpses of memories about all of them.

With Joyce it was pretty clear, she'll do anything to protect her children.

That awful, hallowed out echo inside of Billy's chest that he's had since he was a child rears its ugly head for a moment before she speaks.

"Will said you might come, please he's in the living room. Make yourself at home." She says with a ragged smile like she's exhausted.

Who can blame the woman? She just can't seem to catch a damn break.

Billy nods and makes his way inside. He glances at their fridge and his stomach turns for a moment.

That's where it had all started.

He quickly averts his gaze.

Eventually after a bit of fussing and asking if he wants anything to eat or drink, to which he politely declines, they all make it to the living room.

Jonathan is standing in the archway looking at Billy like he wants to kill him, or rather, is ready to kill him if he makes the wrong move.

"I wanted to clear some things up." Billy says and suddenly Joyce is offering him a cigarette and lighter.

Billy blinks, surprised at the gesture but decides not to look a gift horse in the mouth and lights it up.

"Okay." Will says and he seems nervous more than anything and Billy can't believe this kid had to go through what he had too, but for so much longer.

"The connection it has to you is frayed, it can't reach you from the upside down. It's too weak but we followed the thread and you're what we found. It clearly remembered you." He states, trying to be as
When you say we-" Joyce goes to say and Billy nods, letting out a puff from his cigarette.

"I mean myself and that thing."

"What was it like for you?" Will asks and Billy purses his lips, looking the boy in the eyes.

"It was like...knowing everything all at once and being overwhelmed by that overload of information, like it was being crammed to the brim inside of my brain, getting ready to explode."

Will nods and gets this look in his eyes like someone finally gets it and that was part of the reason Billy had even come. He had wanted to talk to someone who knew what it was like.

Steve didn't know and even if he could remember the creature it hadn't actually gotten to him. Steve had merely felt the effects of it through Billy.

"Do you...see things?" Will says quietly.

"The things I shouldn't know?" Billy responds and he thinks he knows exactly what the kid means.

Will nods with a small smile.

Billy notices absently that Jonathan's demeanor has started to change, like he was seeing how good this was for his little brother, to be able to talk to someone who could understand him on a personal level, could relate to him in a way no one else could.

Joyce gets a look of confusion on her face and looks to Will.

"Sweetie, what do you mean by see things?" She asks patiently.

Billy isn't fooled though, she's terrified for her son and trying to act like she's not.

A fierce wave of protectiveness rises in his chest as he looks between them.

Don't get close.

"He means we still have stuff crammed into our heads, things we shouldn't know and sometimes the smallest thing will set it off." Billy answers for him.

Will turns to his mom and nods.

"Like what?" Jonathan asks, finally choosing to join the conversation.

"Different things, words, phrases, information, memories. It's hard to explain and it just depends on what sets it off in the first place, I guess." Billy says with a shrug.

Joyce starts fidgeting, looking between the two of them.

"Do you think it's still there?" She asks and it's a pretty decent question.

"No but if it wants to find us, it will. That tethered thread is still there and it's just something that
needs to be followed, we're a beacon but it can't touch us."

"But if the gate reopens-" Joyce says.

"He can find us." Will interrupts her to say.

"The good news is it can't just enter back into us, it has to actually do the work all over again but we'll definitely be the first targets if it gets back through that gate." Billy explains. It isn't exactly reassuring but it's the truth and there's no point in cutting corners.

"How do you know that for sure?" Jonathan asks.

Billy just points to his head, hoping he gets the point across that sometimes he just knows things.

There's a bit of silence as they all take in this new information and Billy puts out his cigarette in the ashtray, leaning forward to look at Will.

"You're a strong fucking kid, you know that?" Billy says and he means it too. He's too young, much too young to have had to go through something like this.

Yet he sits there cool as a cucumber with his shoulders square, keeps going and Billy can't help the single minded mantra that repeats itself in his head that just seemed to be getting louder and louder the longer he found himself tangled up in this shit.

Need to keep them safe.

The sentiment he feels doesn't really extend to Jonathan he realizes absently and while he may not really know the guy there's just something about him that Billy can't fucking stand.

With Will they had both experienced what it was like to have control taken away from them and endure shit a human shouldn't have to ever experience.

It was impossible for him not to like Joyce and her kind nature.

Jonathan however-

He just isn't sure what it is about the guy that has his hackles raised.

Will pulls him out of his thoughts by giving him a big smile and mumbling something about how he doesn't think he's strong and Billy can't help but see a little bit of himself.

They don't believe in themselves but when it comes down to it, they're survivors.

Billy eventually holds his hand out for Will to shake and the boy takes it. "You ever need anything, you let me know alright?"

"Yeah, alright." Will says.

"It means a lot to us and to Will that you came to talk. Thank you so much." Joyce says as Billy leaves out the front door.

"Hey, I needed it as much as he did. It helps to talk to someone who knows what it's like." Billy
admits casually.

"Well if you need anything you can always come to us too. My door will always be open for you, sweetheart." Joyce says and she gives him a genuine smile.

Billy looks at her for a moment and he's reminded of how bad and out of practice he is at this mushy stuff.

He'd never been close to his mother persay. She'd died when he was young so he never got the proper chance to actually get to know her and would only ever have the few happy, fleeting memories she left behind.

Memories he hoarded to himself, always keeping them close to his chest.

Losing her destroyed not just him but his father as well, turning him into something else.

Whatever that was, the thing he was living with now wasn't a man anymore and Billy has had to deal with the aftermath for years.

He knows Joyce is just being nice and smiles at her, nodding his head like he should and going through the motions.

As he goes to turn around Joyce calls him on his bluff, grabbing him by his upper arm.

A mother always fucking knows.

"I mean it, Billy. I'm not just saying it to say it, you will always have a place here for what you've done for Will, for what you'll probably continue to do for him. This is good for him and I know it's good for you too." She says and now it feels like she's pleading with him.

It also feels a lot like she might see far more than he thinks she does.

"Yeah, okay Ms. Byers, I got it." Billy says to placate her and he catches a glimpse of Jonathan off to the side with an absolutely horrified look on his face and it immediately makes this whole awkward ordeal completely worth it.

When Billy goes to get into his car and looks up, Jonathan is standing at the front of the hood.

Billy startles. "Jesus, what the fuck!" He yells as he gets right back out, almost tripping over himself.

Jonathan stares him down and Billy can't help but glare. "You're fucking creepy you know that?"

Jonathan is still quiet, saying nothing, doing nothing, just staring.

"What's going on here, Byers? You wanna suck my dick or something?" He laughs out, trying to get a rise out of him.

It works because Jonathan steps back all offended n' shit and the guy actually gets red in the face, making Billy snort.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" He finally says.
"You're the one following me to my car, staring me down. Could give someone the wrong idea." Billy says, winking.

"You're fucking disgusting." Jonathan spits out.

"So you just came out here to fight then?" Billy asks and he's starting to get impatient.

"No I just- I haven't seen Will that happy in a long time. I was trying to say thank you." He admits but clearly he wants to take it back.

"Alright well, this was fun. You go back on into that creepy fucking house and I'm just gonna leave all nice and slow." Billy says because this was just too many shades of creepy for him.

Too many people being nice and pretending to make an effort was going to make him throw up.

"How's Steve?" Jonathan asks instead of leaving him the fuck alone.

Oh.

Huh.

Interesting.

The fucking audacity of this guy.

"I don't fucking know. Why don't you go ask him yourself?" Billy sneers.

"You haven't seen him yet?" Jonathan asks in surprise and Billy can't help his mental eye roll.

"I've been a little busy lately, I'll get around to it."

"Well he probably wants to see you." Jonathan replies with a furrowed brow.

Or a more furrowed brow since that's the way he always looked anyway.

"You an expert on all things Harrington all of the sudden?"

"No, it's just...he probably needs someone to talk to and I'm pretty sure Nancy and I are at the bottom of his list of people to go to at this point." Jonathan admits and Billy can't help that his jaw clenches.

"Such a concerned party you are. You're sure you aren't projecting some feelings about our Steve there onto that girl of yours?" Billy says with all of the cruel sarcasm he can muster.

Fuck this guy.

"We're just worried about him." Jonathan huffs out, putting his hands in his pockets looking dejected.

"That's not my problem and let's get something straight, Byers, the only reason I haven't beaten the shit out of you right now is out of respect for your mother so do us both a favor and shut your creepy ass the fuck up."

"Jesus, you're insane you know that?" He says in disgust.
Billy merely smiles that toothy smile he gets that usually terrifies people away, giving him the bird as he gets into his car and drives off.

Steve is staring dumbly at the freezer of waffles in a grocery store when Mike comes up next to him.

"Regular, she likes regular." He says, reaching up to pat Steve on the back.

Mike wants to see El today and enlisted his help. Mostly for his car but also because the kid was too smart for his own good.

It was like he knew that Steve needed a welcome distraction, had said as much on the ride over here.

"It's fine you know, Dustin said you've been lookin' a little rough lately." 

"Wait, what?"

"Will sometimes locks himself up for days so we find ways to lure him out of that wizard tower he calls a house."

Steve had tried to reassure him that it wasn't like that but they both knew he was lying and Mike was nice enough not to call him out on it.

He'd been meaning to talk with El anyway, tell her how grateful he is for saving his life and Billy's too but it hadn't ever been the right moment.

He'd meant to do it at the party but he didn't want to take away the time Mike had together with her that night.

So, when Mike had shown up at his doorstep this morning to ask if Steve could take him to see her later today and get her some Eggos on the way there, he obliged.

Not realizing there had been ulterior motives at first.

Mike had quickly started spouting off a list of ground rules that Hopper had made in regards to the both of them and it had made Steve chuckle.

Already Hopper was slipping into the overprotective father role.

Steve pulls himself out of his own thoughts and nods at Mike, picking up the regular box of Eggos.

Everything is going great until he goes to turn down a couple other aisles to do some shopping from the list his mother had given him before leaving.

He almost crushes the waffle box in his grip completely.

The onslaught of a panic attack starts creeping up on him as he looks down the aisle to lay his eyes on a small stand of macaroni boxes.

This was the place.

This was the exact place they had been attacked by-
He hadn't even noticed. How had he not noticed?

*Luck apparently is not on his side however as he turns a corner, attempting a good six aisles of distance between himself and the monster.*

*His shoulder barely brushes against a small stand he hadn't been expecting to see.*

Steve drops the box of crushed Eggos and covers his ears with his hands but can still hear himself breathing heavily as he begin to hyperventilate.

*It's not real, it's not real. I'm not there anymore. I'm safe, Billy's safe. We're home.*

He can hear Mike calling out his name but he can't focus. It feels like he's dying again and he just can't catch his breath.

Billy slams on his brakes and almost flips his fucking car over when he doesn't have to worry about if the connection with Steve is there or not anymore.

It roars to life inside of him, angry and vengeful like a punch to the gut as he's forced to pull off to the side of the road.

He starts breathing heavily, putting his forehead against the wheel and recognizing the familiar signs. He's starting to have a panic attack.

No, not him.

*Steve.*

Billy climbs out of the car. He can't be in there anymore, it's too claustrophobic and he sits on the ground beside his car with his head between his legs with his back leaned up against it.

He doesn't know why Steve is *freaking the fuck out* but he goes off of instinct, pulling from the things he already knows about due to his prior experiences with their connection and follows it back to Steve.

They're in a grocery store.

They're in *the* grocery store.

He can feel his thoughts more than he can hear them and Steve is trying to convince himself that it's not real, trying to remind himself they're safe.

He's thinking of Billy.

*Is that what triggered this?*

It's something else, a memory getting triggered as he sees a flash of that piece of shit demon cricket he'd killed back in the upside down for a split second.

*Oh.*
Billy does the only thing he can think of and focuses on Steve's heartbeat, willing it to start beating normally, willing his own to do the same.

Billy?

He stays in that space of mind for a long time, like he's outside of himself before they finally start to sync up and it feels-

When their souls connect it's like coming home again, it feels right.

There's nothing Billy can do to stop it, to stop the overwhelming sense of 'finally' that feeds itself through their connection on Steve's side.

That warmth wraps itself around him, tugging gently at his soul as if he's being pulled into an embrace.

No-

If there's anything that Billy has learned it's that it would be so easy to get lost in it, to get lost in Steve.

Last time he tried to pull away he'd been met with resistance but this time it's almost like Steve had done it instinctively without realizing it as he pulls away quickly like he's in shock at his own actions.

In the next moment there's just an overwhelming sense of confusion feeding itself through the strange bond they seemed to now have with each other.

Billy feels himself double over into the grass from the weight of emotions flowing freely between them completely unfiltered and it's too much.

They can't seem to focus on what's Billy and what's Steve.

As things begin to level out there's a crippling sense of rejection that takes hold like poison in his veins but Billy soon realizes it's coming from Steve's side as his panic attack goes from slowly subsiding to crashing back into him again ten-fold.

Random thoughts that aren't his own start coming and going between them, nothing he can grab hold of as Steve starts working himself into a manic state.

Doesn't want me.

I'm bullshit.

Stay the fuck away.

Nancy.

Nobody could ever want-

Billy can feel hot wet tears streaming down his face, can smell the earth beneath his cheek, the grass he's laying in gently tickles his nose, cicadas blare loudly in the distance.

The sun hits his skin as the clouds shift in the cool Indiana air, the smell of oil in his car permeates all around him, the sharp metal of his keys are digging through the denim of his jeans and pressing into his skin from where they're resting in his pocket.
Dirt under his nails registers next as he digs his fingers deep into the soft soil, letting it ground him as he simply lets go, allowing himself to get lost to the feeling of Steve, pulling him back in.

*Calm down.*

Steve doubles over the moment that feeling of euphoria slams back into him, the one from his dreams.

He's distantly aware that he's somehow ended up on his hands and knees. The white tile underneath him is cold to the touch as he tries to sit upright, eventually maneuvering himself to one side of the aisle, leaning up against a shelf and putting his head between his legs.

Someone else is breathing, similar to his own with a heartbeat that's just as erratic as his own, if not more.

*Billy?*

He thinks absently, letting himself get lost in it, the sound of his heavy breathing, his heartbeat that starts guiding Steve back to sanity again.

He *finally* feels *whole* again.

It all sounds the same as their breathing starts falling in tandem with one another and their heartbeats follow suit soon after.

It's pure instinct that makes him reach out and pull Billy in.

There's nothing he can quite equate the feeling to, he's never felt more secure and certain about anything in his entire life than in this moment as he feels their souls connect.

*No-*

Billy pulls away and Steve comes back to himself a bit with a jolt that he feels in the core of his being.

*What am I doing?*

*What the fuck?*

He isn't sedated anymore like last time. He's fully conscious and he can feel things he wasn't able to before.

*It's too much.*

Steve doesn't know where he ends and Billy begins anymore as he digs his fingers into his scalp, tears streaming down his face as he remembers the other night, Billy *leaving.*

*Of course he didn't stay, he doesn't want me.*

*She was right, I'm bullshit.*

*Billy told me to stay the fuck away.*
Nancy never wanted me, why would anyone else?

Even my own fucking parents, nobody could ever want-

A whimper escapes him as he feels a vice like grip inside of him, inside of his soul, grounding and firm, refusing to let go, pulling him back in.

He falls back inside of it, has no other choice. It's demanding, claiming him like it owns him in every way possible, as if it's merely an eternal constant and there's no question about it.

Calm down.

It's like a shock to his system, a full body reboot as he goes completely calm, responding to the order in full against his will.

What-

That was Billy's fucking voice.

For whatever reason he's back to himself again like he's just woken from a long dream in which he was falling and whatever was there before is gone now.

He finally takes a look around him.

Mike is beside him, looking like he wants to cry but is trying to put up a brave front and people have started surrounding them.

They'd all been watching Steve act like a crazy person in a grocery store.

"Hey, it's okay, I'm okay. I'm sorry, I just had a bit of a moment there." Steve says, trying to reassure Mike more than anyone else as he reaches out to rub his back.

Mike shakes his head and looks away like he's haunted.

Wonderful, I just traumatized the poor kid.

One of the women who had been watching comes to sit down beside him.

"Do you need us to call anyone for you, hun?" She offers.

"No, no I'm good. Sorry everyone, sorry." He says over and over again and eventually the crowd clears as they see that he's actually fine.

The residual effects he'd usually get from a panic attack weren't even plaguing him.

He didn't feel weak, drained, there were no shakes.

It was actually kind of great and exhilarating.

Steve stands around a bit more and notices the box of crushed Eggos on the ground, picking them back up.

"Well, I guess we better get a new box." He says sheepishly to Mike and the kid has gone into full blown disengaged mode on him.
When they finally get into the car after Steve apologizes more than he ever has in his life to the store clerk, paying for the normal box and crushed one as well, he turns to Mike before starting the car.

"I really am sorry about that." He says for the hundredth time.

"It's okay." Mike says, looking out his window, away from Steve.

"Hey, come on talk to me. I can take you home if you want."

Mike looks like he almost gets whiplash finally turning his head toward Steve to look at him.

"No, I have to see El. It's okay really, I just- it's stupid." He says and crosses his arms against his chest to look back out the window.

"It's not stupid, it's okay. You can tell me." Steve reassures him.

"You told us not to blame ourselves but you only did what happened in there because you got stuck in the upside down." Mike says quietly, head still turned away.

Steve gets a sad smile on his face as he sighs deeply, gripping the wheel tight.

"I'm going to tell you what I told your sister. We gotta stop blaming ourselves for things out of our control, okay?" He says as sincerely as he can and maybe a youth will do a better job at listening to advice that he should be taking too.

Before Mike can answer there's a loud, aggressive knock at his driver's side window that scares the ever loving shit out of both of them.

Mike turns his head and screams, his screaming causes Steve to flail his arms up like an idiot and scream too as they both look over to see Billy leering down at them through the window.

"Billy?" They both say in unison as they recover and he's glaring at Steve like he wants to rip his head off.

His heartbeat immediately skyrockets back up yet again and he worries that he might throw himself into another panic attack.

Oh fuck, oh shit-

He goes back and forth between looking from Billy to Mike and then back again a few more times before finally turning his car on so that the air conditioner will still be running.

He has no idea what to expect right now and a large part of him wants to forget any of what just happened between them actually happened.

"Huh, okay well, I'm just gonna- give me a second." Steve says dumbly as he steps out of the car to face an incredibly angry looking Billy Hargrove.

He barely gets his door shut before Billy starts yelling in his face.

"The fuck is your problem, Harrington?! I almost crashed my goddamn car, you dipshit!"
Steve gives him an accused look, immediately feeling defensive.

"Whoa, the fuck you talking about Hargrove?" Steve laughs out nervously, going for the full blown denial route if it means ending this conversation as quickly as possible.

Also, Mike is right fucking there.

"I'm talking about your crisis in the store just now, idiot." Billy lashes out.

Steve barks out another disbelieving laugh.

Another logical part of his brain has gone into self preservation mode.

What if someone was watching them right now?

"Wha- I, I didn't- how, why-" he sputters out, gesturing from the store to Billy.

It really is one thing for it to have happened but it's another thing to have Billy actually show up and yell in his face about it. His brain short circuits, trying to catch up with itself.

"Wah, wha, why don't you just shut the fuck up?" Billy says rudely and Steve points him with a glare, crossing his arms over his chest in defiance.

Billy rolls his eyes and looks over to see Mike staring up at them from the passengers seat as the kid quickly averts his gaze, trying to pretend that he hadn't been listening in.

"Where are you going?" Billy asks as if he's finally starting to realize that this wasn't the right time.

Steve raises a brow at him.

"Mike wants to see El and he invited me. I wanted to go thank her." He says honestly.

Billy gets a thoughtful look on his face then nods.

"Yeah okay, let's go." He says as he reaches past him, getting further into his space as he puts his hand on the driver side door to pull it open, they lock eyes when Billy's met with resistance.

Steve glares at him, putting his hand over Billy's as he pushes the door closed again with his body.

Neither one of them breaks the contact.

"Whoa, no, no, no. You told me to stay the fuck away from you so why don't you go ahead and stay the fuck away." Steve spits out at him and he knows it's petulant to say, he's playing with fire but this shit was giving him some serious emotional whiplash.

A multitude of expressions pass over Billy's face as he leans forward until their noses are almost touching and Steve's hand tightens over Billy's without his permission.

"Yeah and apparently you don't fucking know how to take care of yourself so get into the fucking car and shut the fuck up." Billy says quietly with restrained anger and frustration in his voice with a dash of something else he doesn't want to identify.

Steve isn't really sure what to say to that and Billy seems perfectly content having him essentially
pinned against his own car and his brain starts turning to mush.

This was not how he'd expected his morning to go.

"Well- what about your car?" He asks stupidly, gesturing with his free hand to it a few spots down from them.

"We can drop the kid back off at his place later and drive back here." Billy says logically and tries to open the door again but Steve doesn't budge and physically pulls at his hand to try and remove it from the handle.

Billy doesn't budge either.

Why did everything need to be a battle of wills with this guy?

"This is my car!" Steve yells out, gesturing to it for emphasis.

"Get. In. The. Car." Billy says menacingly and they stare at each other for a long time.

It's much different looking at someone after they've bared their soul to you.

Steve notices a lot of shit about Billy he couldn't see before, every microexpression. It's almost poetic in a way but he sucks at poetry so he wouldn't really be able to describe it properly.

A flicker of something raw and desperate enters Billy's eyes, the anger subsiding to replace it with something else entirely.

Longing.

The memory of Billy pulling him back in after his episode of self deprecation resurfaces in his mind as embarrassment settles deep in the pit of his stomach.

Billy had probably felt everything.

The back of his neck feels red hot, making it hard to breathe as he ducks his head down, averting his gaze and before either one of them can say anything he finally removes his hand from Billy's and gets into the back of his own car.

When they all get themselves situated Billy turns his head to Mike with a 'sup, kid.' and starts the car, pulling out of the parking spot soon after.

Mike gives him a nervous smile and turns away, looking like he wants to jump out and make a run for it.

Steve doesn't blame him.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry but I cannot help myself for wanting Billy to have this protective older brother thing in regards to Will due to them having gone through the same thing, I just saw an opportunity and I took it.
Also oh jeez, Billy why (ﾉ´ཀ´)ﾉ

You just can't stay away can you?

Also poor Mike getting stuck in the middle of their shenanigans, all the poor boy wants to do is see Eleven!

Oh the things we do for love.

*2019 Ceru Log*

First of all why the fuck did my past self make this fracking chapter so mf long.

Secondly i made it even longer lol.

This is probably the chapter I've adjusted the most so far, especially the panic attack scene.

If there's anything I've learned in my year of absence it's that the mind is a very powerful thing.

I hope you guys like the new scene.
Chapter Summary

Beta'd By G_R12

Chapter Notes

No joke as I was writing the beginning of this chapter in my backroom at work on my phone a co-worker of mine pulls out the picture of Joe holding his bats and staring at them lovingly and made it her wallpaper and showed it to me.

My brain short circuited because writing about Steve and having someone suddenly show me a picture of him made me go "oh"

She goes "Oh I just love him"

In my mind I was like "Girl, you have no idea"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The drive there had been full of mostly awkward silence aside from Mike giving Billy directions and Steve exuding as much attitude as he could from the back seat.

Of his own car.

Seriously.

Fuck Billy.

They're walking up the steps to the cabin when Steve gives Billy a pointed look that he hopes indicates 'we need to talk' as Mike knocks on the door in some sort of special way. They hear multiple locks undo themselves as the door opens.

Billy pointedly decides to ignore him.

"El, we're here. I brought Steve and Billy with me." Mike says, immediately making himself at home.

"We just gonna start bringing the whole town around now?" They hear Hopper say as they all walk in to see El and Hopper on the couch watching TV.

"I thought you were working?" Mike asks as he puts the Eggos on the kitchen counter.

"I got off early, sue me." He says with a shrug.
"It's good to see you, Chief." Steve says as he goes to sit in one of the dining room chairs.

"You too, I'm glad you were both able to come." He says with a wave towards Billy who had started walking towards the other dining room chair across from Steve to sit down.

Billy waves back in response.

"Well, we came because we wanted to. Thank you El, for saving us." Steve says and she turns toward them, hanging her arms over the back of the couch at the sound of her name, giving him a small smile and he's reminded of the fact that she's still just a kid.

It's heartbreaking to know the things she's been through, that so many people rely on her. She should be going to school, going to the movies, doing what kids do but she can't because of her abilities.

"Seriously, we would have been worse than dead without your help, kid." Billy pipes up and Steve hadn't expected him to say anything at all.

If anything he assumed he would be the one to do the talking for both of them.

_Huh._

She ducks her head down in embarrassment and looks to Hopper for help who mouths a 'you're welcome' at her.

"You're welcome." She says, still trying to duck down behind the couch.

"We brought you Eggos!" Mike says, interrupting the moment, probably sensing that she wasn't very good at receiving gratitude and quite honestly, none of them were very good at it in general.

Mike starts crinkling the inner packaging and her face lights up, probably at the sight of seeing her two most favorite things in the world.

Mike and waffles.

Steve watches them bicker with a small smile on his face and when he turns his head he catches Billy staring at him intently.

Neither one of them looks away until Hopper asks Steve a question about some dumb baseball related shit.

It was gonna be a _long_ fucking day.

At some point the cabin settles down into something a bit more comfortable after Mike makes them all Eggos and they all start to discuss more mundane topics.

That is, until Hopper turns to Billy and Steve.

"So, the two of you have any other weird episodes?" Hopper asks after finishing a rather large bite of waffle.

"_No._" They say in unison, eyes locking yet again but with a look of surprise reflected back at each other this time.
Steve thinks that maybe they shouldn't be shocked, all things considered.

At least they're on the same page about something.

"Yes."

Billy and Steve whip their heads to look at Mike as he gets a deer in the headlights look on his face after being a fucking snitch while Hopper just raises a brow.

"Care to elaborate?" Hopper asks, turning to look at Billy and Steve while putting his unfinished plate down.

"Not really." Billy says nonchalantly, answering first with a shrug as he pours more syrup onto his waffle.

"Mike?" Hopper says.

"Uh, no?" He answers, looking rapidly between the three of them.

"What's that saying you always use El, something about friends?" Hopper says, snapping his fingers like he doesn't remember.

"Friends don't lie." She says while she reaches for Hoppers half eaten Eggos, taking them for herself without even glancing at them.

"That's not fair!" Mike says, flailing his arms out.

"Life isn't fair, kid." Hopper retorts.

"Ugh, fine. I'm sorry guys." He says, casting them an apologetic look. "Steve had a panic attack at the store and Billy somehow knew where we were and yelled at Steve, saying he almost made him crash his car because of it." Mike finishes with a groan looking like he wants to crawl into a hole and die.

Hopper blinks for a moment and scratches at his beard with a thoughtful look on his face.

"Anything either of you want to add to that since it's all out in the open now?" Hopper asks both Steve and Billy pointedly.

Steve just starts curling in on himself nervously and takes an incredibly large bite of his Eggo to avoid the question while he glances at Billy.

"I knew where they were because I had talked to Steve this morning." Billy lies.

"Oh, interesting because Jonathan Byers says you haven't seen Steve at all." Hopper says.

"Whath, Jawnathawn?" Steve asks with a mouthful of Eggo still in his mouth as bits of it start flying out.

Billy looks at him in disgust and turns back to Hopper, getting this look on his face like he's so done with everything, pinching the bridge of his nose as Hopper continues.
"Also, I know it wasn't this morning that you actually talked to Steve because I also talked to Max, who informed me you actually went to see him a couple of days ago."

Billy groans and rubs his hands over his face in exasperation this time as Steve leans back in his seat, slumping down as his fork clanks against the table loudly.

"Are you fucking kidding me? Do you keep tabs on everyone or just me?" Billy gets out before Steve can say anything about it.

Clearly they'd been keeping tabs on both of them and Steve glances at Mike who looks away guiltily.

"Someone has to keep track of all of you." Hopper says.

"What do you want me to say here, Chief?" Billy asks, flailing his hand in Steve's direction.

"The truth would be a nice start. I can't make either one of you do anything but if it's that bad you should both probably talk to someone."

"I refuse to go back to that lab. I know you have access to the footage, I'm not stupid. I bet you even watched it, you saw what they did to me." Billy says.

Us.

Steve wants to correct him and say but refrains.

"Look, I understand and that Richards guy is a real piece of work but I can get you an audience with Dr. Owens instead." Hopper says.

"Who the fuck is Dr. Owens?" Billy asks.

"He's the doctor who worked with Will, kept the whole facility from trying to kill him when he was possessed." Steve supplies quietly, finally speaking up now that there wasn't Eggo in his mouth.

Also, he was afraid of being asked more direct questions and was hoping the ground might swallow him whole.

"Exactly and he still talks to Will. He's on bed rest but he offered to help as much as he can." Hopper says.

"That means something coming from Hopper." Steve says with a nod, trying to be as reassuring as possible.

"Seriously, you too?" Billy asks, casting him a glare as he shrugs at him.

"I just- I still don't remember everything and maybe he can help us?" Steve says mostly to himself, rubbing at his arm absently.

What happened at the store had been...intense.

If anything he just feels afraid of whatever this is that seemed to be getting stronger and stronger really fucking quickly by the second.
Even more annoying was the fact that neither one of them seemed to have the desire to willingly *address* it.

"Yeah, absolutely not. If you wanna go and see this guy be my guest but leave me the fuck out of it." Billy replies while holding his hand up, refusing to budge.

Steve sighs and admits defeat.

He really doubts it would be a good idea to move *against* each other in a situation that seemed to be pushing them *toward* each other at a fast pace.

That's not really something he can *say* though.

"Think about it and if you change your mind you can have Steve get with me about making it happen." Hopper says to Billy as he watches them disagree.

"I'm not his keeper." Steve says with a huff.

"Seems to me like you two weren't huge fans of each other when shit first started rolling downhill but now it looks like a whole lotta somethin' else."

"No offense but it's not actually *any* of your *fucking* business."

"Billy-" Steve says as he shoots him with a glare.

"Hey!" Mike yells out.

"Language." El says quietly.

"No *offense* but you could *both* still be infected by that *thing* somehow and it's just sitting there waiting for you both to let your guard down."

"I don't think-"

"Whatever you *think* this is, it's not." Billy spits out.

"Okay, how is *anyone* supposed to know that if you're both treating it like some horrible secret? We were there, El got you *both* out of that place but *nobody* seems to know what *really* happened other than the two of you. Those lab freaks looked ready to shit themselves, you know that?"

Neither one of them says anything as Hopper sighs deeply, pinching at the bridge of his nose.

"I'm not trying to pry I just need to know if you're both dangerous to anyones safety."

*Are they dangerous to Eleven's safety?*

That's clearly what Hopper *means* to say.

"I can't speak for Billy as a *person* but no, we're not *dangerous.*" Steve says as he turns to stare at the Chief.

He can see Billy glare at him out of his peripheral.

"I don't have a reason to believe you but so far that seems to be true. Just do me a favor and keep your options open, okay?"
They drop Mike back off at home who had been worried that they were going to kill him or something for ratting them out to Hopper.

Steve is eventually able to reassure him that wouldn't be happening.

Well, they reassure him after Billy tries to fuck with him only to say he's kidding.

They think.

Steve could never really tell when it came to this psycho.

When they've dropped off the baggage and they're finally alone without an audience it's the single most awkward car ride he's ever had to be a part of.

Even the road trips with his parents weren't as bad as this.

He glances at Billy who seems to be completely stonefaced and indifferent as he taps his fingers lightly on Steve's steering wheel.

So, that's how they were gonna play this then.

"Why don't you want to see anyone now that we know the connection is still there?" He asks, bracing himself for a full blown fight.

Billy rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

"Because I don't like labs and I don't like being followed by creepy government agencies. I don't like any of what's going on, they already know too much as it is." He huffs out, gripping the wheel instead.

"You're being way too paranoid, what do they know too much of exactly?" Steve asks, crossing his arms over his chest.

"You're not paranoid enough. Our story is that we got out of that place through a convenient opening back into our world but it was actually Eleven who got us out. They start poking and prodding and that puts her at risk too." Billy says, pointing a finger at Steve while still looking at the road.

"I didn't know you gave a shit." Steve retorts, batting his finger away.

"Saving our lives counts for something. I'm an asshole not an idiot."

"Yeah, you've established that before Billy, thanks." Steve replies, rolling his eyes.

"I don't understand why Jim is up our asses about this, he's gotta know if we go to the lab she'd be in danger." Billy says after a few moments of a strangely comfortable silence between them.

"He's probably just afraid and besides we can still lie, the cover story doesn't really have anything to do with it." Steve says with a shrug.

"For all we know she could be part of the reason it's happening."

"We can just lie."

Steve realizes they're already back to the grocery store when Billy whips into a parking spot so fast
that it jostles them both around and he's about to chew the asshole the fuck out for being so careless with his car when its aggressively put into park and Billy turns, getting in his face to stare at him.

"I'm not doing it."

A brick wall, that's what it felt like when talking to Billy.

"Ok, fine." Steve says after a few moments, giving up as he rolls his eyes and gets out of the car.

What was the fucking point?

Billy gets out too and leans with his back against the door as Steve walks to him, moving to grab his keys when they suddenly get thrown into the air.

He fumbles a bit but ultimately catches them against his chest, throwing a glare at Billy.

"You need to keep your shit together, Harrington." He says and Steve can feel the beginnings of anger taking root.

It's not like he'd meant to have a fucking panic attack as if he was scheduling them on a daily calendar or some shit.

"Yeah sure, your concern is duly fucking noted." Steve says sarcastically, moving forward under the assumption that Billy will move out of his way except he doesn't.

"I'm being serious. If you gotta talk to someone then talk to someone. We know that connection is still there now and I don't wanna have to hold your hand through every fucking panic attack you decide to have." Billy says with a scoff.

Steve clenches his jaw and just looks at him.

"I didn't ask for your help and it's not like I can help it." He says quietly, not understanding what Billy was gaining from putting up a front like this, from blatantly being an asshole for no reason at all.

They'd both been there, had experienced it together.

Denial was something Steve could understand, something he could honestly get behind but for Billy to just blatantly act hypocritical wasn't doing them any good.

"Doesn't matter, keep your shit together. We clear?" Billy says like he doesn't even give a shit, was pretending not to give a shit.

Steve is suddenly overcome with the urge to punch him in his face.

"Yeah, and what about when you go breaking down on me?" Steve bites back out at him.

Billy puts his hands in his pockets and snorts like that's the stupidest thing he's ever heard.

"Don't you worry about me pretty boy, I'll be just fine. You worry about yourself." He says with a smug look on his face.

"You are the most unbearable piece of shit I've ever met. You know that Billy?" He hisses out.
"Oh yeah, you know I love it when you get like this. Keep it coming, just get it all out." Billy taunts, leaning in closer to his face.

_He wants this, he wants a fight._

It's sad how easy Billy was to read at this point, how desperate and starved for attention he really was but couldn't just come out and say it.

The fight goes out of Steve and he can feel a physical ache begin to form inside of him as he moves away, mumbling out a 'just fuck off' with a grimace as he goes to open his car door.

"Sweet dreams, Harrington." Billy says after moving out of the way and Steve slams the door shut, whipping back around to face him.

"Is this really how we're gonna do this?" He asks, searching his eyes for something, anything.

He knows Billy felt what happened between them.

"I don't know what the fuck you're talkin' bout." Billy says with a toothy grin.

Old Steve would have been afraid of the gesture, old Steve wouldn't have known Billy was simply pushing him away, trying to act like this on purpose.

The only thing was that he couldn't figure out why.

There were too many potential reasons he supposed, it wasn't exactly the most comfortable thing in the world to let someone into your soul.

Maybe that's what was making Billy like this.

He's not sure why he goes along with it, why he doesn't just call him on his bluff.

It feels wrong.

If Billy can't talk about it unless they're under the influence of the connection he wasn't going to fucking force him.

"Fine, we'll do this your way." Steve says as he gets into his car, throwing up his middle finger in Billy's direction and driving off without looking at him, wishing he'd gotten one good punch right into his stupid fucking face.

---

Things fall back into normalcy pretty easily after that.

Whatever was going on between himself and Billy was still rocky of course but that's just to be expected.

Steve wonders if things will ever not be complicated between them.

Yeah, that'll be the day.

They haven't had any sort of episode ever since the one in the grocery store and Steve isn't sure if he should feel happy about it or not.

Currently however he's holed up in the library with Nancy and Jonathan.
They'd started hovering around him more often and he genuinely couldn't find it within himself to care.

Having people around him other than Billy or the kids was a nice change of pace, not to say he didn't love the kids but being with people his own age could be a bit more grounding at times and Billy was just, well Billy.

They also weren't speaking and Steve was not going to be the one to break that silence.

He'd done nothing wrong.

There were clear and obvious signs he was starting to emit however, after pulling away from his casual friends to the point that they'd given up on talking to him as often, if at all.

He'd become far more introverted, quieter and pulled himself out of basketball, mostly to avoid Billy.

Okay so, it was completely to avoid Billy.

He just couldn't handle being near him more often than he needed to because there was that physical ache inside of him at the thought of Billy.

For all intents and purposes Billy had essentially been rejecting him at every turn.

It was like he could feel Billy pulling away, shutting him out and it was fucking unbearable because Billy needed things to be on his own terms while Steve be damned.

So fucking self-centered.

As of recently it was like a void inside of him had started growing and he couldn't figure out why it had started or how to fix it.

It was making him irritable, restless and he wasn't sleeping as well anymore.

He's assuming it has something to do with Billy but there's nothing he can do about it.

So he's doing what he does best, ignoring it.

It was easy keeping himself occupied as often as he could, convincing himself it was because of the trauma of being in the upside down.

Even though he knew better, knew there was more to it than that.

Unfortunately it was like everyone had started keeping a watchful eye on him, noting his changes with concern yet not knowing how to address them.

Nancy had tried but he'd just shut down all of her attempts.

"You know I'm awful at writing." Steve says, pouting as he pulls himself out of his own thoughts.

"Yes, that's why I'm here to help but before that, I'll be right back. Meet you guys out in the hall okay?" Nancy says with a smile as she gets up, probably to go to the bathroom or something.

It's just him and Jonathan when they begin to grab all of their things soon afterwards and as they walk out into the hall in silence, Jonathan turns to him.
"I can give you a book that Nancy recommended to me this one time. It helped me out pretty well." He offers.

"Huh, yeah that'd be great." Steve says, a bit surprised that Jonathan of all people would be willing to help him.

Sure, they'd been hanging out but it was still kind of awkward.

"Cool, I'll bring it tomorrow."

"Have you talked to Billy recently?" Jonathan asks suddenly out of nowhere and Steve stops to turn to him.

"Uh, no. Why do you ask?" Steve replies suspiciously, wondering where this was coming from.

"I was just wondering, it feels like you're avoiding eachother." Jonathan says with a shrug.

"We are." Steve says honestly, hoping he'll just drop it.

"Why-"

"Hey, so same time, same place tomorrow?" Nancy interrupts them to say as she walks up behind them.

"Yeah, I offered Steve that book you gave me a few weeks ago. I'm gonna bring it tomorrow for him." Jonathan says.

"Hey man, you don't have to if it's too much trouble." Steve says, trying to be nice. He really doesn't want the guy to go out of his way for him because he can only imagine how uncomfortable it must be to have to entertain Nancy bringing Steve into their circle, what with their history and all.

He hadn't spoken to Jonathan about when he and Nancy talked but Steve still feels like maybe he should apologize at some point, even though nothing happened.

If anything the exact opposite had happened.

"Steve come on, if Jonathan wants to give it to you, let him." Nancy says with an eye roll as she turns to walk away from them and they start to follow suit.

"Oh yeah, it's a super big deal. The things I do for you." Jonathan says jokingly as he laughs. The smell of ozone fills his nostrils and he can hear metal breaking in the distance.

Steve gives them a strained smile and suddenly feels like he's been run over by a freight train as a pulsing migraine slams into him with no warning.

He belatedly realizes that he's stopped in the middle of the hallway with a white knuckled grip on the strap of his backpack.

Nancy and Jonathan are calling out to him but he's starting to feel weak.
The pounding in his brain is too loud and the pain is too much as he starts to feel nauseous.

"The things I do for you."

It found him.

It's trying to get to him, trying to reach him but his physical body is incapacitated and the creature can't find it.

It feels like his mind is floating. He feels a shift as the monster alters something.

Reality?

He isn't sure but it feels like he's being sucked inside of a vacuum and pulled somewhere else. It feels like he's outside of time, the confines of it were no longer a problem, like it wasn't a variable anymore.

It's a trap.

Who?

For a very long time there's nothing and he's simply floating in some sort of strange space. His consciousness distanced, away from its body.

Another consciousness starts floating beside him right as another one slams into him and there's an explosion of everything all at once.

Eleven?

Billy?

Something dark, tainted and wrong tries to reach inside of him but he can feel the outside forces of Billy and Eleven pushing it back, trying to get it away from him.

Meanwhile, he can feel his consciousness melding together with Billy's.

It feels like a lightning strike when Eleven suddenly disappears and he feels threads form in his mind, branching out endlessly.

Memories, thoughts, and feelings enter him all at once.

It's overwhelming, the ferocity of it.

Billy.

It's indescribable as he feels a sense of togetherness, souls calling out to each other.

Something changes, rearranges and takes a new shape, something that feels inherently like himself but not at the same time.

It feels like them.

Us.
It's instinctual. He feels as if he's been broken down into his most basic form, unhindered by raging thoughts and simply an existence of emotions.

He pulls Billy into himself but there's something tainted inside of him so he pushes the virus out, healing the wounds it had left behind in his soul.

He starts to feel Billy fight it, notices that there's a darkness inside of him aside from the one being caused by the Mind Flayer and it uses it against him, tethering itself to that place inside of Billy.

A place Steve can't get to.

It's too much at once as he gets lost in overwhelming sorrow.

Irredeemable.

Insecurities were eating away at Billy like a flesh eating acid, causing him to fight against the bond.

I don't deserve it.

Steve feels a rush of frustration build inside of him at the audacity as he sinks himself deeper inside of their new connection.

Don't you dare, you're stuck with me now.

It ripples through them as Billy answers his call, they become one and something locks into place.

Like a piece to a puzzle.

Reality shifts again.

Darkness.

There's only darkness around him and when he looks forward Billy is standing across from him.

"Billy?" He asks in absolute disbelief.

He merely gapes at him, like he can't find the words.

Steve feels Eleven appear next to them before he sees her.

She must have done this?

He's not sure what's going on and isn't able to ask when Billy doubles over in pain.

"No-" Steve hears him say, choked off and wet.

Dark tendrils converge in around them, reaching out as they latch back on to Billy again.

It's a trap.

It had them all right where it wanted them.

Steve leans down to crouch next to Billy and starts to call out his name but gets no response. He's fighting against it, the all-consuming darkness.
It's agonizing and he can feel Billy's pain as he tries to brace himself.

"I got most of it out of him earlier, I can do it again." Steve says.

Billy reaches out and grabs Eleven by the wrist, "take him and go. It's trying to trap us, I can't hold it back now that it followed you here to me." He grits out in pain.

There was no way he was leaving but it was hard to do anything with the unbearable pain coursing through him, through Billy.

Eleven nods and holds her hand out, ripping the gate back open again.

They all scream.

Steve, Billy, the monster.

It feels like being torn open.

"Billy no!" Steve screams out.

There was absolutely no way he was going to let him go, not after this.

Steve starts fighting against him and it feels like Billy encases him in some sort of prison as part of his mind gets shut away and he can feel a wall go up.

Steve loses himself, becoming fragmented pieces.

Everything starts coming to him out of order, certain things leave him, others begin morphing.

In a fit of panic he realizes what Billy is doing.

He's making him forget, distracting him, keeping him occupied.

*Always the same.*

Son of a bitch.

Steve feels himself reach out to El as if he's always known but he doesn't know why he knows, can somehow feel a thread of some sort leading straight to her as he clings to it, pulling hard.

Suddenly he's standing before her, pleading, begging her to save Billy as his mind slowly deteriorates and the wall begins to fully form, holding in place as he begins to forget why he was there in the first place.

The only thought that gets left behind is all-encompassing.

Billy's in danger.

Distantly Steve can hear voices all around him, the lights are too bright and he feels like he's going to throw up as he doubles over in pain.

The wall inside of his mind shatters as it all comes rushing back to him in waves.

*Billy saved me, he tried to sacrifice himself-*
The last thing he sees before he passes out in the school hallway are the worried faces of Nancy and Jonathan.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter seems a bit shorter to me than usual but it's pretty dialogue heavy and next chapter has *SO* much shit going on with it that I just needed to get this part out of the way and get into the really good shit.

Looks like our boi Steve finally remembers but it turns out our dear Billy was the reason for his memory loss in the first place.

(Ψ° Д° )Ψ

*2019 Ceru Log*

Old readers of this story are probably going to look at the new version of this chapter & be like "wait, what the fuck?" I HAVE MY REASONS LOL
He's walking down the hallway at school to get to his car when he sees a crowd of kids huddled around each other, blocking his path.

*What now?*

As he gets closer and moves his way through the crowd he starts pushing people aside because he *really* doesn't care about who got into a fight with who right now.

He just wants to go the fuck home.

Today had been absolute *shit.*

He can hear whispering but he can also hear familiar voices and when he gets close enough he realizes they're the voices of Nancy and Jonathan.

"Steve, wake up!" Nancy yells out looking around in a panic.

Jonathan is slapping his face lightly and starts turning Steve's head from side to side, inspecting him like somehow he'll magically know what's wrong.

"You gotta be fuckin' *kidding* me." Billy says in exasperation as he moves to crouch down beside them.

"Billy?" Jonathan says in surprise as Nancy whips her head up to look up at him in shock.

"What the fuck happened?" Billy grunts out as he goes to scoop Steve up into his arms without a second thought.

No point in putting him on display like a fucking comedy bit for any longer.

The physical contact gives him a tingling sensation that starts from his fingertips and moves up
through his arms and into the rest of his body as he shivers.

_Fuck._

The pull between them becomes stronger again, bursting to life and zipping around like electricity in his veins.

_Shit._

A void that had been forming inside of him for _days_ now begins to close as he holds Steve closer to his body.

This isn't what he'd wanted, all he'd wanted was to create some distance, get a handle on whatever was happening to _him_, to _them_.

None of it had helped, Steve pulled out of basketball and their contact became nonexistent.

Recently Billy would wake up crying in the middle of the night, an ache so painful inside of him there was nothing he could do but lay there and sob.

Still he denied its existence, acted as if it wasn't there.

They both knew that wasn't true, Steve had said as much that night in the parking lot when he asked him if this was how they were going to do this.

He'd been giving Billy an opportunity to change his mind.

Being near Harrington was a lot like being two different people at once. Spitting harsh words in his face yet craving contact between them on a cellular level that felt a lot like the pull of a magnet.

Over the last few days he'd started equating it to quantum entanglement.

It was like they were one element split in half yet no matter where Steve was, no matter how far away they were from each other he could still feel that pull, that _connection_.

Ever since the panic attack it was like Steve could see right through him all of a sudden, knew he was full of shit but was choosing not to say anything.

Billy isn't sure if he should feel grateful or not.

Jonathan and Nancy get up from their crouches, getting on either side of him and the crowd starts to clear as they move through the throng of people.

"I don't know. Jonathan was talking to him and all of a sudden he just stopped and his eyes rolled into the back of his head, after that he passed out." Nancy says like she's about to get hysterical just from the memory of it.

Wasn't this girl supposed to be all calm and collected or something?

It clearly hadn't been a panic attack again otherwise Billy probably would have felt it.

He absently wonders if Steve has been taking care of himself and maybe he just passed out due to exhaustion or something and if that was the case Billy was going to need to have a _serious_ fucking talk with the guy.
Whatever had happened he hadn't felt anything, not even a tickle and it was all starting to make him feel uneasy as he carries Steve to the nurse’s office.

When they get him inside he drops him unceremoniously onto the bed and runs a hand through his own hair, turning around to see the peanut gallery staring at him expectantly.

"What?"

"We thought you could tell us." Jonathan says.

"Tell you what?"

"Why Steve passed out." Nancy gets out first before Jonathan can.

"How the fuck would I know if I wasn't there?" Billy says with a look on his face like they're both idiots for even asking.

"I dunno, we just thought you might know." Jonathan says with a shrug as he puts his hands in his pockets and Nancy starts to wring her hands together nervously, not taking her eyes off of Steve.

"Look, he's probably just exhausted or something. Have you guys been making sure he's taking care of himself?" He asks, turning to look back at Steve's still unconscious body.

"We're not exactly his parents but he eats, drinks, I think he's been struggling with sleep but that's just normal." Jonathan says, taking one hand out of his pocket to scratch the back of his head.

"This didn't look like an exhaustion thing." Nancy says pointedly as she goes to kneel next to the bed to brush hair out of Steve's face.

Billy moves aside and looks away. "What do you mean?" He asks as he chooses to look over at the counter across the room instead.

"It was weird, his eyes. It was like he was there one second and then gone the next, staring off into space. He started shaking, got pale, looked like he was going to throw up and just collapsed." She says as she gets up to go over to the counter to grab a dry cloth, taking it to the sink and getting it damp to put onto Steve's forehead.

"Yeah, it was right after I said something to him, like literally right after." Jonathan says as he purses his lips.

"What did you say?" Billy asks, confusion on his face.

"I don't know, I made a joke or something."

"You offered him a book, he said something about it not being a big deal and you made a joke saying something like 'oh the things I do for you.'" Nancy answers for him, still dabbing the cloth around Steve's face.

Billy stills and whips his head back around to look over at Steve.

"The things I do for you."
No, it can't be.

*That's impossible.*

Steve was already unconscious when he'd said that, he couldn't have heard him say it.

He starts to remember the conversation he'd had with Will, something in the back of his head he'd been personally wondering about a lot more but it wasn't important enough to take note of.

"Do you...see things?" Will says quietly.

"The things I shouldn't know?" Billy responds and he thinks he knows exactly what the kid means.

The things they shouldn't know.

The random little bouts of information that kept giving him headaches sometimes.

"He means we still have stuff crammed into our heads, things we shouldn't know and sometimes the smallest thing will set it off."

It would happen at the most random of times, a news anchor would say something on TV and he'd see flashes of a forest.

Sometimes he'd just see the upside down, the tunnels underground that it couldn't use anymore.

Other times he could see animals, mostly deer.

None of it made sense and it would come and go quickly, as if it had never happened at all.

"Different things, words, phrases, information, memories. It's hard to explain and it just depends on what sets it off in the first place, I guess."

He wonders if maybe Steve was possibly suffering from that potential side effect as a result of their connection but he hadn't heard anything from him.

Not that Steve would probably tell him anyway.

The panic attack had happened because of a memory, an onset of PTSD.

It wasn't the same thing.

Had the phrase set something off in his head? If it did, what got set off?

Billy feels himself start to panic.

There was only one logical thing that could have happened. It probably triggered Steve's memories, it probably caused him to remember *everything*.

It was probably too much information at once and it overloaded him, made him pass out.

*Oh fuck.*

Billy tries to reason with himself, keep from assuming the worst.
But would it really be so bad for him to remember?

He isn't sure, he just knows it would change everything because it was one thing for Billy to feel that initial moment of connection but for Steve to remember it too?

To know how far Billy had been willing to go to keep him safe?

It's terrifying to think about.

Steve had already started fathoming him out with just the panic attack episode, already knew too much.

"You said something about phrases and words triggering things when you talked to Will. Could it have been that?" Jonathan asks like he can suddenly read minds and Billy almost loses it but forces himself to keep his cool.

"No, he was never possessed." Billy lies and who knows, maybe he was telling the truth but he had a feeling that wasn't the case for this.

"I don't know what could have happened then." Jonathan huffs out, clearly frustrated.

Billy needs to get out of here.

He needs to get the fuck out of here.

That's all he knows. Before Steve wakes up he needs to give himself time to figure this out, think of what he'll do.

"Well, ask him when he wakes up but I've gotta go," Billy says with a shrug, feigning indifference.

"How can you not care about what's happening after all you've been through with him?" Nancy spits out at him as she leaves Steve's side and gets into Billy's personal space.

Billy feels an ugly, dark laugh leave him as he looks at Jonathan in disbelief and laughs right in her face, loud and boisterous but she doesn't falter.

Is this bitch for real?

"You're one to fucking talk." He says as his laughs turn into a fit of chuckles like this is the funniest joke he's ever heard and it pretty much was at this point.

"Excuse me?" She says, all high pitched and squeaky, grating on Billy's ears as he grimaces.

"You sit here pretending to give a shit about him, lead him on and sit here by his bedside again. You gonna cry again too?" He laughs out, a new bout of chuckles causing him to grab his side as he wipes a tear of laughter from his eye.

It's all so damn funny.

"Stop it. You don't know what you're talking about." She says like she doesn't even believe herself.

"Yes, he does." Jonathan says suddenly, a serious look on his face as they both turn to look at him.
Billy tilts his head to the side and gets a smile on his face while stalking up to him nice and slow.

That clearly unsettles Byers because he takes a step back until realizing he's shown weakness and pretends to put on a brave front.

Too late.

"Sorry, I didn't hear you." Billy says, cupping a hand to his ear.

"I said, you do know because you couldn't have known about Nancy at his bedside at Hawkins lab, just like you couldn't have known about where Steve was when he had his panic attack." Jonathan says, standing his ground.

It's kind of admirable if not a little bit idiotic.

"And how the fuck would you know anything about that?" Billy asks, amusement dripping from his tone.

"We talk Billy, all of us talk. We know that connection is still there."

Hopper.

He'd opened his big gob is more what he meant.

If Billy was in his position he'd be doing the same but that doesn't make it any less frustrating.

"Yeah well, in this particular case I don't know what's going on with Harrington." He says and it feels like a lie.

"I don't believe you." Nancy says and these two were really starting to get on his nerves.

"Well believe me or don't, it doesn't matter because like I said, I've got somewhere to fucking be." He spits out as he turns his head to look at her before turning back and brushing past Jonathan, knocking shoulders with him, almost causing the guy to fall over.

He opens the door and slams it shut so hard that the walls shake and doesn't look back.

When Billy gets out into the hall with his metaphorical tail tucked between his legs a man with a white coat on almost slams right into him.

Panic swirls in his stomach for a split second upon seeing white as flashes of Hawkins Lab flit through his brain but rational thought kicks back on as he realizes it's probably just the school nurse.

"Oh, Mr. Hargrove. Is everything okay?" The man suddenly asks but Billy doesn't recognize him, has never seen him before at the school.

"How do you know my name?" Billy asks suspiciously.

"I'm a nurse, it's my job to know the names of the students. I am loathe to admit I may not know them all of course." He says with a chuckle that sounds hollow and fake.
There's warning bells going off in Billy's head and he's not sure why but he's got too much on his mind to worry about that right now.

"Haven't ever seen a male nurse here at the school before." Billy comments with a shrug.

"Oh, I just started. There aren't many of us but we do exist." He says with a creepy ass smile and a laugh that makes it seem like he thinks he's hilarious.

"Yeah well, you've got a guy in there who's probably dehydrated or something, Mr.-?" Billy goes to ask, not having caught his name and for some reason his name tag is turned over.

The guy could have been on a break?

He tries to think logically, wondering if maybe he really was being too paranoid like Steve said.

The man blinks and looks down, turning the name tag towards Billy.

Kirkman.

"Alright, Mr. K. This has been nice but I gotta go." Billy says, walking past him.

"Of course, I'll make sure Mr. Harrington is alright." He calls out as he disappears through the door.

Billy's too preoccupied with his own panicked thoughts to even question how the man could have known Steve was the one in the room when he hadn't even said his name.

It's a day after the events of Steve passing out and his little pow-wow with the resident power couple.

Another shitty day at school and he learns through the grapevine that Harrington hadn't shown.

An ugly feeling curls up inside of his stomach that's closely akin to worry but also equal parts dread.

He hadn't figured out what he wanted to say or how he wanted to approach Steve. If anything, he'd ignored it and hoped it would go away.

Logically, he knew it was too good to be true so when he gets home from school and opens his front door to see Steve in his house, sitting at his dining room table finishing a sandwich he'd clearly made for himself, Billy is as far from shocked as he can be.

Slightly.

He takes a deep breath and drops his things in the living room and goes to stand at the archway leading into the dining room. He leans against it to cross his arms over his chest, looking at Steve.

"Where's Max?" He asks, knowing she should be here too.

"I took her and the kids to the arcade. She let me know that your parents will be gone all day too so you and I can have some alone time." Steve says after finishing the last bite of his sandwich to lean back in his chair to stare up at Billy.

Fuck me.
Billy thinks because the look in Steve's eyes has changed.

He knows.

He remembers.

He'll be damned if he lets Steve fucking Harrington intimidate him though.

"Finally propositioning me, how forward. It's about time." He says with a smirk on his face with as much fake bravado as he can muster.

Steve gets a new look in his eyes and gets up out of the chair.

It looks a lot like fury.

"Hardly." He says and it's all grit and anger as he strides across the room.

Billy rights himself to take a step back and before he knows it Steve stops in front of him and lays one on him, right into the left side of his face.

He almost loses his footing.

It's not a hard punch by any means, nothing like the ones they've given each other before but it still causes his tooth to cut into his bottom lip and he can taste blood.

He wipes at it with his tongue slowly, locking eyes with him.

"You should get that look in your eyes more often pretty boy, it looks good on you." He rasps out.

Steve merely glares at him in response and it causes Billy to smirk.

Always playing so hard to get.

Although these days it was starting to feel a lot like the opposite.

He waits for Steve to lay another one on him except it never comes.

"Shut the fuck up, Billy. I know you made me lose my memories." Steve spits out at him.

Billy blinks stupidly.

He's usually pretty quick on the uptake but the wheels in his brain turn uncharacteristically slow as he tries to catch up.

"Wait, hold up, rewind. What did you just say?" He asks as he licks at his bottom lip again.

"The reason I couldn't remember, it was you!" He yells out, pushing his finger at Billy's chest.

He knocks his hand away and honestly he's never been more confused in his life than he is right now.

Steve apparently picks up on this because he rolls his eyes.
"You told El to take me, to go." He says, walking them both back through it as if it wasn't a big deal to just relive the experience that had single-handedly uprooted their entire lives.

"Yeah okay, go on."

"I wasn't going to leave your side so you put up a wall inside of my head and it fucked me up Billy! It made me forget, jumbled everything around!" He yells and this time he pushes at Billy's chest with both hands.

The shock distracts him as he almost falls flat on his ass but still manages to catch himself.

There's a reputation to uphold here and he'll be damned if he lets Harrington catch him completely off guard.

It's also kind of cute to see him get this hot and bothered though.

"I don't remember it like that. I don't remember doing that at all, I swear." He pleads, holding up his hands in surrender because he seriously has no idea what the fuck was going on.

Steve just looks at him for a while and huffs out a sigh, running a hand through his hair before crossing his arms again.

"I actually believe you. I actually believe that you somehow unknowingly put a wall up inside of my head." He says and Billy isn't sure if he's being serious or sarcastic.

"I just remember wanting you to be safe, no matter the cost." He blurts out like an idiot because seeing Steve like this was turning his brain into a worthless pile of goo and it hits him right then as he breathes out a long winded 'oh.'

Well shit.

He had done it.

Well, he must have at least. There's no recollection of it but its not like they've got a guide book on this shit.

Billy goes to open his mouth, unsure of what he's going to say next so he ends up just gaping at him.

One moment Steve is staring at him with a look on his face Billy doesn't recognize and the next he's grabbing him by his jacket with both hands and pulling him in for a crushing kiss.

It's all teeth, pressure, anger, frustration and the angle is a bit off.

Billy's brain goes blank because this was the last thing he'd expected yet it's also exactly what he'd expected under the conditions that Steve finally remembered everything.

How had it come to this?

Why had it been Harrington as the one to initiate this first and not him?

Your game is getting bad, Hargrove.

He thinks to himself and it's like a dam breaking as he lets out the most pathetic whimper he's ever
made in his life.

All of those emotions, feelings, the memories, connecting to Steve yet never being able to touch him in the way he needs.

The frustration of it all had been filling him to the brim until he could feel it tearing him apart from the inside out. It's like he'd been holding so much of himself back and hadn't even noticed the full extent of the damage it had been doing to the both of them.

Steve eventually pulls away, unsure, like he's getting ready to bolt or maybe he didn't think before acting like usual.

It was starting to become one of Billy's favorite things about him.

Oh hell no, you're not going anywhere.

He thinks with a growl as he pulls him back in, fixing the angle and it's fucking perfection.

He backs them up and Steve's back hits the wall as Billy grabs him by the nape of his neck, deepening the kiss which causes Steve to groan into his mouth and it's an intoxicating sound, everything about him was intoxicating and it drives Billy on, makes him crave more, makes him want to pull more noises out of him.

So, he does.

Billy takes control, makes it his mission in life to reduce Steve into an absolute fucking mess. He succeeds pretty well as the grip Steve has on his jacket gets weak, like he doesn't know what to do with his hands yet still lets out the most amazing moans and groans Billy has ever heard.

And he's heard a lot of them.

Unfortunately they need to breathe and Steve pulls away whispering out a breathless "fuck" as his head bangs against the wall behind him, exposing his neck and Billy takes advantage, biting gently at his earlobe before letting his hot breath fan over it.

"The things I wanna do to you." He groans out, voice husky.

Steve makes a desperate sound in the back of his throat and his knees buckle as he uses Billy to keep himself upright.

Billy smirks, pulling him back up into bruising kisses and the cut inside of his lip opens again. They can both taste his blood and if anything it just eggs Billy on, adds an extra dimension to it as he maneuvers Steve over to the couch and pushes him down onto it.

Steve reaches up and moves his fingers through Billy's hair, grabbing onto it gently at first until suddenly he pulls hard, causing Billy to groan into the crook of his neck as he moves down to mouth at the skin on Steve's shoulder, biting down hard enough to leave a bruising mark.

Steve gasps and shakes underneath him and it's so fucking beautiful that Billy has to take a moment to ground himself because the fact that he likes a little pain was almost enough to make him fucking lose it.

"I knew you were just being an asshole." Steve says breathlessly while Billy is busy going to town
on his neck again.

He goes still and grunts, pulling back to look down at him intently.

God, they both must look like a sight.

"You wanna hold hands and talk about it or can I get my mouth back on you?" He asks, brow raised as he grinds down on him.

"I-" Steve breathes in through his nose as he lets out a chuckle that makes Billy want to lick into his mouth again. "You drive a hard bargain, Hargrove."

"Your choice Harrington, we can stop at any time."

Steve looks up at him like he's searching for something and he must find what he's looking for because he shakes his head and pulls him back in.

Thank god because Billy was not in the mood to do anything other than just touch him, feel hot skin under his fingertips, take in his scent that was clouding up his mind.

Everything about him was quickly becoming his new favorite drug.

Billy reaches down to undo Steve's belt as he takes control of the renewed kiss and gets a hand down his pants, rubbing at him slowly and methodically, wanting to savor it.

Steve throws his arms around Billy's neck, pulling at his hair some more as the desperate, rushed kissing continues like they're parched and finally allowed to drink each other in.

He knows this is new for Steve, that he's never been with a guy before because he'd had Tommy breathing down his neck all the damn time giving him information about 'King Steve.'

It's overwhelming and Billy basks in the fact that he's the one that's going to be able to introduce him to this, to new things.

If anything he's surprised by Steve's boldness but it also feels like he's known the guy his whole life even if they technically barely knew each other.

It was almost as if he hadn't felt truly alive until Harrington had come along, even before their dimensional escapade.

Apparently Billy also gets to be introduced to new things however because soon after he starts speeding up his ministrations on Steve the connection comes to life.

This time for a different reason than the times prior.

There's a feedback loop of pleasure that builds and builds between them as they become one and Billy can't think much less function properly.

In this moment, this space as he feels himself become them it dawns on him.

This is it.

There would never be anyone else.

His logical side that had been kicked to the curb a long fucking time ago tells him that it's sappy, completely fucking bananas to even think much less feel but there it was.
Steve was it for him.

The sensation of being able to feel someone else's pleasure on top of his own is nearly unbearable and Steve goes wild underneath him, getting increasingly louder.

"Oh god, Billy no, please. It's too much." He cries out, pushing and pulling at him, not knowing what to do and it just makes him want to ruin Steve even more as he pumps at him faster, getting the angle just right.

They get a true sense of what too much actually feels like as he puts a hand over Steve's mouth and feels when he falls into an earth shattering orgasm, his eyes roll into the back of his head and he arches up off of the couch with a muffled yell.

The feeling of Steve's orgasm is like a punch to the gut, like it's being torn out of him and Billy comes completely untouched as he bites down into Steve's collarbone to keep himself grounded at least a little bit, to keep them both from losing their minds as Billy's orgasm rips through Steve and a new round of shaking begins for the both of them.

There's a sense of serenity within them as Billy shifts, getting himself fully on top of Steve, holding his face in his hands as he puts their lips together through the storm of emotions flowing between them.

For the longest time they simply breathe into each other's mouths, sharing the same air as they hold tight.

Steve's hand digs into his wrist, knuckles white as he runs the other one through his hair and he's really starting to think that Harrington might have a kink for it.

Not that Billy blames him, he takes quite a bit of pride in it.

He isn't sure how long they're suspended in an afterglow unlike anything he's ever experienced.

All he'd done was give the guy a fucking handjob.

Steve starts moving his fingers up and down his arm gently, touch featherlight as Billy shivers, resting their foreheads together as he opens his eyes.

Steve's eyes are still closed but it's almost as if he can sense it as his own open a few seconds later.

They simply stare at each other for a long time and Billy has a second realization.

He was never going to be able to get Steve out of his system.

Truly, it felt like he'd been injected with a drug that was causing him to need more.

More of Steve.

"Holy shit." they both say in unison and it causes them to divulge into a fit of hysterical laughter together.

He thinks they may have broken each other.

Or maybe they were piecing each other back together again, Billy wasn't totally sure yet.

"Okay, okay, come on. This is great but you're crushing me." Steve finally says, wiping at the tears.
in the corners of his eyes and then swatting at his back playfully.

Billy snorts and gets off of him, helping him up.

Steve wobbles a bit and it causes Billy to smirk, which makes Steve give him an eye roll as he buckles himself back up and looks down at Billy.

"You-

"Oh trust me, I did." He says with a snort, knowing where he'd been about to go with that.

Cute little Harrington wanted to return the favor.

Billy had never come untouched before and it had been the most mind blowing orgasm.

*Orgasms?*

He'd ever had in his life and again all he'd done was give a quick handjob like some cheap whore at a bar.

*Wow.*

Usually he's got more to say but it's all he can think of as he watches Steve try to situate himself and look at Billy in a way he isn't familiar with.

"I've gotta go pick up the kids." Steve says and Billy doesn't understand what he means at first through his post-haze bliss until he *does.*

Oh, *Max.*

The arcade.

*Right.*

He nods and before he can put his hands in his pockets Steve walks up to him, kissing him again.

This time it's gentler, slower as if Steve is trying to get a point across and Billy's feeling way too great to care.

When they both pull back they rest their foreheads against each other again. Steve puts his hand on the back of Billy's neck as they close their eyes and just *feel.*

Billy's never been more content in his life and it scares the shit out of him.

"Hey, you're freaking out. It's okay." Steve whispers softly.

Billy makes an affronted noise and opens his eyes to pull back slightly.

*How?*

"What? Am not."
"It's okay Billy, we'll figure it out." He states so firmly and with so much conviction that Billy can't help but believe him.

This isn't the first time he'd heard him say those words. His heartbeat quickens without his permission and he feels ready to climb out of his own skin.

"Yeah, alright." He says, clearing his throat and pulling away.

"This doesn't mean I forgive you but I do think I should still thank you for wanting to save me so badly." Steve says, tone uncertain.

"I already told you, I didn't know and also fuck off, I don't need you to say that shit to me." Billy says with a sigh as he makes a face like he just stepped in something bad.

"You've really gotta learn to take gratitude and it doesn't matter, off limits. You can't fuck with my memories anymore Billy, let's make that rule one." He says with a glare as he holds up his index finger.

Billy rolls his eyes and eventually nods.

"So, now we have rules." He says, chuckling.

"We'll probably need them, neither one of us fully knows how this 'thing' works." He says while making air quotes.

Billy just wants to get those fingers into his mouth and-

"Yeah alright, you've got me there." Billy admits, trying to kill his own train of thought.

Steve must see the darkened lust filled look in his eyes that he apparently can't hide because he scratches at the back of his neck, laughing nervously while backing away.

"Slow down, cowboy, I've gotta go."

Billy smirks at him and shrugs his shoulders.

"Alright, I'll meet you at your place, tomorrow night."

Steve flushes like Billy somehow hadn't just had his hand down the guy's pants and gets flustered.

It would be fucking adorable if it didn't make Billy want to have him right here, right now but he knows he needs to practice a great deal of patience and takes a deep, controlled breath.

"Tomorrow night, your place." Billy says again, leveling him with a look.

There was no way he could stay away now and he couldn't even remember why he'd been fighting against it in the first place.

"Yeah, okay." Steve says with a nod, looking embarrassed as he heads out the door.

Billy has a third and final realization that day yet it doesn't deter him like he thinks it should.

*I'm outta my depth.*
Here's the thing about two people who have a stupid amount of sexual chemistry.

It is *SO* hard to keep them from jumping each other's bones and I've put it off for as long as I possibly can but there's a point in which I have to say "Yeah ok, he'd totally just jump him at this point"

I've know for a long time that when Steve finally remembered everything their dynamic would have no choice but to change when I implemented the soul bond aspect.

I actually had them kiss in the early draft of the chapter with the bed scene in Steve's house (I forget which chapter that is at this point tbh)

1. I was drunk.
2. It didn't feel right.
3. I felt like it wasn't fair with Steve's memories still so fucked up and not remembering, it didn't seem like it would be very in character right after his really sobering conversation with Nancy, breaking down, and everything else that had been going on his life.

So, here we are. :)

Chapter End Notes
Max thinks she might be in the twilight zone or something because when Steve brings her back home from the arcade Billy is acting downright nice.

Usually they bicker or he gets in her face about something stupid but instead he just waves hello and goes on about his day with a small smile on his face.

Max tries to remember the last time she’d seen a genuine smile on it, she'd just always assumed those kinds of muscles just didn't exist, like a birth defect.

It's super creepy.

When Steve had asked if her mom and Neil would be home anytime soon she'd been expecting to come home to the aftermath of a natural disaster.

Now she owes Mike that dollar from the bet they made at the arcade earlier. At least he can win at something.

"You didn't see them when we were at the grocery store or when we went to see El." Mike says while playing an intense game of PacMan as they all crowd around him.

"Nobody cares Mike, focus. She's the enemy right now and she's just trying to distract you because she's scared you'll beat her score!" Lucas says.

They'd been trying to beat Max's top score on the machine for a month now and it turns out Mike is their best chance to do it.

It's cute really.

"So what?" Max asks, rolling her eyes and ignoring Lucas as he throws his hands up in defeat after shooting her a glare.

"I'm just saying I think they'll work it out." Mike says with a shrug.

"I think so too." Will says quietly.

"You haven't even seen Steve lately!" Max says, raising her brow at him.

"Yeah but I saw Billy and he seems...different than before." Will says with a shrug.

"Last I heard they weren't speaking." Max replies, leaning against the machine.
"Sorry Max but I'm with Mike, if Steve is gonna finally confront Billy that probably means they're gonna work it out or whatever." Dustin says, piping in.

"Based on what?"

"I dunno, a feeling."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"Look, my boy Steve might not be able to win in a fight but he gets shit done." Dustin tells her as he points a very serious looking finger at her as she just rolls her eyes and swats it away.

In the next moment Mike loses the game and they all groan as Max gives them a triumphant smile.

Mike turns to her and holds out his hand as she looks at him in confusion.

"I'll bet you a dollar they work it out by the time you get home."

"What?"

"Take it or leave it."

Max looks at him for a few seconds before finally shrugging.

Fuck it, why not?

"Yeah, alright. I'll take that bet."

"So, you work things out with Steve then?" She finally dares to ask when she can't stand the curiosity that was eating away at her anymore, standing next to the couch with a hand on her hip as Billy sits there watching TV with his legs up on the coffee table, lounged out.

Not a care in the world.

She's too curious for her own good and she needs to confirm if she needs to steal a dollar from Billy's wallet or not.

"Is that any of your business?" He retorts and that's the Billy she was far more used to.

"I'm just saying. Technically I helped you guys sort things out so you should probably be thanking me." She says righteously, trying to get him to slip up.

Billy snorts and shrugs. "Yeah okay, thanks Max."

Max falters and almost falls over as she looks at him like he's grown two heads.

"Wait, are you being serious? You worked it out."

Billy just turns his head to look at her, totally deadpan. "Shouldn't you be off doing homework or something?"

"I need a dollar."

New plan.
"What?"

"A dollar, I need a dollar."

"What for?"

"I lost a bet."

"The fuck are you talking about?"

They stare at each other for a minute until she finally sighs. "I made a bet with Mike and I lost, so I need a dollar."

"I'm not giving you a fucking dollar because you made some sort of shit bet." Billy says as he rolls his eyes.

"I said you wouldn't be able to work things out with Steve."

She waits a beat, stepping away to get distance between them in case he tries to lunge for her.

"You little- the fuck?!" He says as he cranes himself on the couch so they're facing each other.

"Give me the dollar Billy."

"I'm not giving you the fucking dollar."

"Fine, I'll ask Steve the next time I see him. He's nice, he'll give me one." She says with a smug smirk on her face.

They both know Steve is an awful liar and doesn't know how to keep his mouth shut.

"I'm going to kill you, Max."

"Maybe I'll call him right now."

"Fuckin' christ you just never stop, do you?"

Billy runs a hand through his hair and shakes his head as he pulls out his wallet to throw a dollar behind him on the floor.

"Fine, fucking take it."

"So you did work it out, thank you for your generous contribution." She says as she grabs it, holding it up in the air to make sure it isn't fake or one of those religious dollars they try to put in tips jars at stores.

You can never know with Billy.

"Contribution to what?" He asks as he goes back to flipping through channels.

"Funding Mike in his endeavour to try and beat my score in PacMan so I can watch him lose and rub it in Lucas's face."

Billy taps his finger on the back of the couch a few times in a gesture that she knows means he wants to say something at the mention of Lucas.

"Quit while you're ahead Billy." She tells him as the tapping stops.
"Just be careful with guys like that." He says, still managing to get his two cents in.

"Whatever Billy. It's a good look on you by the way." She says as she starts walking down the hallway toward her room.

"What is?" He asks, stopping on a boring channel about some hunters trying to track a deer.

He turns the channel again a few seconds later.

"Happiness."

To say Steve was happy would be a gross understatement. Things aren't perfect by any means and they never will be but he feels like progress was finally being made with Billy.

Ever since getting his memories back it was a lot like getting his identity back, being more in tune with himself.

Kissing Billy had been impulsive.

Steve hadn't known what he was getting himself into and the moment Billy confessed just how far he'd been willing to go to protect him all bets were off.

Especially when he'd said it without being under the influence of the connection between them.

*No matter the cost.*

He starts to wonder if this is what being lovesick feels like.

With Nancy-

Actually, there was no comparison and he'd been trying but this wasn't something that he'd ever experienced prior to Billy.

Everything was new territory.

That sense of connection they'd shared with each other couldn't be properly described.

The only thing he could think to equate it to is that feeling you get when you submerge yourself completely underwater, that first minute of no strain as you hold your breath, complete relaxation.

Even more intense was the sense of a fact being stated.

The sky is blue, grass is green, water is wet, Billy and Steve.

Maybe he should feel worried but for some reason he doesn't.

*It feels right.*

The orgasms were a nice touch and now that Steve knew what he was looking for he thinks he's figured out at least *something* in regards to their connection.

They'd both been fighting it.

Billy due to his insecurities and Steve due to simply not having all of the information readily
available or completely distorted in his mind.

It had caused a sickness inside of them much like a slow moving, corrosive acid that had been eating away from the inside out.

Billy probably hadn't noticed.

It was pretty clear that he's held that same kind of darkness inside of him for a very long time.

It probably felt normal to him.

Regardless, Steve felt it and allowed it to take hold of him, let it consume him, eat away at him, let him become irritable, introverted.

Until he remembered.

He doesn't blame Billy, not really.

He'd done all of it unknowingly, it was merely in his nature. A coping mechanism through years of conditioning to have that separation, that piece inside of him that was just absolute chaos and destruction to pull at whenever Billy wanted to just lose himself to it.

He remembers when they were in the upside down and Billy had given into his rage and tortured the monster.

*The creature thrashes around even harder, the crowbar dislodges and clatters to the ground, the creature falls sideways and into the desk, destroying it completely.*

*The sounds it starts making cuts through Steve's soul, like its crying.*

There were also flashes of memories every now and again and he wonders if Billy deals with it too.

It isn't anything he can fully remember because it would happen too fast but if he thinks hard enough he knows it happened.

Like when you know you dreamed but you can't remember what the dream was about.

It would most likely be a dangerous path to walk inside of Billy's memories if his gut feeling was any indication.

So, he chooses not to.

It would be a complete invasion of personal space.

He knows logically that he could use Billy fucking with his mind as leverage to negotiate but Steve can't bring himself to be that kind of person and he already knows exactly how a conversation like that would go.

Not well.

It's just all so strange, remembering, having the wall down like he'd been asleep this whole time and now that he's awake he just knows certain things.

He can see more clearly in so many different ways and feels completely self-aware in a way he's never felt before.
Steve had felt the empty void begin to close and old jagged wounds starting healing as Billy had overcome his own darkness if only for a moment as they brought each other to completion.

But it's still there.

Steve can just barely feel it like a thread reaching down into a part of Billy he had felt for a moment back when the connection first took.

The darkness that the Mind Flayer had reconnected itself to, the part of Billy it had used to influence him.

The thought of that time makes his blood boil.

Steve's alone in the library at school when he closes his eyes and feels for that thread out of sheer curiosity.

*I shouldn't.*

Curiosity wins out in the end.

It feels like an eternity has gone by and he almost gives up until finally he feels it, brushes against it for a moment.

If he can just grab onto it, pull himself inside he'll be able to see-

Steve jolts awake as Nancy slams her books onto the desk.

"Jesus Nance, warn a guy." He says, holding a hand up to his heart.

"Steve, we've been worried sick." She hisses in a whisper as she sits down across from him and Jonathan follows behind soon after.

"Oh, right. I was supposed to meet you guys here yesterday." He says, mouthing a 'sorry' as he cringes physically.

"You pretty much just bolted. What happened?" Jonathan asks and if Steve didn't know any better he'd say he actually looked concerned.

"I needed time to think, I had to talk to Billy." He says truthfully since there's really no point in lying.

"I knew it, I knew he was lying." Jonathan says, slamming a hand down on the table as the people around them turn to glare.

"Lying about what?" Steve asks when people finally stop looking at them again after they look around sheepishly.

When he'd woken up in the office he assured them that he was fine after they told him Billy had just been there. He told them not to worry while getting out of there as quickly as possible.

He tried to catch up to Billy but he'd already left by then.

A large part of him assumed it was because he didn't want to confront the idea of Steve remembering everything.

For some reason he'd a feeling that Billy knew and at first Steve had been pissed, assuming the
memory wipe had been on purpose.

Now he sees that Billy was simply afraid and he can't really blame him for it.

Steve gets it.

Also, he'd almost knocked the school nurse over in his rush, causing him to apologize profusely to the poor guy before quickly taking off.

The whole thing had been one huge mess.

"Jonathan called him out and said he knew what was happening to you but Billy just denied it. He left as soon as he could without a glance." Nancy says in exasperation.

"He got in Nancy's face, started bringing up when she'd cried at your bedside at Hawkins Lab." Jonathan says.

"Well, I got in his face first." She says with a shrug.

"That's no excuse." Jonathan says pointedly.

Now that Steve remembers he can pinpoint the moment they’re talking about clear as day.

He remembers feeling Billy start to lose his mind as they burned the virus out of him and Billy retreated into Steve's side of their connection.

At the time he had no clue, his memory had been wiped so he wasn't able to notice that Billy had started to see through his eyes.

He'd seen Nancy.

Steve grimaces internally, wondering if he’s somehow inadvertently caused Billy to feel insecure about Nancy.

He loves Nancy, he always will but he knows when to let something die and his talk with Nancy in the Byers backyard had done exactly that.

He'd allowed himself to mourn and sure, it was still a sensitive spot but his past with Nancy was exactly that.

The past.

Of course it still makes him wonder when that particular subject will suddenly start to rear its ugly head and Billy tries to throw it in his face because it's Billy.

Probably very soon.

He knows he'll need to have a conversation with the guy because starting fights with Nancy?

That's a no-go zone, cannot ever happen and it's not going to be pretty.

He'll have to put his foot down and Steve's probably going to get his ass kicked.
Nothing he wasn't used to already.

There’s also the question of how to bring it up, there was still too much for them to talk about and discuss. Steve isn't sure if Billy will actually listen to anything he has to say, doesn't know for sure if their heated session was just a fluke.

A large part of him assumes the rug will get pulled on him and they’ll be back to where they were before.

Billy could be unpredictable at times.

"That nurse was strange." Nancy suddenly says, pulling Steve from his thoughts.

"The one I almost ran over on my way out?" Steve asks, wondering where she's going with this.

"Yeah, he's new. I've only seen him a couple of times."

"Okay, how does that make him strange?" Steve asks, snorting.

"I don't know, there's just something about him." She says with a shrug.

When Steve's about to open his car door after school he nearly has a heart attack when Dustin almost crashes his bike right into the side of it, skidding to a stop.

"Dustin?" Steve asks, looking at the kid who looks like he's been running from something.

Immediately he feels himself get tense, bracing himself for the worst.

"Steve, my man, I need your help. Can I put my bike in your trunk and ride with you?" He asks breathlessly as he gets off of said bike and starts hauling it over to the trunk as if Steve has already said yes.

"Whoa, whoa, hold on what's going on?" He asks, getting in front of him.

"I may have pissed Max off and I need a getaway. We don't have time Steve, this is a crisis, let’s go!" He starts yelling as he moves the bike towards him and Steve steps out of the way and throws his arms up.

"Fine, okay, let me pop the trunk." He says with an eyeroll.

"Good, okay. Let’s hurry up now, we can't put this perfect face at risk." He says while peeking his head over to watch Steve.

"Will you just shut up and get in the car?" Steve says after pulling the lever for his trunk as they both hear the popping sound of it opening.

"Right of course!" He says while loading his bike inside and getting into the passenger's seat as quickly as he can.

After they get inside and start driving, Steve turns to glance at the kid and Dustin is staring ahead, looking like he's up to no good.
"Okay, what happened?" Steve finally asks.

"I lied, Lucas and Max are fighting." He admits sheepishly.

"Okay, what does that have to do with you?" Steve asks, suddenly confused.

"Steve, seriously?" Dustin says like he should apparently know the answer to that.

Steve just shrugs his shoulders and looks at him in a 'are you going to explain?' sort of way.

"Max is part of the party now so if she's upset, we're all upset but Steve, here's the thing," Dustin says, pointing to him and pausing for dramatic effect and Steve is trying to remember why he hangs out with these kids again.

"If Lucas is also upset that means I'm twice as affected. They're coming at me from both sides man, it's a double whammy!" He exclaims like the world is ending or something.

"Take the next right." Dustin says suddenly, interrupting himself and for some reason Steve obliges because he's distracted and stupid.

"Yeah okay, I think I'm starting to understand."

It's like if Nancy and Jonathan got in a fight, he'd be smack dab in the middle of it.

"Exactly, so I have to fix it." Dustin says nodding to himself.

"Fix it how?" Steve asks, wondering what this has to do with him.

"I need to go into the lion's den, take another right up here." He says darkly and it's contrasting as he gives directions.

"Wait where are you having me go?" Steve asks suspiciously as he starts to take in his surroundings.

When they get to the next stop sign he slams on his brakes and puts the car into park and turns to Dustin.

"Why the hell are we going towards Billy's house?!" He yells, pointing up towards said house that's just over the hill in front of them.

"Here's the thing Steve, you gotta take drastic measures to protect the ones you love, you should know that better than anyone." Dustin says and Steve is about ready to throw this kid out of the car.

"Whaaaaat are you even talking about right now?" Steve asks rubbing a hand over his face.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend. I've gotta help Lucas make things right and he'd never let me do this so I've gotta take it upon myself to make the hard decisions." Dustin continues and Steve really doesn't like where this is going.

"That- no stop, that barely makes any sense dude-"

"If I can get into the mind of Max I'll know how to help Lucas make her happy again. I have to go to the only place I'd be able to look inside of a girls mind without having to actually like-" He makes a
gesture with his hands to his head, "get inside of her mind.

Steve just stares at him for a long time until finally he turns back to look at the road and pinches the bridge of his nose.

"Yeah, I'm turning this car around." He says as he goes to put his hand on the knob of his shift to put it back into drive.

Dustin moves quickly, hitting Steve's hand away and-

_How the hell does he move so fast?

Takes the keys out of the ignition, gets out of the car and throws them as far as he can.

"What the fuck?!" Steve yells out as he gets out of the car, runs to the passenger's side and starts running towards his keys before turning around to face Dustin, who had taken the opportunity to run around the other way to the driver's side as he goes to pop the trunk.

_That little shit. That's why he watched me pop the trunk, motherfucker-

"You fucking shith@d!!" Steve yells as he starts to run back to his car and Dustin goes for his bike.

"Steve, you've done well. I'm sorry I had to play you like this, I'll make it up to you I swear!" Dustin yells out as he grabs his bike from the trunk and just as Steve is about to make a grab for him, he turns his body, rights himself and gets on the bike to haul ass down the road towards the Hargrove house.

"Son of a bitch!" Steve yells out as he puts his hands on his head in exasperation looking from the direction of his keys to Dustin's retreating form.

Billy was going to fucking _kill_ them.

No, scratch that.

Billy was going to kill _Dustin_ and Steve couldn't let that happen so he'd have to get in the middle of it and then Billy was going to kill _him_.

He moves quickly as he goes to find his keys and swears to fucking god he's going to _murder_ Dustin himself when this is over. It takes much longer to do than he'd have liked but finally he finds them and runs back to his car and drives for dear life.

The relief he feels to see that Billy's car is still gone is so substantial he wonders if he's ever felt anything like it.

And he's been to the upside down.

He parks his car out of sight so that if Billy _does_ show up they might be able to make a getaway. As he runs to approach the house he doesn't see the bike so he starts walking around it and as he turns the corner of one side of the building he finally sees it next to an open window and curses under his breath as he makes his way to it to climb through.

When he pokes his head up he sees Dustin in the middle of the room looking at Max's things and the
"Kid turns around and squeals like a little girl."

"Steve, brochacho, my main dude, my pal. We're here now so why don't we just take this nice and slow and take a look around?" Dustin says as he puts his hands up and backs away slowly like he's dealing with a wild animal.

"Dustin you can't just break into someone's house. What is it with you people and breaking into people's houses through their windows!?" Steve cries out as he pulls himself through and falls gracelessly to the floor almost face first and groans out in pain.

"See, it sounds like you've got some pent up frustration here buddy. Why don't we talk about it and maybe your good friend Dustin can help you figure things out? Who's been climbing in through your window?" He asks softly as he looks around the room.

"I'm going to kill you, Henderson." Steve says as he turns onto his back and starts to lift himself up.

"Now that's just drastic and rude, I can't believe you would say that to your friend." Dustin says as he's now looking through papers on her desk while still keeping an eye on Steve.

"Drastic and rude is breaking into a little girls room to go through her things!" Steve yells.

"It's for the greater good Steve!" Dustin cries out.

"No it's not!" Steve yells as he goes to make a grab for Dustin and he ducks down, runs past Steve and climbs over Max's bed to get away. Steve is lucky he's got long legs because he gets to him, tugs on his shirt and picks the kid up.

He's about ready to throw him out through the window when the doorknob to the room turns and they both freeze in place.

Billy walks in-

How the fuck had they not heard him get home?

They all just stand there frozen, staring at one another for a really long and uncomfortable amount of time.

Whatever Billy had been expecting to see this was clearly not it because the look on his face would be hilarious under different circumstances if he wasn't probably about to kill them.

He settles on looking at Dustin with what Steve is pretty sure is close to killing intent and his blood runs cold as Max pushes her way through.

"What the hell!" She yells out and Steve drops Dustin as he falls to the ground flat on his ass and just stays there looking up at Max who looks like she's going to kill him before Billy can.

Basically everyone was going to kill each other and it's all because Steve got outsmarted by a child.

Again.

Except this time it was only one of them.
"I know what this looks like." Steve says and then he realizes he doesn't actually know how this must look so he closes his mouth.

"What the fuck are you people doing in Max's room?" Billy says murderously, still looking at Dustin.

You people. Rude.

Steve thinks to himself absently and he's at a loss for words, doesn't really know how to diffuse a situation like this.

"It's my fault. I tricked Steve into driving close to here, I took his car keys-" Dustin goes to say and Max groans.

"This is about Lucas isn't it?" She hisses.

"You let a kid get your car keys?" Billy asks, ignoring Dustin to look at Steve and he can only scratch the back of his head in response while averting his eyes.

"What? No, of course not!" Dustin cries out in response to Max, looking to Steve for some help that he is really not willing to give.

"You're a liar. I can't believe you!" Max says as she stalks towards Dustin like she's about to punch him in the face and Dustin apparently assumes the same thing as he cowers, strategically hiding away from her and curling into a ball on the floor.

Max stops right in front of him and rolls her eyes, holding her hand out to help him up and finally when Dustin peeks out over his arm he pauses, probably thinking she's faking him out until he tentatively reaches his hand out to grab hers as she helps him up.

"Let's get something straight, Henderson." Billy suddenly says, piping up and Dustin looks about ready to shit himself.

"If you ever show up to my house uninvited again I'm going to fucking kill you. We clear?" Billy says with his hand still on the doorknob.

Dustin nods his head rapidly in understanding and looks ready to get behind Steve in case he needs to use him as a human meat shield.

"And you," Billy says even more viciously, pointing to Max who turns around to look at him. "What have I told you about Sinclair?"

Max and Steve groan in unison and it just causes Billy to look even more pissed off as he casts a look to Steve that says 'shut the fuck up' more than anything.

"Can't you just drop it Billy?" Steve says, finally interjecting.

"I'm really not in the mood to hear you speak right now, Harrington. Stay the fuck out of it." Billy spits out.

"Look, they're just kids man, let them be kids." Steve says in exasperation and he absently notices that both Max and Dustin are slowly backing themselves up to the open window.
Billy laughs out boisterously loud. "Yeah, well that kid broke into her room and you let him." he says pointing from Dustin, to Max and then to Steve.

"Look, that's totally beside the point, I didn't know he'd make a grab for my keys!" Steve exclaims and he just now starts to realize he doesn't have a good excuse.

He'd been played.

Little shit.

Billy pinches the bridge of his nose and looks to Max and Dustin.

"Get out." He says darkly and the way he says it sends a chill through Steve and apparently the kids as well as they both go stock still, casting a glance at Steve like they're getting ready to prepare for his funeral. Max makes a quick move to grab her skateboard as they wordlessly leave, climbing over each other to get out through the window.

"It was nice knowing you buddy, thanks for taking one for the team!" Dustin calls out as they jump through, closing the window behind them before taking off.

Billy just sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose again like everyone he's ever known is an idiot and in this case, Steve kind of understands where he's coming from. "They could have left through the front fucking door."

"Okay so, here's what happened-" Steve goes to say, putting his hands up and Billy looks up at him with a raised brow.

"You just couldn't stay away, could you?" He interrupts to say as he starts stalking towards Steve and he finally realizes what this must actually look like.

Oh.

Oh.

Billy thinks that he-

Oh, okay, he can work with that.

"Yeah you know me, just can't stay away." Steve says nervously, cursing himself for being the absolute worst liar in existence and Billy stops and just gives him a look.

"You're serious? He actually jacked your keys." Billy says like he's finally realizing Steve really is that stupid and starts breaking out into fits of laughter.

"You- you, I can't believe it- you actually, and- oh man-" Billy says unintelligibly through his fit and Steve just crosses his arms over his chest.

"Yeah, yeah laugh it up, get it all out."

Billy listens to him for once in his life and grips the doorknob again and just keeps laughing until eventually Steve just pushes past him.
He goes into the living room and Billy follows him out.

Suddenly, they hear a car pull up into the driveway and Steve wonders who it could be until he realizes ‘oh yeah, parents.’

"Fuck." Billy suddenly says and he goes pale in a way that makes Steve's heart clench as he shoots him a look of concern and confusion.

"Don't say a fucking word. Let me do the talking." Billy says as he picks up the remote and turns on the TV and Steve feels a pit settle inside of his stomach.

It's Billy's dad.

He's never met the man, doesn't even know what he looks like. It'll be his first time finally seeing him and Steve is really not looking forward to it.

"Go grab three beers." Billy tells him and Steve just raises a brow at him.

"The old man doesn't give a shit, just do it." He says, waving him off nonchalantly.

Steve obliges and goes to the fridge and when he comes back out to the living room he throws the first one to Billy who catches it easily and places the second one down next to him on the side table and goes back around the couch to sit down.

Before he's about to sit Billy's dad walks through the front door with what looks like Max's mom in tow and the adults catch sight of them pretty quickly.

Billy's dad just stares at them for a while Billy as just looks at the TV and waves a hand in hello.

Susan smiles at Steve and goes to move toward him with her hand outstretched. “Oh hello. Are you one of Billy's friends?” She asks.

"Yeah, I'm Steve." He says and he likes her already. She seems nice.

"Susan, I'm Max's mom. This is Neil, Billy's father." She says, gesturing toward the older man.

Steve moves past her and holds out his hand. He's not sure why but he feels nervous, as if he needs to somehow impress the man.

Although if the apple didn't fall far from the tree he supposes that will probably never be possible.

Neil grabs it firmly and just stares at Steve and the pit in his stomach grows as if the man is dissecting him.

The older man looks down at Billy and then at the unopened beer next to Billy and then back to Billy again before landing back at Steve.

"It's nice to meet you, Steve." He says and he lets go of Steve's hand to grab the unopened beer to crack it open before looking at Billy again.

"Billy, where's Max?" He asks between drinks from the can.
"She just left with one of her friends." Billy says, turning his head up to look at Neil.

"You didn't drive her to where she needed to go?" He asks and it sounds threatening.

"Her friend has a bike and she has her skateboard. They didn't seem to want either one of us to drive them anywhere." Billy says with a shrug, turning back to look at the TV.

Steve finally opens his beer and takes a big gulp from it, watching the interaction and wanting nothing more than to let the floor swallow him whole.

"I see. Steve do you need to be driven home later?" Neil asks as he looks at Steve's beer.

"Oh, no. I have my car and I just opened this first one." He says, gesturing to it in his hand.

Neil just stares at him for a moment and the look on his face changes, the kind that makes the temperature drop a few degrees.

"I didn't see your car when we drove up."

"Yeah, I parked it a little further away." Steve says, not really catching his drift.

Why the hell did that matter?

He catches sight of the side of Billy's face in his peripheral and sees him close his eyes and huffs out a silent sigh.

"I see. Well, if you're sure you'll be okay to drive home. I don't mean to kick you out so soon but I need to speak with my family privately, if you don't mind." Neil says and Steve's jaw clenches.

"Yeah of course, no problem. I'll see you at school Billy." He says and Billy just waves him off.

When Steve gets into his car his hands are shaking and it takes him a long time before he finally drives off.

"Why was his car parked away from the house?" Neil asks after Susan closes the door, casting a worried look in their direction before going into the kitchen to start dinner.

Staying out of it as usual.

Not that Billy blames her, he'd much rather get the brunt of it than see her have to suffer his bullshit.

"I don't know dad, maybe he didn't want to block the driveway. I didn't even know he parked further away." Billy says with a shrug as he turns the TV off and gets up to face his father.

He actually hadn't known Steve parked further away, hadn't thought about it and now there was really no bullshitting his dad.

Neil just stares at him and Billy is pretty fucking sure he's about to get hit because his dad isn't buying it.

Probably hadn't bought it from the moment he walked through the door.
Asshole.

Billy isn't sure what Neil is looking for at this point so he starts to walk towards his room until his way gets blocked by the man as he continues to just stare.

"If I catch wind of anything Billy, you know what's going to happen, right?" He asks quietly, menacingly and Billy averts his gaze, stares at the shabby carpet hoping to burn a hole into it with his eyes as all of his muscles tense, waiting for that first hit.

"Yes, I know." He says back and he feels pathetic.

He'd survived the upside down for fucks sake and still, one look from this man put a fear into him like no other.

He hated himself for it.

"What is it that you know?" Neil asks like a parasite, latching onto that fear to suck the life out of him.

"I know what will happen." He whispers.

"Say again?" He says, cupping his hand over his ear.

"I know what will happen, sir." Billy says with conviction to placate the piece of shit.

"Good. I don't wanna see that boy in my house again. Are we clear?" He says, still not moving out of Billy's space.

"We're clear, sir." Billy assures him. It was too late now, telling him he had it all wrong would only piss him off more.

It would also be a big fucking lie.

"Good."

Billy doesn't show up through Steve's window that night.

He can't help the feeling of guilt and worry that plague him, make him pace his floor after he gets home, get lost in worst case scenarios for-

I don't even want to know how long.

If he'd kept his big mouth shut this wouldn't have happened and he figures Billy will yell at him about it tomorrow or something.

He sees now why Billy doesn't get along with his father very well. It was making him kind of appreciate his own a little bit.

Barely.

Neil is basically just Billy but times that by about a thousand on the aggression scale. He realizes that's kind of an awful thing to think but it's also not entirely untrue.
Steve sighs and lays down on his bed for the hundredth time, feeling restless as he closes his eyes, willing his body to *calm down*, trying to find that sense of peace that only Billy seemed to be able to help him achieve.

*I'm in too deep.*

In for a penny, in for a pound he supposes.

It was like being in a state of constant high alert after he'd left, making him tense and wide awake in a way that told him if he didn't get his shit together he'd be pulling an all-nighter.

An idea pops into his head that he should probably rethink.

If he can just *feel* Billy maybe it'll make him feel better?

He gets up and moves his blanket off the bed to sit comfortably in the middle as he crosses his legs and lays his hands flat to rest on his knees as he closes his eyes to breathe in deeply through his nose and out through his mouth.

There was a certain level of balance that seemed to be needed for him to reach into the connection, as he'd started to learn so far.

He's not sure how long he does this but eventually he reaches out for Billy much like how he had in the library earlier today.

If he brushed against it pretty easily, he should be able to find it again.

It takes a while and he almost gives up a few times and it doesn't help that he can't seem to let go of his concerns.

When he *finally* finds what he's looking for he pulls.

Darkness.

For a moment he almost panics, remembers when he'd been stuck in this place with the Mind Flayer but-

It isn't the same.

It feels like a mockup of that *space* outside of reality, a fake version of it. The darkness is similar but the *feeling* is different.

*Them.*

*Us.*

It isn't singularly Billy or simply just Steve, it was a combination of them both, a place existing *for* them, *because* of them.

He's not sure how or why he knows.

For a moment he worries that maybe the Mind Flayer can reach for them while he's here.

The gate is closed, this *isn't* the Mind Flayers domain.

That's what he keeps telling himself at least.
It can't get through because it had never been able to attach itself to Steve's side of the connection. They were safe from it for now and he can feel it like a pinging in the back of his mind. Far away. Distant. Its looming, hovering, waiting to strike at them if it gets the chance. It had still gotten inside of Billy though, using his darkness against him and it could easily taint their connection yet again if it could find them again. If it could find Billy. Or Will. Steve wonders if it would go that route or choose to infect someone else, spread that corruption elsewhere. It's hard to know, he didn't spend time getting to know it like they did. When he's talked himself through it for long enough and feels calm he starts to walk around for a while but all he finds is more darkness around him. This isn't as exciting as I expected. Steve huffs out a sigh of frustration and tries to think back to before when he had tried to connect to this part of Billy, or rather when he noticed it was there in the first place. It was easier then, he'd been about to die. Or worse. So, that's what he does, he closes his eyes and thinks of it again, feels for it. It doesn't take him long, hits him like a truck because it's stronger than it was earlier today in the library, easier to find, making more of a ruckus. When Steve opens his eyes, he sees it. Billy's darkness. "A beach?" He says out loud, mildly confused. He'd been expecting a manifestation of shadows or maybe some sort of monstrous creature but Billy's darkness inside of him apparently manifested itself as a beach. "Huh, okay." He says to himself as he moves closer to it. Steve likes beaches, doesn't really see a problem with them so to know that Billy apparently doesn't like them at all is a pretty new piece of information. The guy used to live in California, how could he not like the beach? Perhaps it's water?
Maybe he doesn't like water and manifesting as a pool would just look stupid so instead it's a beach. But, he doesn't remember Billy ever saying anything about water, he'd never seemed to have a problem with it.

*How would I know?*

They *don't* actually know very much about each other.

Steve decides to get a closer look but as he gets closer the tide recedes more and more and he can never quite touch the water.

Almost as if its luring him in further or maybe it's trying not to touch him?

When he finally gives up and stops walking forward he notices the water starts to do something strange.

*Well, this was probably a mistake.*

He doesn't get to think about it for much longer as the tide rushes toward him violently from all sides.

"Wait-“ He manages to get out right before it consumes him.

*Oh fuck-*

Generally that sense of submersion makes him feel relaxed but this was *something else.*

When he breaks through and gets his head above water its short lived as a huge wave slams down on top of him to pull him under even further.

It's like drowning but he's drowning inside of *Billy.*

His anger, frustration, insecurities, all of the repressed memories, trauma.

It's bearing down on him and Steve can feel *every single piece* at once as it consumes him.

For a while he merely exists as sensations flowing freely back and forth, much like water itself.

Fluid.

"Please…” He pleads within his own mind, not knowing what to do.

He thinks of himself, other people that know him like Nancy, Jonathan, the kids, earlier today with Dustin.

Getting lost in his own memory seems to help as he finds himself again, holds strong against the emotions flooding his mind.

When he opens his eyes while under the water he startles.

A woman is sleeping peacefully in front of him, mirroring him but her eyes are closed.

*She's beautiful.*

Long blonde curly hair pools out around her all the way down to her lower back, her face is angelic yet worn in a way that makes her seem worldly.
Billy's mother.

He'd never heard Billy mention his real mother, couldn't remember seeing any pictures of her in the house when he'd been there but again he still didn't actually know Billy that well in retrospect.

They didn't exactly sit around telling each other stories and braiding each other's hair.

He reaches out slowly to touch her face because she looks so much like him.

Or rather, he looks like her and when he just barely gets close enough to touch she opens her eyes and grabs his wrist in a bruising grip, her expression furious.

"You did this. You did this to me." He hears inside of his head, angry and vengeful. He tries to pull away but can't, she won't let him.

"I'm dead because of you!" She screams and Steve can feel himself crying not in a physical sense. His soul is crying.

Why was this sort of guilt inside of Billy?

Fear wraps around him, suffocating him as he thrashes violently, trying to pull away.

*Please no, I don't want to feel it anymore.*

Billy hates himself for a lot of shit and Steve knows that if he stays here it will drown him, consume him, he'll be lost inside of it.

"I'm sorry." He hears himself saying and repeating over and over again as he clutches at his face and he doesn't know if he's the one apologizing or if it's Billy.

Maybe it's both of them.

He fights against it and tries to follow his way back to his side of the connection and it's nearly impossible at first until all of a sudden he's reached the shore of the beach again.

Steve breathes, gasping out for air and spitting out water as the waves lick at him calmly instead of being a raging torrent like before.

He shakily stands and turns around but when he does the beach is gone.

Steve jolts awake back in his own bed and notices he's fallen off of it, groaning out in pain.

"What the fuck?" He whispers as he pushes himself back up and grapples himself back on top of it.

That was not what he'd been expecting at all.

Whatever he'd been trying to accomplish, that was definitely not it.

If anything he feels even more like shit because he feels like he just intruded on something he shouldn't have at all.

Steve nearly screams in frustration as he rubs his hands over his face because he can't shake off what he'd just experienced.
It was like that moment after an adrenaline rush when you just feel drained and tired.

All in all, the only conclusion Steve could seem to come to is that the situation with Billy's father, whatever baggage he seems to have festering inside of him can't be ignored.

Billy certainly seems to try.

Steve knows he's the only one that can somehow get Billy to see that and as he eventually gets himself to calm down with that thought in mind another one hits him right before he finally falls into a deep sleep.

*I'm out of my depth.*

Chapter End Notes

The reason I chose a beach as Billy's manifestation of the dark part of him is because of the conversation Max & Lucas had in the show when he asks if she misses the beach and her response was a little strange.

So yeah, that's why it's a beach as well as other spoilery reasons.

*2019 Ceru Log*

LOL I'M STILL SHOOK GUYS THE BEACH IS CANON PFFFFFFFFTTTTT

Lucky guess.

I'm not the only person who assumed a beach would somehow be involved so a lot of praise has been hurled my way but like a lot of us been knew.

There's a sort of poetic grace to it.

I portray the beach as his darkness while the show portrays it as the last moment in his life in which he'd felt truly happy.

IT HURTS SO GOOD.

Y'all don't know how shook I was when his mom makes the comment about rip currents I was like O.O

Some people think that people from the ST team saw my fic or read some of it.

Tbh a lot of it is not even close to what ultimately occurs, their Mind Flayer is much different from mine.

That being said I'm hoping they haven't read this because as I've said in prior comments I'm a little unhappy with certain things in this fic but I also want to try and respect some of the original intentions of it.

I haven't gone too far off the rails yet and if anything there has been more of a shift in tone than anything else.
Welp.

Onto the next!
Guys.

GUYS.

People have made FANART and I am not okay, I am so far from okay I keep staring at them lovingly and it gives me SO MUCH inspiration.

You must all look! *throws them at everyone's faces*

kappkiii - https://kappkiii.tumblr.com/post/167369438781/i-love-broken-pieces-by-ceruleaine-on-ao3-so

ningdom - https://cdn.discordapp.com/attachments/378718612942487552/379080446832672778/fanrat.png

How the hell are they so beautiful?! My brain still cannot even begin to compute.

Also I posted part of the chapter after this on accident for a split second, accidentally deleted chapter 1, then I had to go back and fix everything cause I'm dum so that was fun.

When Steve wakes up the next morning he looks at himself in the mirror, it had started to become a part of his normal daily routine.

Ok well, it had always been but now it wasn't to simply manage his hair or give himself a pep talk.

Now he would look for obvious changes, differences from who he was before and who he is now.

All because he'd pushed Billy into a fridge.

Reflecting back on all of it always made him feel like he was looking back on someone else, not himself.

Obviously he changed, there was a natural progression of it but now it felt like everything was happening too fast all at once and all he can do is hold on tight.

He traces the marks left by Billy with his fingertips gently.
Being with a guy had never really occurred to him before Billy and although he knows how to appreciate a good looking male this was completely new territory.

Yet it felt like it wasn't.

Billy touching him and kissing him had been exhilarating and had taken his breath away, it was everything he never knew he needed.

Everything between them had been charged for so long and he supposes it was bound to explode at some point.

Personally he expected a fight from it, lots of repression and for them both to go their separate ways afterward.

Until he got soul bound to someone that he can honestly say he hadn't known how to get along with.

Seeing into his soul had certainly been telling though, had given plenty of insight.

Steve's not a complete idiot either. He just chose to ignore the nicknames and sexual energy that Billy would give off in the past, writing it off as just a personality quirk or something that people in California do.

Anything Steve had repressed on his side had come to the forefront and instead of fighting it, he chose to just go along with it, see where it would lead him.

They both knew, why try to fight it?

It clearly wasn't doing them any good when they would.

The mark on his collarbone is particularly prominent and he has a small smile on his face when it suddenly hits him

Billy's going to fucking murder me.

He isn't sure why he realizes this now as if Billy hadn't somehow felt Steve all up in his business last night.

There’s not even a small possibility that Billy hadn't felt something pass through the connection as Steve dived right into the waters that were so entirely Billy.

He groans and puts his face in his hands because he's pretty sure today is his last day on earth.

What a fucking hypocrite. You're such a piece of shit Steve, way to fucking go.

He thinks to himself as he eventually recovers from mortification and continues to look at himself in the mirror with a resigned look on his face because things had been going so well. He was making progress with Billy and learning how to relate to him. It was at the pace of falling molasses but it was still progress.

Progress that was probably about to go right out the fucking window because Steve would be dead anyway so fuck progress, right?

A million scenarios start to play out in his head as he tries to find out how Billy's going to do this and he knows that no matter what he thinks up, it will be nothing compared to whatever reality Billy will
have in store for him.

The guy is just too unpredictable.

He tries to think of how much Billy might know. Did he see it all for himself? What had it felt like? Had Steve hurt him in some way, had it caused him pain?

Of course it caused him pain. How could it not, idiot.

Maybe he'd dug into deeply hidden memories that Billy hadn't wanted to have resurfaced and fucked up his mental state.

Perhaps he didn't even know it happened.

That was impossible though, there's no way there hadn't been something.

Steve grips the bathroom counter and feels himself start to freak out but more than anything he worries that he's made things worse for Billy, that he has inadvertently caused some sort of mental harm to him.

By the time he reaches school he doesn't even remember getting there, too caught up in his own thoughts as a feeling of dread settles inside of him like a second skin and it sticks with him throughout the whole day.

He doesn't see Billy at all during school. He's nowhere and Steve starts to actually worry.

Did Neil hurt him? Had he done something?

Halfway through the day he gets desperate and brings up a way to find out if Billy had shown up at all in random conversation and he finds out that he had shown up today.

Which meant he was avoiding Steve.

They would always at least pass by each other in the hallway everyday at some point, but today, not at all.

This hadn't been a scenario Steve thought might happen, that Billy would ignore him, refuse to see him, just walk away from it all completely.

Billy was the most confrontational person he knew. He wouldn't just give up.

Would he?

Maybe he wanted nothing to do with Steve anymore and maybe that's what this was all leading up to. Maybe he was trying to find a way to tell Steve to back off, to figure out how to get the bare minimum out of this thing that was happening between them and go on with their lives.

Separately.

Like nothing had ever happened.

Steve almost wants to cry at the thought of it, feels an ache not just in his chest, but it's all over his body.
He aches everywhere.

I don't want to lose him.

They'd already been through too much. They couldn't just give up now but at the same time there hadn't ever really been anything, had there?

They didn't hang out, they didn't sit around and talk, they didn't act like friends, they were two guys who got into a fight once and it took a turn for the worst.

What if Billy had gotten bored and went back to indulging in other people?

What if he had already been indulging in other people?

Steve has no say in something like that, it's not like he's told Billy that other people are off limits.

They had one quickie at Billy's house and that was it.

Perhaps the way he felt wasn't the same as how Billy felt, maybe he's had it all wrong this whole time.

He wouldn't even dare to say anything about being with other people anyway because he has no right to tell Billy how to spend his free time, especially not after breaking a rule he himself had put into place.

There's a thought he never knew he'd have in his head one day.

Did he alter Billy's memories on accident like Billy had done to him?

No, that can't be it.

He realizes he's going in circles, psyching himself out but what if he wasn't?

What if it wasn't a big deal?

But what if it was?

The whole day passes in a blur and before he knows it he's walking outside towards his car and school is over.

If you asked Steve what he'd done today he wouldn't be able to tell you because he's been on auto-pilot as he obsesses over his predicament with Billy.

He knows he talked to people today but he doesn't remember the specifics. He remembers he talked with Nancy and Jonathan but again, no specifics so it must not have been very important.

He hopes he hasn't made them worried again.

When he turns his head to look up at his car he almost goes stock still because Billy is leaned up against Steve's driver side car door, smoking a cigarette while looking right at him.

Steve slows his steps because he knows after this point on it's probably all downhill from here.

I should have told Dustin he can have my shit when I die.
"Give me your keys." Billy says when Steve finally gets in ear shot and maybe he should put up a little resistance.

*Maybe* he should ask why, maybe he should ignore him, make a sarcastic comment, do anything he'd usually do under normal circumstances but he's been in such a high state of stress all day that his mind is a fucking explosive mess of shit that has been talking itself in circles so he just plucks his keys from his pocket almost immediately and places them in Billy's hand.

Billy gets a strange look on his face for a split second before recovering and throwing his cigarette on the ground and pocketing Steve's keys.

"We're going in my car, come on." Billy says as he puts said cigarette out with the heel of his shoe and turns to walk away.

Steve merely follows him wordlessly.

---

"How did things go with Neil?"

He'd expected Billy to say something once they'd gotten inside of the car. He'd even expected yelling, for Billy to tell him off but there was nothing.

Only silence.

So, he'd broken it himself because at the end of the day even if Billy wanted to call things off Steve was still *concerned* about him, wanted to make sure he's alright at least.

He wishes that Billy would just *say* something though, *wants* to get yelled at because it would be so much better than the worst of Steve's fears that are growing at an increasingly alarming rate as time goes on.

"Better than expected. Congratulations! You've been banned from my house." Billy says with an amused snort that sounds hollow.

"How is that a congratulations?" Steve mumbles, turned away from him as he looks out the window.

"You've been promoted to one of the guys my dad thinks I'm fucking." 

"Oh," is all Steve says as he just blinks.

Technically that wasn't true. They hadn't *actually* fucked and they probably never would now that Steve had gone and royally fucked *everything* up.

He has no idea where they're going and he absently thinks that maybe he was right, maybe Billy really *is* going to kill him and stash his body somewhere.

*I've lived a pretty full life, this isn't so bad.*

He sees Billy glance over at him through the reflection of the window with a strange look on his face again. He starts tapping his finger on the steering wheel and it just serves to make Steve even more nervous.

The fact that Billy still hasn't said anything about the metaphorical elephant in the room is still just
reinforcing the idea in his head that this is it, *this* will be the moment.

Billy's going to call it off, whatever it is between them, he's going to just simply pull away and that will be it.

Steve puts his arms over his chest, slouching in his seat a bit and digging his fingers into his arms.

Billy pulls over suddenly, puts his car into park and almost fully turns in his seat towards Steve.

"Okay seriously, you look like I killed your fucking puppy or something. Can you stop?" Billy says, frustration lacing his voice.

Steve turns to him and ducks his head down. "I'm sorry." He says and it sounds pathetic even to his own ears.

*When'd you become such a pussy, Steve Harrington?*

He thinks to himself before realizing that being self-deprecating probably wasn't going to do either one of them any good.

Billy's jaw clenches and he takes his keys out of the ignition.

"You're not even going to ask me why I took your keys?"

Steve furrows his brow, not really knowing what that has to do with anything.

"Uhm, why did you take my keys?" He asks because apparently that's what Billy wants him to say.

"So you wouldn't try to bolt. I wasn't sure if you'd get defiant with me. I expected you to get defiant like you always do when I fucking rip into you but here you are looking like I've already said something and I haven't even fucking *said* anything yet!" Billy says and through his tangent his voice had started getting increasingly louder.

Steve winces and curls in on himself even more. "I'm sorry."

"Holy *fuck*, get out of the car." Billy says in exasperation.

Steve gets that hopeless feeling in his stomach and just does as he's told before belatedly realizing Billy still has his keys and hopes that maybe he'll throw them out the window to him before driving off.

Or at least that's what Steve had been expecting, for Billy to just drive off at this point and leave him there in the dust.

It's probably what he deserves anyway.

Instead Billy gets out of the car and walks around to the passenger's side to stand in front of Steve.

"Okay this, whatever *this* is right now, knock it the *fuck* off." Billy says, waving his hand between them.

"I- I don't know what you mean." Steve says and he *really* doesn't understand the context because he's assumed all day that Billy is going to pull the rug out from under his feet but from the look on
his face he thinks they haven't even gotten to that point in the conversation yet.

"You're saying sorry. You never say sorry unless you think we're gonna die or you get all hopeless on me." Billy says with a raised brow as he puts one hand in his pocket.

_Huh._

He was right, the last time Steve had said sorry was right before Billy had knocked him out in the upside down.

_Interesting._

He'd never personally noticed.

"I guess." Steve says absently, not really thinking.

"Okay, What's going on in your fucking head right now? Cause I'm at a fuckin’ loss." Billy says, rubbing a hand over his face.

"I don't know- I just." He heaves out a heavy sigh but it only seems to piss Billy off even more and he forgets how impatient the guy can be at times.

"Spit it the _fuck_ out, Harrington!" He all but yells in his face.

For some reason that makes him _angry_ and _upset_ that Billy thinks he can get away with acting like this.

Yeah, Steve fucked up but Billy doesn't need to be such an _asshole_ about it.

"I'm afraid you want to end _this_!" He says much louder than intended, yelling in his face back while making a gesture from himself to the guy in front of him with his hand, running the other one through his hair in a desperate manner.

"Whatever _this_ is." He says in an almost whisper and there's silence on both sides as Billy just stares him down.

"Did I hurt you?" Steve suddenly asks because its been eating away at him and he doesn't want to hear the words yet.

Billy looks like he's just gotten emotional whiplash and lifts his head up, looks towards the sky and closes his eyes and mumbles something Steve can't hear before looking back at him.

"No, you didn't hurt me, I was asleep. It felt like being stuck behind two way glass, I couldn't see anything, all I could do was feel whatever you were feeling."

Steve takes that in.

He's not really sure what that means but he feels one knot unfurl inside of his stomach at knowing he hadn't actually hurt Billy in the ways he'd been dreading.

_Thank god._

"The thing that pisses me off, however, is how you wanna sit there and make rules, tell me you don't
forgive me, and-" Billy stops and huffs out a laugh before holding up his index finger. "One day. It only took you one fucking day before you decided to be a hypocrite and go inside my head like it's a free all-day carnival."

"I know, I know- I'm so sorry. I didn’t-" He's interrupted as Billy slams his hand down on top of the car and it makes Steve jump and duck his head down again.

"Stop saying that word. I don't wanna fucking hear you say that word.″ He yells even louder and Steve can feel his eyes start to water.

Oh god, get it together Steve…

He says to himself, wondering when he'd let himself get so emotional over shit like this.

"Okay, okay." He whispers out, trying to keep it together because he still isn't sure what Billy wants from him at this point.

He's still waiting for the other shoe to drop.

From this angle he knows Billy can't see his face, which is a small miracle so he keeps his head down for a bit longer until he feels put together enough again to chance a glance up towards Billy and lets him just go for it.

"Also, that dumb shit about ending whatever this is," Billy says, making air quotes, "I'm stuck with you Harrington, so I don't know what the fuck you're talking about."

And that right there makes Steve want to cry and not for good reasons either because Billy's right, they're stuck with each other.

They didn't have a choice, they'd been thrown into a shitty situation and forced to find a way to survive through it.

Now they had to find a way to make it work.

"I know, I just thought you probably wouldn't want me anymore and-" Steve goes to say and it comes out way more broken than he'd wanted.

Oh god, I just said that out loud-

Why did I just word it like that-

He's a bit upset with himself because he doesn't know why it came out of his mouth like he's the most pathetic, pitiful little bitch ever.

Apparently his brain to filter doesn't fucking work anymore.

Billy makes some sort of noise in the back of his throat like he's been deeply offended, interrupting Steve and cupping his face with both hands as he pulls him into a kiss.

Steve's hand comes up to grip at Billy's wrist and he's not sure how things went from 0 to 100 but Billy kisses him like he's desperate.

Or maybe Steve is the desperate one.

He's not sure.
Steve makes a broken noise and Billy pushes him up against the car, getting a hand in his hair to tilt his face upward as the kiss deepens. Heat pools deep inside of Steve's groin as he makes a low groan into his mouth.

Kissing Billy is like nothing else. It's all consuming and a little embarrassing because it wipes away his ability to think until all that's left is Billy.

Just Billy, taking over every single one of his senses like he's reaching inside of Steve and forever carving himself a place inside, making his mark.

And ain't that just the truth.

Billy pulls back after a while and puts his face in the crook of Steve's neck.

"I don't wanna hear you say dumb shit like that ever again." Billy says and it comes out dark and threatening but it sends another wave of heat through Steve all the same.

Billy's hand comes up to pull Steve's shirt down a bit and he bites into the mark on his collar bone that was still there from before.

The same one he'd traced with his fingertips in the mirror this morning and it fucking hurts, makes Steve grab Billy's waist with a grunt but it also hurts in all of the right ways too.

When Billy's done he places the hand that had been pulling his shirt down around Steve's neck, applying no pressure, just places it there and looks Steve in the eyes.

Billy's pupils are dilated, completely blown wide and it takes Steve's breath away.

Billy leans in and tilts Steve's head up a bit using the hand around his neck and bites just underneath his jaw, starts moving his way up to the shell of his ear, biting gently.

Steve had no idea how sensitive his ears were until Billy.

"Oh." He says a little breathlessly, biting his lower lip to keep from making more embarrassing sounds but Billy seems to know exactly what to do, starts to whisper filthy fucking things into his ear while giving it his utmost attention.

Every fucking time Billy speaks it makes his knees go weak. There's something about his voice that just reaches deep inside some primal part of Steve and turns him completely pliant so that he's utterly defenseless.

Billy could probably get him to do anything with that fucking voice.

The hand moves from his neck as Billy pulls away, putting his hands in his pockets and staring at Steve like he's admiring his own work.

"Get in the car." Billy says, sounding completely unaffected as he walks away to go to the driver’s side, getting in.

Steve almost wants to hit something as he tries to catch his breath because he's never been as hard in his life than he is right now and Billy just fucking wham, bam, thank you ma'am'd him with barely a glance.
He knows Billy's hard too, he'd seen and felt it so why the fuck was he being such a god damn tease?

Steve takes a deep breath and gets himself barely under control, considers just pulling Billy right back out of the car and getting on his knees for him.

Instead he gets in the car but he certainly isn't fucking happy about it.

Billy doesn't even look at him, just starts the car and they drive off.

Steve wonders what he's gotten himself into.

Chapter End Notes

So this chapter is a bit shorter but there's a couple of reasons for that.

It's not AS plot heavy like the next chapter will be, I feel like we need a bit of a separation from the plot for a second to kind of regroup ourselves because there has been so much of it lately and I wanted to instead delve into Steve's mind a little bit because as we all know when Steve gets guilty he acts drastically and starts freaking out and I wanted to play around with what it's like for those of us that deal with high levels of anxiety as we sit here and work ourselves up about things that never end up being as bad as we make them out to be.

It's the whole 'We will always be our own worst enemy' sorta deal.

Also hot and heavy Steve & Billy is fun.

Also I post a lot anyway so I'm sure you guys can suffer through a bit of a shorter chapter than usual. ;D
Chapter Notes

This took longer to post because my soulmate and I went to check out a venue for the wedding today and guess what?!

WE FOUND THE VENUE FOR THE WEDDING!

First venue and we knew the moment we walked down into this gorgeous courtyard that it was the place she's going to get married, it's so breath taking you guys, I'm so excited for this I am having so much fun with all of this.

Anyway, enough about me, onto the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Present Day - Nancy & Jonathan

"Did Steve seem a little off today or was that just me?" Jonathan asks Nancy as they drive toward his house.

Usually he wouldn't concern himself with it, Nancy was always worried enough about everything for the both of them.

Especially anything Steve related ever since he'd been rescued from the upside down.

It doesn't necessarily bother Jonathan but at times it was definitely a worrying trend. When Nancy told him she was going to talk to Steve at the dinner he'd been ready to let her go at the time.

If she wanted Steve why should he waste his time?

He'd never expected anything from her in the first place and it's not like he didn't understand. This was why he'd pulled away back then too, after the whole thing with the Demogorgon.

Nancy couldn't possibly see something in him, yet here they were after a night of passion that felt like so long ago where they finally got to realize how much they meant to each other.

It still scares him, this thing with Nancy.

He keeps expecting her to up and walk away at any moment, to realize that she's making a mistake
but here she still is, standing beside him.

Slowly he's come to realize he really does have trust issues.

When Nancy had come back inside with Steve they both looked awful. Steve had a far off look in his eyes and Nancy had clearly been crying.

He'd still been expecting them to reconcile even though everything suggested otherwise.

Later that night when they laid in bed together though, he held her as she sobbed into him. She kept saying things like, "it's my fault," or "I can't believe I did this to him," completely wracked with guilt.

All Jonathan could do was be there for her.

There's a sense of responsibility he feels for any pain Steve has been caused in regards to Nancy, the half-assed break up, all of it.

She assured Jonathan that they had broken up before the sex between them happened but it still felt wrong.

Was Jonathan just a rebound all along?

Did she really want Steve but she just couldn't admit it to herself?

Honestly to hear that Steve had been the one to reject Nancy at the house was a complete shock.

It's the last thing he'd have ever expected from the guy. If it had been Jonathan he'd have jumped at the chance, except at one point it had been him.

That night with Nancy, he could have just done nothing, pushed her away, told her he didn't want to but he didn't do any of those things because she was like a magnet and as hard as he tried to resist her pull, it just eventually never mattered.

They would always come right back to one another.

So he stopped resisting, just let things be and here they were.

For once in Jonathan's fucked up life he was happy but that didn't stop his guilt pertaining to Steve.

Sometimes Jonathan would have nightmares that Steve's body was lifeless when Eleven had pulled him back through the gate instead of unconscious and he'd wake in a cold sweat.

Nancy had plenty of nightmares about it too and he would hold her through them. She would help him too. Whenever it became too much, she would take his hand into hers, lay the back of it on her palm and trace his scar to calm him down.

He would do the same to her.

Eventually it would help them both get back to sleep and they would fall asleep holding hands more often than not. It had become a sort of ritual for them and he was glad they had each other because he wasn't sure what he'd do with himself otherwise, without Nancy as a constant beside him to hold him through the worst of his fears.
"Yeah, a little bit. He looked like he was stressed out about something." Nancy answers with a shrug.

"I feel like he didn't hear a word we said to him." Jonathan says with a shake of his head. "Do you think he'll come?"

"Before we left I saw Billy leaned up against his car as Steve was walking out so I would assume so."

Billy.

Billy Hargrove.

What a piece of fucking work that guy seemed to be and Will actually liked him. He just couldn't wrap his brain around it. The guy was a ticking time bomb.

Jonathan felt stressed out just being around the guy and Steve had to spend his time in the upside down with him, with that? Jonathan would have probably just offed himself and he's not sure how Steve does it.

He supposes they must not have had much of a choice, what with that whole connection thing they seemed to have.

Jonathan only knows snippets of what Nancy has told him, Steve's panic attack at the store and how Billy somehow knew only to show up to yell in his face about it.

Who the fuck even does that?

Makes someone feel bad for having a panic attack?

Apparently his own car is more important than Steve's mental health.

Yeah, what an asshole.

Nancy wasn't a huge fan of him either, but sometimes she'd get a look on her face while looking at Steve that he wasn't familiar with.

He had finally asked her one day what it meant.

"I think they're in love with each other." Nancy says, still flipping through the book she was studying.

Jonathan almost spits out his drink all over her bed as she glares at him and he laughs nervously at her.

"What the hell makes you say that?" He asks, thinking she's totally insane.

"Whatever happened to them in that place, we will never understand it but you saw him at the lab." She says, getting a far off look in her eyes, reliving the moment.

"Well yeah, it was insane. He just kept calling out for Billy. I can't believe he almost got up." Jonathan says, getting chills just from thinking about it.
"Hopper says Billy freaked out too. Connection aside, I saw what I saw with my own two eyes, you saw his face when I told him Billy was okay." She says, pointing her pencil at him in her usual Nancy fashion.

She was right, he'd never seen someone's heart rate drop so fast. It didn't even look real, like it had malfunctioned.

All Steve had needed to hear was that Billy was safe and all was well with the world when the drugs in his system finally kicked in, even though they should already have been working by then.

"Okay, I see your point. Do you think they know?"

Because he knows it's one thing to be in love with someone and it's another thing to accept being in love with someone.

Jonathan and Nancy knew that better than anyone.

"God no, I think they're both idiots." She says with a flip of her hair.

"Well I hope whatever is going on he's okay." Jonathan finally says and Nancy nods, agreeing.

"So wait, where are we going?" Steve asks after they've been driving long enough for him to calm down but he's pretty sure if Billy pushed for it hard enough he'd be ready to go at any given point.

"Wait, you seriously don't know where we're going right now?" Billy asks incredulously.

"Uh, should I?" He asks, tilting his head to the side in confusion.

"You didn't talk to those best buddies of yours? Either one of them at all today?"

"Yes?"

They talked but he'd been freaking out the whole day so everything had gone in one ear and out the other.

"Okay, well they would have told you Hopper's calling a family meeting or whatever you people want to call it." Billy says after glancing at Steve with a raised brow.

"Oh shit, I wasn't even listening." He admits and now that he thinks about it he does remember them saying something about it.

"That's why I took your keys dipshit. I thought we'd get into a fight the moment we got into the car and you'd wanna leave and take your own." Billy admits and there's a vulnerability to his voice that Steve isn't used to hearing.

"So you were just gonna hold me hostage?" Steve says with a snort, trying to keep things light.

"You can still jump out, I'll even help you and push."

"Haha, very funny." Steve says and they fall into a comfortable silence for a while.
Until Steve is ready to potentially ruin it because apparently he's some sort of masochist.

"I really didn't mean to intrude, I was worried about you after Neil made me leave. I thought maybe if I could just search through the bond I'd see if you were alright but I had no idea what the fuck I was doing and ended up doing-" He waves his hand in the air, not really knowing how to explain it.

"Well you know better than I would because all of a sudden I'm dead asleep and then I can just feel you everywhere. I could feel your emotions, I could hear you-" Billy cuts himself off and grips the steering wheel and gets a far off look in his eyes after taking in a shaky breath.

"I do not wanna talk about it Steve, whatever you saw, don't make me talk about it. This is me asking you, please." Billy says, still looking off into space and it's those eyes, his expressive eyes that pull at something inside of Steve's chest.

Billy's afraid.
He also said please which was not a word Steve was aware Billy even knew.

He said he'd heard him.

*The beach.*

Billy knows Steve saw the beach.

Whatever that meant, it meant something.

Something that Billy didn't want to address and Steve had already intruded enough. He had no right to Billy's trauma unless Billy gave that right to him willingly.

"Okay, it won't happen again, I promise." He says as genuinely as he can because he means it.

Now he knows what he did and how to do it again but just because he knows how doesn't mean he will.

"There is something else though." Steve says, bracing himself and maybe the timing is off but it still needs to be addressed. He can't just let Billy get away with doing certain things and not suffer any sort of consequence.

"Yeah?" Billy asks, glancing at him and there's a mixture of worry and questioning on his face and in his tone.

"You can't get into Nancy's face like you did the other day. She said she started it or something but it doesn't matter. I will knock you flat on your ass Hargrove, don't try to start shit with Nancy, or any of them for that matter. Let's just throw everyone that matters onto that list." Steve says, nodding to himself.

Billy hits his brakes hard and Steve lurches forward, almost bashing his face against the dashboard. He glares over at Billy who's looking at him like he's contemplating actually throwing him out of the car now.

*Yeah, this is about the reaction I expected.*

Steve thinks to himself as he sighs.
"Is this the part where you tell me not to tell you what to do?" Steve asks sarcastically before Billy can get anything out. "Cause we've been through this song and dance before." He continues with a snort, remembering the times Billy had gotten in his face about it.

Billy looks at him appraisingly for a moment before nodding his head.

"Alright Harrington, if you wanna play, let's play." Billy says and he gets that insane look in his eyes and Steve actually wonders if he's just made a huge mistake as Billy turns back to face forward in his seat to start driving again.

Hopper has them all meet at the Byers house.

When Billy and Steve step inside they notice everyone is present other than Eleven, which is probably for the best.

"Good, everyone's finally here. Find a place to get comfy, we've got a lot to talk about." Hopper says.

Billy is pointedly glaring at Lucas from across the room and Max is glaring at Billy. Steve wonders who will start the first fight as everyone finds somewhere to sit.

"Alright, I'll make it quick. We've got questionable people in Hawkins, Richards is one of them. Nancy brought the highschool nurse to my attention." Hopper starts off by saying.

"Wait, Kirkman?" Billy says, cutting him off as he glances from Nancy and then back at Hopper.

"Yes, Louis Kirkman. You've had contact with him?" Hopper asks suspiciously.

"Yeah, the other day with sleeping beauty over there." Billy says throwing his thumb up in Steve's direction. "I left the office and there he was, creepy as could be."

"Did he say anything strange?" Nancy asks, interjecting.

Billy purses his lips and just looks at her, seemingly in deep thought.

"Yeah, as I left he said he'd make sure Harrington was alright. I hadn't even told him who was in the room...he couldn't have known." Billy says like he's coming to a serious realization.

"So we know one target for certain then." Hopper says.

"Wait, sorry what?" Steve asks, holding up his hand and feeling incredibly out of the loop.

"I did some digging. I've got a new cop, a school nurse and a Hawkins Lab employee all showing up from Chicago. This was all well hidden information in the first place." Hopper says, his voice sounding grave.

"What's in Chicago exactly?" Joyce asks.

"El was in Chicago for a bit. She met someone there and I'm starting to think things are connected in some way." Hopper says, crossing his arms over his chest.
It all goes way over Steve's head because none of that made any sense to him.

"So what does that have to do with Harrington being a target?" Billy suddenly asks, which was the exact question Steve had too.

"Not just Steve. You, Will, El on the off-chance they find out about her. Richards is a mole." Hopper says.

"Richards, the guy from the lab?" Steve asks.

"Yeah, not sure who he works for or what they want to accomplish but Dr. Owens has been doing some digging in his down time. He's not a fan of the guy, that's how this came to my attention." Hopper informs them.

"Just Richards is a mole in that lab? I don't buy that." Jonathan says, mirroring what many others were thinking as well.

"In regards to this Chicago group he's the only one we know of. I need everyone to have their eyes and ears open at all times. You see or hear anything I want to know yesterday." Hopper demands.

"Will is going to see Richards in a few days. We want to see if we can get any information out of him inadvertently." Joyce says, looking at the younger children.

"Hold up, why are we putting the kid in the line of fire?" Billy asks, pointing to Will.

"Hopper and I will be there. Richards has access to all of Will's files and any footage they've acquired. There's no hiding from him." Joyce says and it looks a lot like there had been in a fight about it if her body language was anything to go off of.

"Nope, I don't like it. They have our files too and we have no idea what these pieces of shit want, what they're capable of, or what they're willing to do to get what they want." Billy says shaking his head and Joyce's eyes light up.

Probably at the prospect of keeping Will safe.

Steve isn't surprised.

"Yeah, why don't we just use Billy as bait? It'll be like old times." Lucas says, clearly intending it as a jab.

"See? Sinclair and I agree on something for once, that has to count for something." Billy says, pointing a finger gun at the kid and winking.

Lucas just blinks and makes a 'see, I told you' gesture.

Hold up.

Steve's brain screeches to a grinding halt.

Bait?

Oh no, nope. No, no, no.
He's been through *this* particular song and dance before with Billy, he'll be damned if he lets everyone else be tricked by it.

"You *cannot* be serious right now. That's *not* happening!" Steve yells, turning to Billy so they're facing each other.

"Of course, you're always right dear. What was I thinking?" Billy says sarcastically with an eye roll.

"I know you've got a death wish Billy but it's really not cute anymore. It has gotten really old, really fast." Steve hisses out.

"Aw you think I'm cute, *how sweet.*" Billy says and it just sounds menacing more than anything else.

"You're really gonna fight me on this?"

"When have I not fought you on something, Steve?"

"That's besides the *fucking* point. Nobody needs to be bait for anything, *ever.* It doesn't always need to end in being bait, or falling into a trap!" Steve yells out, looking pointedly at everyone in the room now that he's standing.

He realizes they're all looking at him like he's insane but he doesn't really care.

They wouldn't understand, they'd never understand.

"How about this, that little request of yours in the car before we got here? I'll listen to it like a good little boy if you shut your mouth." Billy says sickly sweet and Steve knows he's just been played.

*You motherfucker.*

"It was a demand, no room for negotiation." Steve spits out.

"Well it's time to negotiate a compromise for that demand then." Billy quips back.

"You're fucking *impossible.*" Steve says throwing his arms up.

"Boys!" Joyce says but it doesn't deter Billy.

"What have we learned about telling me what to do?" Billy says darkly, looking only at him.

"To go *fuck yourself-*" Steve starts to say.

"Enough!" Hopper bellows and everyone goes stock still for a moment.

Nancy and Jonathan start whispering in each other's ear, Joyce has a hand over her face in exasperation, Dustin and Lucas are simply shocked, Mike and Will look completely uninterested like it's just another normal day and Max is trying not to laugh.

"Watch your language in front of the kids but more importantly Billy is right." Hopper says.

Steve whips around, glaring while pointing a finger at him.
"You are not helping! Do you not understand that?!"

The one thing Steve hated most about Billy was his martyr complex.

There was this thing constantly happening where it seemed to be a habit for Billy to throw himself into the line of fire with complete disregard to how others might feel about it.

Time and again it was as if he walked around with a sign stapled to his forehead saying 'if someone needs to die, it better be me. Call me at 1-800-BillyIsADumbass and I'll die for you today.'

Even worse is he seems to think he's irredeemable or some stupid shit like that, disposable even.

That couldn't be further from the truth.

Steve knows he doesn't have all of the data yet but this all originates from somewhere inside of Billy and it needed to be nipped in the bud as quickly as possible. He couldn't just keep throwing himself at things and hope to continue getting out alive.

"Sit. Down." Hopper says, tone low and Steve almost fights him on it but the kids are here and he's not about to subject them to more of this.

So, he sits. For now.

Billy gives him a look, smug grin on his face as he mouths out an 'I win' and Steve wants to kill him.

"If there's another outburst I will be physically removing anyone who causes it." Hopper says, looking only at Steve.

"Billy is right, we don't know anything and if you're willing to be a scapegoat we can formulate a new plan." Hopper goes on to say, speaking mostly to Billy now.

"Sounds good to me Chief, where do we start?" Billy says, rubbing his hands together.

Steve gets kicked out of the house.

Jonathan can't find it within himself to be very shocked if what just happened wasn't already a pretty good indicator already of the tumultuous relationship between Billy and Steve.

He certainly hadn't expected them to just get into it all of the sudden in front of everyone but when Nancy turned to whisper in his ear it started to make a little more sense.

"Ever notice that Billy likes to yell at Steve when he's worried about him?" She had said in his ear.

"I think that's just Billy's default mode." Jonathan whispered back.

"Yeah but did you see the look he gave me when he realized the thing about the nurse, noticed that Steve might be in danger?"

Jonathan hadn't said anything back, just sat in his seat and kept looking at Billy to see if he could notice any of the things Nancy seemed to see.

Nope, still nothing.
All he can see is an overly aggressive asshole.

He sighs, getting rid of that train of thought and gets up, asking Nancy to fill him in later as he leaves the house, closing the door gently behind him.

Steve is leaned up against Billy's car.

He looks pissed.

They aren't close, Jonathan wouldn't even necessarily say they're friends but he still feels bad all the same as he goes to stand next to Steve, leaning himself back against the car as well.

"I don't know how to get him to stop doing this." Steve says, running a hand through his hair.

"Stop doing what?" Jonathan asks.

"This, making himself out to be the bad guy, throwing himself into a raging fire unnecessarily. There's no sense in it." Steve says in exasperation.

"Well, I mean Billy is kind of a bad guy though but I would also prefer it being him to my little brother so he's not a bad guy, if that makes sense." Jonathan says honestly.

"No, I know, I get that but why is this the only option?" Steve asks, turning to look at Jonathan like he somehow has all of the answers.

"Because Hopper just wants to protect El and he doesn't like to sit around and wait. He tends to want to strike first if you hadn't noticed." Jonathan says with a shrug.

"I guess." Steve says, turning back to look forward as he puts his hands in his pockets, looking utterly defeated.

"I wouldn't worry too much. Billy looks like he can take care of himself." Jonathan says, attempting to be reassuring.

"It's not that. There's only so much a person can take before they snap and keeping Billy from getting to that point would be preferable for everyone involved, trust me." Steve says with a grimace like he's remembering something particularly unpleasant.

"You and Billy been talking a lot lately then?"

"Huh? What- no, I just know stuff."

"You know stuff."

"Yeah, the...connection thingy." Steve says as he rubs at his neck nervously.

Explaining it out loud probably sounds really fucking silly.

"The bond." Jonathan says.

"Right, the bond." Steve says after pausing for a moment, staring a little awkwardly.

If anything that seemed to be far more of an accurate description, now that he thinks about it.
Jonathan barely knows anything but just from what he has heard it seemed like there was more going on than either one of them wanted anyone to know about.

"So you just know how he feels all the time?"

"Kind of, not...really. It's hard to explain."

Jonathan stares at him for a long time, long enough for it to start getting uncomfortable and Steve looks down at the ground.

"Well, sometimes we just have to bite the bullet. We can't force people to listen if they don't want to, it's the same with Nancy. You know how she gets." Jonathan says but then he grimaces, a little alarmed at himself for making the comparison.

Steve gets a small smile on his face, shaking his head.

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

Suddenly, the front door to the house opens and Billy walks out looking pompous as ever. Jonathan turns to Steve and gives him a look that he hopes translates to 'have fun' as he turns to leave.

He gives a nod in Billy's direction who pointedly decides to ignore him completely.

Jonathan isn't even sure why he tries.

I'm doing this for Will.

He thinks to himself like a mantra as he goes back into the house.

"If you're out here I hope it's because we're leaving and you're taking me back to my car." Steve says, refusing to even look at Billy after Jonathan leaves and he knows they're alone.

"Ms. Byers is making dinner for everyone so suck it up buttercup. You have fun out here with your boyfriend?" Billy asks and his tone is borderline petulant.

Steve just looks at him like he's an idiot as Billy opens his dumbass mouth again, gesturing toward the house. "What? I didn't mean to interrupt. I can bring him back out if you'd like."

Was this guy for real right now?

He looks at Billy, tries to see if maybe this is some sort of distraction tactic but Steve isn't picking up on anything.

"Are you seriously jealous of Jonathan?" Steve asks in complete disbelief.

Billy just looks at him, giving nothing away and Steve barks out a laugh.

"Jonathan, the guy I tried to beat the shit out of once." He says, not even knowing how this had become a topic of conversation.

"If I remember correctly you and I have both tried to beat the shit out of eachother." Billy says, completely monotone.
Okay so not a good comparison. Billy actually had a point with that one no matter how farfetched it was.

"Yeah okay, if there's anyone to be jealous about it'd be Nancy." He laughs out, instantly slapping a hand over his mouth, eyes widening because oh my god did he just say that?

Steve clenches the hand that was over his lips into a fist, still holding it up to his mouth because he's so fucking angry with himself and Billy is just staring him down, completely expressionless.

Why don't you ever fucking think before you speak?

He thinks to himself as he starts to backtrack. "The way that came out, not what I meant at all- that's not-" He sputters out, completely panicking because he's not sure how to fix this massive fuck up.

"Rewind, delete that, let's try this again." He says, waving his hands in front of himself frantically.

Billy puts a hand up to stop him and puts his other hand in his pocket and takes out Steve's keys and lobs them at him. He fumbles a bit, but ultimately catches them and gapes at Billy.

"Go ahead and have someone else take you back to your car. I'm leaving." Billy says as he immediately turns to walk away to his driver side door.

Steve goes to grab at his upper arm to stop him and Billy wrenches it away, putting a firm hand against Steve's chest to keep him back before using it to point his index finger into it.

"Don't. Fucking. Touch. Me." Billy says threateningly and Steve's not even sure what to do at this point.

"I didn't mean it like that Billy, please." He pleads, keeping his distance.

"This isn't a discussion. You're all pissed off because you didn't get your way in there and now you're punishing me for it by throwing her in my face. That's not how this works." Billy spits out.

"That is not true." Steve says, knocking Billy's hand out of the way.

"Tell me I'm wrong Steve, go on. Try to tell me how wrong I am." Billy taunts, holding his arms out in a challenging gesture.

Steve stands there, can't even believe the audacity of this guy.

"I'm pissed, yeah. I fucking hate that you're using yourself as bait but I swear to god I did not mean to say that." Steve says and there's that nagging feeling in the back of his head all of the sudden, the one he's felt before.

Where had he felt this before?

"Maybe not consciously but you know she's a sore spot for me. Let's not bullshit ourselves right now, yeah? I've seen into your soul Harrington, I saw the way you looked at her. I felt what you felt when she cried for you." Billy says except there's no actual heat behind it, it's too calculated.

If there was anything Steve had learned it was that Billy is all emotion when he's really angry. There was nothing calculated about his emotions, he'd just spout shit out hoping to hit a mark.
Billy was being way too calm, way too collected.

This wasn't the Billy he knew. This was too familiar: his demeanor, his voice, the way he was holding himself.

The only thing they ever did was fight. He knew Billy in a fight whether it be a verbal one or physical one.

It's what they did, this was their thing.

Steve likes to think he knows when Billy's trying to bullshit him at this point. Sure, he's a bit slow on the uptake but eventually he likes to think he's catching on to what game is being played right now.

Steve squints his eyes and tilts his head to the side.

"This is a trick." He states as if its a fact and Billy's brow furrows.

"The fuck did you just say?" Billy says and now it was starting to sound more like him.

"You're trying to trick me. You're starting a fight on purpose." Steve says, slowly putting it all together as he scoffs. "You're trying to get rid of me because you're going to do something I won't like. What's Hopper making you do?"

He knows he may not be as smart as Nancy or Billy, or even Jonathan for that matter but he knows Billy, knows his tells at this point, has seen into his soul.

Billy gapes, making Steve snort and he doesn't even try to hide it as he lets his arms rest at his sides.

Billy puts a hand over his face to hide it from view and his shoulders start to shake as he slowly starts laughing and it's a beautiful sound.

It's a real genuine laugh that he's only heard come out of Billy one other time: when Steve first kissed him and he raises his brow, waiting it out.

Billy finally recovers and looks at him in a way Steve has never seen before. It makes something in his chest constrict.

"How the hell did you put that together?" Billy asks him like he can't even believe it and Steve actually feels proud of himself for once.

"You've already done this to me once before. You gonna try to knock me out again this time too?" Steve says jokingly.

Billy barks out another laugh and just shakes his head, like he's astonished, like he's speechless.

Steve takes a step closer. "You actually had me going there for a minute too."

"I thought I had you going for sure when you fucked up and put your foot in your mouth about Nancy." Billy says with a snort.

"I really didn't mean to say that." Steve says, wanting to make that as clear as possible.

"Yeah I know. Get in the car I'll explain on the way there." Billy says.
Steve finally gets close enough to where he could just reach out and touch him if he really wanted to. So, he does.

He starts by touching his face and pulling him in, resting their foreheads together. Billy tries to pull away and Steve smirks as he keeps him in place.

"Harrington, what's with you-" Billy goes to say as Steve clamps a hand down over his mouth to keep him quiet as he forces them to lock eyes.

"I don't like the idea of you being in danger."

Billy gets that vulnerable look in his eyes for a moment before the mask falls back into place as he steps away.

"Yeesh pretty boy, possessive much?" Billy says with a loud laugh that's probably trying to hide his nervousness.

Steve knows better by now.

"You're one to talk." He says with a snort.

Later, when they're finally in the car halfway to their destination Steve comes to a realization.

"Wait, were you actually jealous of Jonathan?!!"

Chapter End Notes

Oh my bois *tears up* they grow so fast.

I rewrote that ending scene like...an ungodly number of times you all have no idea, that last scene alone is probably what kept this chapter from being posted like...3 hours ago.

Anyway I hope you all liked it, I really wanted to get into Jonathan's head a little bit because I haven't given him much love yet.
The Day after Will Is Purged

Deep Inside the Forests of Indiana

"I dun' understand how I say I see sum' weird shit last night and you think that means let's go find it." Dylan says as they trudge through the cold chill of the morning.

He'd been talkin' up and playin' up how he'd seen some feral deer in the woods last night on his way home to his brother. He hadn't even been huntin', he'd been driving his truck and it was the strangest thing he'd ever seen in his life.

And he'd seen some strange shit in Indiana.

A deer, standing off in the middle of the opposite lane, not even moving, staring at his car lights as he drove by. He thought it might bolt in front of his car, get itself hit, thinking maybe it had one of them mental diseases or something but it just stood there, watching him nice and slow.
When he finally came to a stop beside it he almost got out to grab his hunting rifle from the back of the bunker of his truck bed but he was afraid it'd spook.

He just sits there and stares at it from the safety of his drivers seat, looking at it through the passenger side window as it just stares back like it's self-aware or sumfin'.

He gets that feeling his na'an used to tell him about when they were little, those scary bedtime stories to make little children be good.

If your gut tells you to run she'd say, you damn well better run.

There's something wild in its eyes and it's like he's in a trance. He forces himself to look away and just drives away and when he looks back in his mirror...honest to god, it just looks at him, watching like it's a predator hunting prey before darting back into the forest.

So now, here he is with his younger brother who thinks the sun rises and shines on his ass, wanting to try and find some retard deer that probably has worms inside its brain or somethin'.

"Ya know, if we find it we ain't eatin' it right?" He clarifies, doesn't want whatever it has. No point in risking it.

"Yeah awright. Just wanna see it." His brother says.

"Shel, the chances of us finding it if it's still alive are pretty damn low." Dylan huffs out, wondering why he let himself get dragged into this when he could be at home with his wife, curled up in bed.

"Well at least we'll knows it when we sees it." He replies with a shrug and they soldier on for another four hours.

By the fifth hour Dylan's ready to give up. They'd come across plenty of normal deer, they'd spook, act like they're biology dictated and they'd even seen some other animals but Shel didn't wanna go for those ones because he was afraid if they got a shot down it'd scare off the one deer they were hunting for in the first place.

So basically they'd come out here like a couple of numpties with as much game as their heart desired all laid out nice and pretty for them with nothing to show for it.

By the sixth hour Dylan finds blood on the ground and they get into a low crouch, taking it nice and slow.

His thighs are burning from overexertion. He really doesn't know why he indulges his younger brother like this but when he gets home tonight that bath his wife draws for him is going to be one of the greatest he's ever had, it's a small consolation though.

The trail stops for a bit and starts back up a few feet away and Shel holds up his hand to stop them. Further ahead of them, just down a slight dip in the hill, is the wildest shit he's ever seen in his life.

A deer, eating another deer.

Dylan's blood runs cold and he knows it should have heard them by now, way before this.

It should have tilted its head up to look up at them. The sense of hearing from a deer is so much
more superior to that of a humans and he's hunted deer all his life to know when he hasn't been quiet enough.

It just stays there, eating another deer.

Had it killed the deer itself or found the dead carcass and was desperate?

Could a deer even digest this sort of meat properly? Could a deer get desperate enough to eat its own kind?

He’d heard rumors from some Scottish guy he’d met in a bar once saying he saw deer eating bird sometimes up in Scotland but was that just due to the breed?

Whatever this was, it was not normal. It was a disgusting thing to watch. Its teeth weren't very good for it, loud squelching sounds coming from where it was trying to eat the other deer and just ripping into it like it was frustrated that it couldn’t get bigger pieces of meat.

But the weirdest thing was that it seemed more interested in the blood. It would stop chewing and then lap at the blood like it was water and Dylan's stomach churned; he thought he might throw up.

He reaches out to Shel, grabs his shoulder, and uses his hand signals to indicate that they need to get the fuck out of here but Shel just shakes his head, totally entranced.

"Are you kidding me? This is sum' creepy shit. Let's go." Dylan whispers quietly and the deer still doesn't even look at them.

What the fuck?

"You gotta be kiddin' me Dyl, this is the craziest shit I ever seen. We gotta kill it yeah?" Shel whispers back.

The deer suddenly stops what it's doing and looks right at them. Dylan almost falls back flat on his ass because it was like it knew what they were saying.

"What the fucking shit?" Dylan says out loud, not even caring about being quiet anymore and suddenly it breaks off into a sprint toward them.

They’d both been hunting for years, had learned from their father as children, who learned from his father before him so they knew how to handle the forest, how to handle the animals inside of it but it was like all of that went out the window as they almost shit themselves.

Both of them hurl their bodies in opposite directions to get away from the feral cannibal deer that looked ready to kill them.

It gets up the hill fast and goes for Shel first, reaches up on its hind legs and Dylan doesn't think, he just reacts and he shoots it.

One.

Two shots, just to make sure.

It collapses gracelessly on top of Shel and he freaks out, screaming as he gets himself out from under
it. He backs himself up into a tree behind him and just sits there breathing heavily, trying to keep himself calm.

Dylan isn't sure what possesses him to do it but he reaches out with his hand, slowly, deliberately, looking from Shel to the possibly dead deer and touches it with his hand, wondering if what he's seeing is even real.

Suddenly, it's like he's held in place, can't move even if he tried and he doesn't even understand what's happening as it feels like something is trying to crawl inside of him.

He chokes out panicked noises and it just gets worse and worse, like something is trying to consume him, moving through his veins and he catches sight of Shel who looks absolutely horrified.

"He-lp" Dylan manages to get out but it's too late.

He feels it reach into his mind, like a dark muddy casing filling him to the brim and he falls to the ground writhing.

He can absently hear Shel screaming his name, but it's too much.

He tries to fight it, tries to get it out of him but he can't. It's taking over every part of him like a virus and eventually he feels like he's gone insane because he can feel everything.

Get up.

There's someone talking to him and he doesn't recognize the voice, like a thought but it isn't his own.

I said get up.

He gets up and tries to push himself off the ground but struggles a few times before finally giving up and just sitting on his knees as he turns to look over at Shel.

"I think I'm okay. I think I'm good." He hears himself say but it's like he's hearing everything underwater.

You'll do nicely.

The voice in his head says again and he turns his head, looks around and then back at Shel who was just sitting there on the ground next to him in fear. "Do you hear that?" He asks him, putting a finger in his ear absently to get ear wax out of it.

Shel looks at him and then looks around and back again, shaking his head like he has no idea what Dylan is talking about.

Kill him.

It says and Dylan furrows his brow, "Sorry what?" He says out loud and now Shel must really think he's insane because he knows he's talking to himself and it's really hard to focus on any one thing for long periods of time.

The human mind, it's such a fragile thing isn't it? I didn't know. Kill him, kill this brother of yours.
"No." He simply says, putting his hands over his ears to try to block the sound out but he knows it's impossible because it's coming from inside of his own mind.

That's alright. I have all of the time in the world to take complete control of your mind, body, and soul. I learn fast.

The voice says and suddenly sound comes back to him.

He can hear the wind through the trees, the sounds of the birds cawing, the rustling of Shel as he tries to lift himself up. It doesn't sound like everything is under water anymore and he feels moderately back to normal, but there's something inside of him, something in some dark corner of his mind eating away at him.

He can feel it, but he can also see things, see what he can't understand, what he shouldn't understand and it makes no sense.

"Dyl, come on. We need to go. We gotta get you to a doctor, to a hospital." Shel says, grabbing his arm.

Dylan doesn't think, he panics and pushes Shel up against the tree, putting his arm across his own brother's throat.

"NO." he screams out and it sounds not entirely like himself, like something else as well.

"He doesn't want to." Dylan says in a panic and he realizes he's choking his own brother.

He lets go of Shel and looks at him with wide eyes.

What's happening to him?

Present Day

Hawkins Indiana

"I need to get myself arrested."

Steve slowly turns his head to look at Billy, eyes wide.

"Explain."

He's trying really hard to be as understanding as possible but that ship was quickly sailing.

"In a few days, I need to get myself arrested by that cop. We wanna see what they do when an opportunity presents itself." Billy states like it's not a big deal.

"So, willingly get yourself caught, get yourself a juvenile criminal record. Yes, this sounds like a fantastic plan."
"I've already got a record in California, may as well get one here in Indiana." Billy says with a shrug.

"You've got to be kidding me. Why am I even shocked? I don't even wanna know what you did." Steve says, rolling his eyes.

"Good 'cause I wasn't gonna tell you anyway." Billy replies, flashing him a predatory smile.

Steve silently fumes as he thinks of how many different ways he could push his counterpart off a cliff.

"If they don't kill me Hopper wants to use Eleven to find out where they take me, if that's what they're even trying to do," Billy goes on to tell him.

"You do realize how insane that sounds?"

Once again Billy just shrugs at him and Steve wants to pull his hair out, maybe shake the guy a little bit too.

“How is Hop even agreeing to something like this?" He asks, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I sweet talked him."

"What?"

"I told him Joyce is never going to give him the time of day if he turns me down and still willingly puts her kid in danger. I also told him he's not upsetting anybody if he uses me instead." Billy says with a shrug.

"What the fuck?!" Steve yells, turning in his seat completely, "I would care. Also, I'm not completely stupid Billy, I know you're only doing this because you're just as worried about Will."

There's a look of panic that crosses over Billy's face for a split second before he schools his features with that fake smile Steve was starting to be able to pinpoint really well. "You're like a naggin' wife, yappin' in my ear."

"Don't be an ass, I'm trying to have a productive conversation with you right now." Steve says pointedly.

"I don't know who you think-.

"Billy, we're bonded."

Taking a page out of Jonathan's book seems to do something because there's a lot of silence after that.

So much, in fact and it gets so thick that Steve starts to think he should just concede, admit defeat and 'stay the fuck away' like Billy wanted when this all first started.

"Sure, we get a little too close sometimes but that doesn't mean you can tell me what to do." Billy finally retorts but his voice sounds distant, like his heart isn't in it.

_Fucking idiot._
"You really think they'll just kidnap you when they get their hands on you?" Steve asks, trying to approach this from another direction.

If he makes one wrong move, pushes Billy too hard somewhere it'll all crumble apart.

"Well, the two most likely options are kill me or kidnap me, anything else would just be creative."

If there was a way to dump someone into a vat of boiling hot lava without them actually dying Steve would really like to hear it right about now.

This was so many levels of fucked up that Steve wasn't sure where to start.

So, he just starts somewhere and goes from there.

"You said in a few days, right?"

Billy nods.

"You were going to get into a fight with me for how long exactly?" Steve asks, side-eyeing him.

"We're always fightin' anyway, doesn't make a difference. I just needed you distracted because Hopper thinks you'll fuck this up. I need to get with him again so we can finalize the plan and execute it." Billy says nonchalantly, making a quick finger gun motion.

"You can't just do that, you can't just keep doing this."

"Uhh, I'm pretty sure I can."

"One day you're going to push it too far and it's going to do irreparable damage to our relationship." Steve says because he's at a loss, doesn't know how to get through to Billy who is willing to just tear him down, say whatever he needs if he thinks it's going to be for the greater good in the long run.

Billy side-eyes him back. "That's the first time you've said relationship."

Steve huffs out a laugh, can't believe that's what he took from anything he's said so far. "Don't get too excited, you're my least favorite person right now. I use the word loosely as in, two people who know each other very reluctantly."

"You always say the sweetest things to me." Billy says with a snort.

When they reach Steve's car in the parking lot he gets out and looks at the school, thinking of the nurse, the situation, of how helpless he feels in the face of it all.

"Well, sometimes we just have to bite the bullet. We can't force people to listen if they don't want to. It's the same with Nancy, you know how she gets."

He remembers Jonathan's words but it doesn't help him feel any better.

There really is nothing he can say to Billy to get him to listen and he has to just sit here in eternal suffering.

He hates it, hates Billy, wishes he didn't care.
Things would be so much easier if he'd never met Billy, if he'd never pushed him into that fridge.

But here they were and Steve was helpless in the face of his feelings; wanting nothing more than to just squash them, stop that buzzing underneath his skin he got whenever Billy was near.

It drives him insane.

The whole thing is exhausting but also exhilarating. He's never felt anything like it. Whatever Billy is to him it's terrifying and he's starting to see why the guy across from him pulls away, keeps things at an arm’s length, keeps him close but never close enough.

At least, never in the ways they both truly want and maybe that's for the best, maybe right now it's what works for them because if Steve allows himself to sink deeper into Billy he'll drown.

Billy comes to stand in front of him and tilts his head to the side. "What's going on in there, Harrington?" He asks quietly, poking at Steve's temple lightly.

He knocks his hand away and huffs out a laugh.

"Just thinking."

"Bad idea."

"I think we need space."

"I think it's cute that you're all worried and shit but I'm not backing out."

"That's fine, I get it. I'll see you later, okay?" He says, seeing his opportunity to act like he doesn't give a fuck as he tries to move past except a hand wraps lightning fast around his wrist and there's now one at his hip.

He's reluctant to admit he goes warm all over.

The attention is admittedly intoxicating, makes him want to be stupid but it wouldn't do them any good and he can't just give in when the guy is being a grade-A douchebag.

"Hey, don't be like that." Billy says soothingly, repeatedly running his thumb up and down his hip as if he hadn't just spent the entire car ride here riling him up.

It was starting to turn Steve's brain pliant, the touch soothing as he gulps, trying to take back control of the situation.
This clearly isn't the first time Billy has done this, he probably has a lot of experience in knowing exactly what buttons to press at exactly the right time.

"Fuck off." Steve says and it comes out gravely and rude which he's glad for as he pulls away but Billy just starts following behind him to his car instead.

"Steve-" He hears from behind him and his blood boils as he whips back around and Billy almost stumbles right into him.

"Don't you dare. You never call me by my name so just don't." He spits out as he takes a step back, putting distance between them again.

"It isn't a big deal-" Billy says in exasperation, tone pleading as he runs a hand through his hair like he doesn't know what to do. Steve can't stand it anymore as he quickly interrupts him.

"I felt it too Billy, you can't pin me down to a bed and use my amnesia as an excuse anymore."

Billy frowns like he's in deep thought, staring at the ground and breathing heavily.

"Every single thing you felt was something I felt too, why don't you understand that?" Steve tries to ask. He wants to understand but he's starting to feel like he just doesn't.

"Look, this shit is as freaky for me as it is for you, I just don't understand why you care so much."

Billy says as he runs his hands over his face and then stuffs them into his pockets.

"Because I do!" Steve hisses out.

Even from here he can see a shine in Billy's eyes, a look in them like he doesn't know what to say as if Steve is speaking total fucking gibberish or something.

It makes Steve want to punch him, or kiss him, or both.

"How many times do I have to keep saying this?"

Billy shifts his feet, averting his gaze to stare at the large expanse of grass leading to the school football field as he shakes his head, speaking quietly. "It doesn't change anything."

"No, of course it doesn't." Steve says with a hollowed out laugh.

"It's me or someone else and I'm the best option we've got."

"Yeah, what about me?"

“What do you mean, what about you?” Billy asks, glaring at him suspiciously.

“I take your place, I’m the one that gets arrested or whatever dumbass plan you both come up with.”

There's something to be said about the look he gets in his eyes after Steve utters those words, his demeanor changing on the flip of a dime, expression going cold, eyes going from that beautiful crystal water blue to swirling pools of the darkest depths of the ocean.

It reminds him of Billy's darkness.

It's actually a little bit unsettling and he thinks he hears waves crashing in the distance.
“Absolutely not.” Billy says in a tone that leaves no room for argument.

Steve can’t bring himself to give a flying fuck.

“Oh, so it’s fine if you show concern but the moment I do-”

“It’s not the same!” Billy says, interrupting.

“How?! Tell me, help me understand.” Steve pleads with him.

Billy just stares ahead, looking through him, expression hardened like steel.

“Ah yes, nothing. You’ve got nothing. You think that because you survived the Mind Flayer it’ll be fine, right?” Steve goes on to ask rhetorically since the guy across from him had decided to check out.

Still, only silence.

“Newsflash Billy, one day your luck is gonna run out.” Steve tells him with a scoff as he crosses his arms over his chest.

Absently he looks around to make sure nobody is listening in nearby.

They should probably be a bit more careful but Steve feels too heated to care.

“You wanna risk Will instead?” Billy finally says, returning back from whatever mental vacation he seemed to have just taken.

“Don’t.”

“Do you?”

“Don’t use him against me, throw him in my face so you can get what you want.” Steve tells him as he hugs his arms closer to himself.

“I don’t see you coming up with a better idea.”

“Hopper can figure it out himself, keep us all the fuck out of it.”

It still boggled his mind that Hopper was even entertaining this yet in the back of his mind he knows they’re right.

That doesn’t mean he wants to risk Billy though.

“That’s not realistic and you know it.”

All his life he’s dealt with that word, has had it thrown in his face over and over again by his father.

“That’s not realistic.”

“Please be realistic.”

“Steven, you’re losing sight of reality.”

He uncrosses his arms and fiddles around with the cool metal of his car keys as he stares at them like they’re the most fascinating thing he’s ever seen.
"I can't do this, I can't." He says almost whisper quiet and he's not even sure if Billy hears him.

"What?"

"Whatever this is, I can't keep doing it if this is how it's going to be." He says a bit louder, looking up to stare at him as he pockets the keys.

"Now you're just being-"

"It's fine Billy, I get it but I can't get close to you like this."

"Like what?"

"Like I don't exist, like what I say doesn't mean shit to you!" Steve says and he can't quite keep the pain out of his voice.

"I don't even know you, we barely know each other!" Billy yells out as if Steve is being ridiculous.

Maybe he is, maybe he's getting too worked up over this, maybe he should just walk away, maybe he isn't being realistic.

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

Naturally he assumes that will be the end of it and he's entirely ready to just get into his car and leave but Billy moves forward out of nowhere and seemingly unprompted.

Steve isn't expecting it as he jolts back a step. One second they're a safe distance apart and the next Billy has his hand on the nape of his neck as the other one comes up to brush hair out of his face.

His entire being goes into a state of elation, the touches send that electric feeling through his body as he immediately goes red, grabbing Billy by the crook of his elbow.

What the fuck?

He isn't sure what's happening but he feels like a tree that's grown roots, unable to move and a huge part of him doesn't want to.

"I'm not trying to piss you off." Billy says in a quiet tone and Steve isn't really sure how they got here, why Billy is even trying if he's the one that has been rejecting things every chance he gets.

"It's fine-" Steve tries to say as the enigma in front of him shakes his head.

"It isn't, can you just wait a fuckin' second?"

"I have to go home, Billy." He says, trying to pull away but somehow before he knows it Billy gets him to move a certain way and he's caged in, up against his car with nowhere to go.

How?

He tries to step to the side instead, "so you can go feel miserable? Just stop-" Billy says, moving with him, not touching, keeping a good enough distance to be non-threatening.

It should probably be disconcerting, he should probably put up an actual fight but he's just tired.
“You said it yourself, we barely know eachother.” Steve retorts, reminding him and staring anywhere that isn’t at Billy.

For some reason Billy’s hands slide down to his waist, bracketing him in and Steve’s heartbeat skyrockets up into his throat, his breathing comes out in shallow huffs as he settles for breathing in through his nose instead.

Billy has to know what he's doing, he must know what this does to his head, it's probably written all over his fucking face.

It feels like he was never in control of this conversation in the first place, as if Billy knew exactly when to push and pull at him.

It makes him realize something painfully obvious.

Steve is the one with a disadvantage here.

His amnesia and strange mind distortion he'd suffered from had put him behind, he wasn't able to start figuring Billy out until afterwards.

Billy's been cataloguing Steve this whole fucking time however and probably knows his tells.

Another realization hits him in that moment.

They were doing this backwards.

Usually you have to fight tooth and nail to get past emotional baggage, childhood trauma, the walls we build to keep other people away from the real person under all of the layers.

He'd been given a fast pass directly into Billy's soul and vice versa.

Their souls have certainly never cared about social constructs, there were no walls between them in those moments of perfect symbiosis.

They might not understand it yet, can't really pinpoint things in a focused manner but the feelings were still there.

The only thing Steve knew with absolute certainty at this point was that their souls had claimed one another.

Billy steps impossibly closer as if on cue and Steve turns his head to lock eyes with him.

We're supposed to be fighting.

"Can I kiss you?"

Steve's brain goes blank as he frowns and blinks at him, replaying the words in his head over and over to figure out if maybe he misheard.

"What?"

"Can I fucking kiss you?" Billy asks again but with an attitude Steve was far more used to dealing with.

He just feels more confused though.
They'd just been discussing the fact that they don't know each other and now Billy is asking to *kiss* him?

Where was the segway?

Had Steve missed something along the way?

Was he going to wake up to find out he'd never gotten free from the upside down and this whole thing had been a fever dream?

"I don't understand."

"*Quiero besarte.* Do you not speak English all of a fuckin’ sudden?" Billy says with a raised brow and Steve holds up his hand.

"Hold up, since when do you speak Spanish?"

"I'm literally *in* your Spanish class."

"Dude, I always skip."

"Yeah, I know."

It becomes yet another staring contest and Billy is clearly still waiting for an answer and Steve tilts his head to the side.

"I feel like this is a trick."

"You're killing the mood, Harrington."

"There's no mood, there was *never* a mood. We were fighting!" Steve says in exasperation as his hands flail out at his sides.

"There's *always* a mood, just depends on how you look at it." Billy says with a cheeky grin.

"You can't sweet talk your way out of everything Billy."

"Sure I can. You're not angry anymore, are you?" Billy says, hands reaching underneath his shirt and they're *cold as fuck* making Steve's muscles tense as his fingertips trace gently upward like they're mapping him out.

"This is ridiculous. I'm going home and you should too." Steve says as he grabs Billy's wrists but doesn't pull them away and he feels like they've been stuck on a stalemate for a while now.

It feels *nice.*

"You've said that like five times now." Billy says as his trapped hands move to Steve's hips and his own hands on his wrists move with him.

Billy pulls him forward so they're chest to chest and he *almost* whimpers, it's a close fucking call but he *doesn't* and considers it a small victory.

Steve's hands leave Billy's wrists as one comes up to rest against his chest and the other one stays at his side.

He knows what Billy is doing, knows that he's trying to keep him talking, find a way to keep the
conversation going until Steve caves.

A highly defiant part of him wants Billy to understand that he's willing to play his game of chess but he's also more than willing to just walk away from the board if he feels the need to stop.

Of course, that means he pushes against Billy lightly who obliges and lets him go immediately which Steve is glad for and moves past him wordlessly and simply walks around to the driver side of his car.

If he wasn't trying to prove a point he'd laugh at Billy's dumbfounded expression like he's been taken off guard and can't possibly believe that someone was able to do it.

Billy recovers quickly and goes to the passenger side, slamming his down on top of it to get Steve's attention right as he's putting the key in to unlock the door.

Their eyes meet over the top of his car.

"You don't understand. I'm not good at this, I don't sit around and talk about my fucking feelings." He says in exasperation, arm resting on top of the car as he gestures passionately with it and then runs the other one through his hair.

"I'm not asking for much." Steve says with a sigh as he stands upright, leaving the key in the door.

Billy takes that as some sort of gesture to walk around to the front of the car and stand beside him, leaning himself on the side of the hood, foot kicked up to rest behind his ankle.

"I'm not putting anyone else in danger, not again." Billy says as he crosses his arms.

"What are you talking about?"

"You got stuck in that hell with me because I was incompetent."

Steve takes a physical step back, feeling like he's just been punched in the gut at how idiotic that sounds.

Billy's been guilt-tripping himself?

"Hold up, that is not-" Steve goes to say, waving his hand in the air but Billy interjects before he can get the rest out.

"It is, we both know it was my fault."

Steve laughs, honest to god laughs loudly and in absolute disbelief. "It just happened. Nobody is at fault."

“You're trying to make me feel better. You get so sweet on me sometimes.” Billy says with a snort.

“I'm not trying to make you feel anything, that's just a fact.”

Billy gets a fond smile on his face as he stares forward and then turns toward him and Steve is pretty sure time slows down or something because the moment gets seared into his brain like he's in one of those sappy romance movies he secretly enjoyed watching with Nancy.

When had he become so stupidly infatuated with Billy Hargrove?
The guy that tried to beat the shit out of him, the same guy that was a total douche to him when he'd been in basketball, or at that party he wishes he could delete from his brain?

Or in general, really.

"You sure I can't kiss you, pretty boy?" Billy asks, almost making him choke on his own spit as he turns away to lean back against his door, attempting to play it cool.

"Why are you being so goddamn persistent?" Steve asks to distract himself.

"Kiss me and find out." Billy says and out of his peripheral he sees him shrug.

"Is this how you get chicks to keep fucking you?" Steve asks, turning back toward him as he crosses his arms over his chest.

"Excuse me, what?" Billy says, turning too except he's got an arm leaning on the car this time after he takes a step forward.

"You get them riled up, all hot and bothered until they're ready to get the fuck out of dodge and then you try to pull them right back in again." Steve says, calling him out on his shit.

"I'm honored you think my skills are that adept." He says, smug look on his face.

It's disgusting how easily Billy can disarm him but it wasn't going to change anything, the damage had already been done and Steve still isn't sure if he can do this.

He needs a minute, needs to digest the idea of them, of what that means, what it entails.

Or maybe he's just as scared as Billy.

"I'm gonna go, okay?" He says as politely as possible with a small smile but when he turns away Billy grabs his arm as Steve turns halfway to lock eyes with him.

They must look insane, this probably looks absolutely crazy with this constant cycle of back and forth they seem to have because neither one of them is willing to just say what needs to be said.

It's easy when their souls connect, it's much easier when they can just do that but it's also a little unfair and Steve doesn't want to use it in place of just communicating like normal people.

He's also still not sure how it works.

"Please." Billy pleads, still keeping a tight grip on his arm.

The rational part of his brain is telling him not to fall for it, the irrational part of his brain wants to run his fingers through Billy's hair.

There's a look in Billy's eyes that's a little bit broken after he says it, a little bit desperate and it makes Steve weak, makes him stupid and he feels himself relax under the grip on his arm.

Which is all the indication needed apparently as Billy pulls him close, puts a hand on the back of his neck and touches their foreheads together.

He's not sure why they keep doing this but it feels nice every time, grounding like the whole world could be burning down around them and it wouldn't even matter because he has this.

"You gonna make me beg?" Billy whispers out and Steve thinks he could count the number of
eyelashes he has if he had enough time and it's so hard, it's impossible.

Denying Billy is like denying himself.

So, he does the stupid thing because he's a stupid idiot doing stupid things and making stupid decisions and pulls him in for a kiss because he's stupid.

It's desperation, there's no delicately slow progression to it like he thought there'd be, the energy between them switches last second and suddenly they were starving.

There's a breathtaking fragility to it too and Steve drinks him in, tries to remember the way his lips feel, registers the scruff rubbing against his cheek that's making him shiver as he tries to commit it all to memory for himself, selfishly taking.

Billy places his hand on Steve's waist and grips him tight, pulls him impossibly closer and it's becoming too much, too heated, too fast.

He's not going to be able to stop, doesn't want to stop, but needs to, they need to.

He goes to pull away and Billy puts a hand in his hair to hold him in place. "Billy, slow down-" Steve manages to get out between kisses but he doesn't listen, pulls him back in, deepens the kiss.

They get lost in it again and Steve's back hits metal.

Oh, the car.

It feels like his body is on fire, like Billy is trying to prove some sort of point and kiss it into him.

Billy does something with his tongue and Steve groans into his mouth, grabbing his face and finally running his fingers through his hair like he wanted to earlier.

Shortly after they start grinding against eachother and Steve thinks that maybe they're going a bit too far in their own school parking lot, acting a bit too animalistic.

Steve goes to pull away again and this time Billy relents but starts biting gently at his neck instead and Steve's knees almost go weak as he squeezes his eyes shut.

“You fuck up my head, Harrington.” Billy gets out breathlessly and goddamn it, Steve shouldn't fucking let him speak.

Why did he let him speak?

“I can't fucking stand it, you're like a fucking drug I can't get outta my system.” Billy says with an edge of desperation that Steve understands completely.

“Tell me you feel it too.”

“I-"

It almost feels like he'd be giving too much away but he supposes he already has. To him it's obvious he feels the same, they're experiencing the same kinds of things but maybe to Billy that isn't the case.

Or maybe he wants clarification.

“I do, I- I feel it.” He says nervously and he can feel Billy smile against his skin, wishing he could
see it himself.

“Good cause it would really fucking suck if this was one-sided.” Billy says with a chuckle.

“Not one-sided, it- it's not.” Steve replies reverently when Billy sucks on a particular spot that goes straight to his groin.

“Mm, that's good. I wanna suck you off.” He says as if they're having a normal conversation and Steve whines in the back of his throat.

Nothing sounds better but-

“Billy.” He says and his tone must give him away because Billy pulls away to look at him, can see it on his face.

“You gotta be kidding me.”

“I just...I need time to think.” Steve says quietly, resting his head back against the car, breathing heavily as he looks up.

He'd never noticed how easy it was to see the stars this time of night.

It makes him feel miniscule.

“To think.” Billy mimics.

“About us, this, the whole…” Steve says as he waves his hand, not really knowing how to say it as he looks back at Billy again.

“The whole shebang.”

“Yes…”

Billy gets a detached look on his face as he nods in understanding and steps away, putting his hands in his pockets.

Honestly, if Billy wasn't so dead set on being an idiot things could probably be different right now, but they weren't different and Billy is an idiot.

So, Steve feels stuck between too many different emotions at once.

He needs to get his head back on straight, they both do.

"I'll see you at school tomorrow, okay?” Steve says and it comes out reluctant, even to his own ears.

“Ok.” Billy says, waving his hand in an absent gesture.

Neither one of them moves and Steve wants to fucking scream as he realizes he has to be the first to leave.

He turns to go grab his key that he left in the lock earlier but it's gone and he blinks as he looks up at Billy who's holding it in his hand.

“You should keep better track of your things, anyone could come along and take advantage of a pretty thing like you.” Billy says with a smug grin.
“Very funny, give it over.” Steve says, holding his palm out.

He's absently reminded of the story of the big bad wolf and how much it applies to Billy Hargrove who was a full blown predator of his own.

“As you wish.” Billy says as he drops it into his hand, tilting his head in amusement.

“Goodbye Billy.” Steve says as he finally unlocks his door and gets inside.

He goes to reach out and close his door when Billy's hand comes down on top of it, pulling it away from his grasp as they look at eachother and Steve lets his hand fall onto his steering wheel.

“Sweet dreams, Harrington.” Billy says before closing the door for him and he watches Billy walk away to his own car.

If anything, Steve just feels more confused.

Hopper pushes the plan back; something happens that makes him wary.

He starts saying he needs to get more information, that they can't go into this with blinders on.

Steve tries to ask the others why he's so jumpy all of the sudden or rather, more jumpy than usual but nobody seems to have the answer.

They all trust Hopper though and if he feels like they don't need to know then Steve trusts that they don't need to know.

Unless it's in regards to Billy.

It had been a relief to Steve but it's also agonizing because it's like having a train coming toward you but you can't move. It's just going to hit you and you know that it's going to hit you and even though you know all of these things you still let it hit you anyway.

Steve gets back into basketball.

It's usually the only time he gets to see Billy the most and Steve makes it a point to not let things get too heated and he absolutely refuses to shower with him.

That would just be a disaster, there would be no helping either one of them.

He is pointedly trying to make things very non-physical with Billy and he seems to be respecting those wishes, which is nice.

So, they avoid eachother in situations that could easily tempt them both.

They still talk, update eachother, sometimes they just bullshit and it's nice.

It fills the void, makes it bearable but he can't be around Billy for too long because the urge becomes stronger.

He starts to get stupid, sentimental, almost blurts out dumb shit that would negate all of what he's trying to accomplish by pushing Billy away and taking things slow.

They've come close to breaking the rules of this dangerous game they've been playing a couple of
times and as of lately Billy's been getting this look in his eyes like he's going to devour Steve whole.

His own will power is starting to falter. He's starting to think he shouldn't have gotten back into basketball at all.

Why did he think that was a good idea?

It's heated looks, the light and secret touches, Billy whispering into his ear to tease him and it *does things* to Steve because it's Billy and he can't help himself.

They've come close but they haven't broken yet and Steve worries it's only a matter of time.

Nancy purposefully twists her ankle one day so she can see Kirkman and when Jonathan tells him about it as they're getting ready to leave school he's *livid*.

Jonathan isn't happy either and said he tried to get through to her but she refused to listen.

It turns out she got sent home early and she's *lucky* because Steve had been ready to track her down almost before Jonathan had finished the full story.

"I'll go to her place, talk to her myself. Maybe if it's coming from both of us it'll mean something because she can't just *do* that. It's too risky, too obvious." Steve spits out, slamming his locker door out of frustration.

"Probably won't do much but it doesn't hurt to try...and that's my queue." Jonathan says, turning to walk away and Steve raises his brow as he sees Billy coming toward him.

Steve frowns, wondering why Jonathan had started making it a point to avoid Billy a lot more as of late.

He wonders if Billy has just been his usual dickhead self or if he said something pompous and stupid.

Granted, he also knows that Jonathan just straight up doesn't like Billy either so it could just be that.

He's also aware that Billy is jealous of Jonathan for some ungodly reason that Steve still hasn't been able to pull out of him no matter how hard he's tried.

It truly makes no sense to him but he knows it's also not really any of his business anymore considering they were doing the whole *just friends* dance right now.

Kinda.

He's not really sure what they are or where they are and he supposes that's his fault, not Billy's.

He also wonders if maybe Jonathan has picked up on the jealousy somehow and just doesn't want to rock the boat.

He files it all away to reassess at a later date though he sighs and shoulders has backpack.

"What has your panties twisted in a bunch?" Billy asks, bumping his shoulder as they start to walk side by side out of the school together.
"Nancy purposefully twisted her ankle today. She wanted to get intel on Kirkman." Steve huffs out, getting more and more upset the more he thinks about it.

"So? That's good, somebody needs to. Did she find out anything useful?" Billy says without a fucking care in the world, which just serves to piss Steve off even more.

"I don't know Billy. I'm going over to her place to try and talk some sense into her because apparently Jonathan tried and that didn't work, so we're coming at her from both sides." Steve says, glaring at him.

"Sounds kinky, you have fun with that one. I've gotta go grab the shithead." Billy says, obviously meaning Max as he waves his hand and goes to get into his car.

Steve just stands there making an exasperated gesture. "You're no fucking help at all!" He shouts at Billy's retreating form.

Billy just flips him off and gets into his car and drives off leaving Steve to his own devices.

When Steve gets to the Wheeler house Mike answers the door.

"Hey, is Nancy here?" He asks, hands in his pockets as he tries to keep the anger out of his voice so he doesn't take it out on the poor kid.

"Yeah, she's upstairs." Mike says, pointing back behind him and moving to let him in.

"Thanks, so uh- how are you?" Steve asks because hasn't actually seen Mike in a while and he absently hopes things are going well with him and Eleven.

"Actually, I was hoping I could talk to you if you don't mind?" Mike asks as he starts to fidget like he's nervous.

Steve blinks and nods, putting his hand out for Mike to lead the way as they go into the living room.

"How did you know Billy was the one?" Mike suddenly asks, not even letting him sit down all the way yet.

Steve sputters out gibberish nervously and hovers above the couch looking like an idiot as he looks around to see if anyone else is listening.

"You- sorry, what now?" He finally manages to get out and he knows he's turned impossibly red as he finally sits down.

"You know...after Nancy, you got with Billy. How did you know he was the one?" Mike asks, thinking he's clarifying.

*That is not-

Just no.

"Uh- wha- no, Billy and I are not- we aren't together." Steve laughs out and he's contemplating throwing himself through the sliding glass door to make a run for it.
"Well I mean just because you aren't together doesn't mean he's not the one. Hopper keeps telling me I'm young and I've got my whole life ahead of me. I think he's trying to keep El from seeing me again." Mike says and his tone gets impossibly sad all of a sudden.

Oh, that's what this is about.

Steve sighs and runs a hand through his hair. "Alright, look, things are crazy right now and he's probably just trying to keep her safe." He tries to reason, attempting to see things from Hops perspective.

"How do you handle being separated from Billy? It was agonizing before, when I thought she was gone but now I know she's here and it's worse." Mike says, getting a far off look in his eyes.

Jesus, this kid had it bad.

Not that he could blame him. His emotions in regards to Billy were the most intense he's ever felt for anyone in his life.

He'd be a hypocrite if he tried to say he doesn't understand where Mike is coming from.

"I uh- I just don't think about it. Sometimes we've gotta make the tough decision to stay away if it means protecting who we care about."

A distant part of his brain realizes he's projecting as he shoots the kid a reassuring smile.

"You've also gotta protect yourself too though, you gotta ask yourself if you want to put up with that kind of heartache, if it's worth all the trouble." Steve admits and he has no idea why he's telling Mike any of this.

Maybe it'll help, maybe it won't.

He thinks he's probably the last person that should be giving advice on relationships.

"She's worth it. I'll wait forever for her no matter what." Mike says immediately without a second thought and Steve smiles.

They were probably going to be just fine.

All of these kids were too smart for their own good and would probably take over the world someday.

"Yeah, well you gotta understand Hopper's side too, this is why he didn't want anyone to know in the first place. You get that right?" Steve asks, and he's not sure why he's on his side for once.

"I get it, I do. It just sucks." Mike says, sighing.

Steve sighs too, letting out a sad chuckle. "Yeah, it really does."

When Steve gets just outside of Nancy's room he takes a deep breath and knocks on her door.

He hears the small 'come in' from the other side and opens it and is hit with a ridiculous amount of nostalgia.
There were late nights where he remembers sneaking in through her window, lots of passion, attempting to study, the excuses to study that always turned into pretty much not studying at all and he almost wants to slap himself because it makes his heart ache.

For the first time it doesn't ache because he misses Nancy, it aches because it just makes him think of how much he misses Billy and how much better it would be if he could just see Billy right now.

Fuck, he's really got it bad too.

He silently blames Mike for making him act like this, for bringing any of it up at all.

If he'd walked up here without that conversation he'd probably just be remembering fond times from his past, with Nancy.

Yeah, of course, that's it. It's Mike's fault.

Except it's not.

"Steve?" She asks, tone surprised like she hadn't been expecting him. She has her foot propped up on the bed with a book on her lap.

"Hey, I uh-" He tries to remember why he even came here, remembers that he's supposed to be angry at Nancy. To talk some sense into her. "You hurt your ankle." he says stupidly instead.

Nancy frowns like she can tell that something is off with him. "Yeah, I wanted to see if Kirkman would tell me anything. I didn't really find anything out though so it was pretty much all for nothing." She says with a sigh.

"You shouldn't be doing stuff like that, you could have just faked it." He finally says and now he's back on track.

"I needed plausible deniability, they've gotta know we know eachother. Also, I figured you'd say that, Jonathan must have told you. We got into a bit of a fight." She says like it's some sort of huge inconvenience, to have Jonathan worry about her like this.

He feels angry all of a sudden and he's not sure why.

"Yeah well maybe if you weren't being such an idiot." He says with a frown and his eyes widen. Nancy's eyes do too as they just stare at eachother for a long time.

He's never once in his life called Nancy an idiot, would never disrespect her like that, would never dream of it and he feels awful.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to say it like that." He says, completely horrified with himself.

Nancy just blinks and gives him a knowing look. "You sure you're upset with me right now?" She asks and it sounds like she's taunting him.

"What do you mean?"

"I kind of feel like you're projecting right now, Steve." She says, chuckling as she takes her book off of her lap and sets it down next to her.
"Projecting what?" he asks with an amused snort, in complete denial.

"You and Billy still fighting?" She asks, raising her brow.

"We're always fighting" He says with a shrug.

"No you're not. You're just avoiding eachother."

"This- I'm not here to talk about Billy." Steve says, pinching the bridge of his nose as he tries to get everything back on track.

"Is it because he's putting himself in danger? I understand you wanting to pull away from him because of that." She continues on to say, completely ignoring him.

"Do you Nancy? Because you're doing the same thing to Jonathan right now but you want to sit here like he's just being silly. You aren't even taking his feelings into consideration." He says, glaring at her and yeah maybe he is projecting a little bit.

Okay, a lot.

Doesn't change the fact that he's right.

Nancy gets a big smile on her face and holds out her hand for him to take. He almost doesn't but it's Nancy so he does anyway.

"You've got it bad for him, don't you?" She asks and he feels like it's rhetorical, like she already knows the answer no matter what he says.

"I dunno Nance, I don't really wanna talk about it." He says quietly.

Why did the Wheeler's have this uncanny ability to see right through him?

Maybe he's always been an easy read.

"Okay, tell you what, I'll apologize to Jonathan because you're right. Will that make you feel a little better?" She asks and he just huffs out a laugh. "Yeah, I'm sure he'd appreciate it."

"Okay" She says, stroking her thumb across the top of his hand in a gesture that in the past would have made him want to do anything for her but now it just feels comforting, like Nancy knows him better than he knows himself, can feel his inner turmoil.

He gives her a smile that doesn't reach his eyes and says goodbye but as he's about to open the door she stops him with a "Steve?"

"Yeah?" He asks, turning back to look at her.

"It's going to be okay." She says and he wishes he could believe her.

That night Steve wakes up in a cold sweat.

He can't catch his breath and feels completely disoriented.

*Why am I having a panic attack?*
It feels strange, different even and it takes him an ungodly amount of time to realize it's not him.

It's Billy.

He'd laugh at the irony of it if it was actually funny, but it isn't.

"Don't you worry about me pretty boy, I'll be just fine. You worry about yourself." He says with a smug look on his face.

He should be mad, upset, frustrated but all he feels is concern and worry.

It was pretty clear that Billy tried to put up a front, pretend shit didn't bother him when underneath his aggressive exterior was someone who was just as afraid as everyone else.

This whole thing was just so far from funny he starts to imagine what could have possibly gotten Billy to break down.

Steve tries to calm himself first because he's worried that if he can feel Billy right now that means Billy can feel his own growing panic and he doesn't want to make things worse.

Billy had been able to help him, he could do the same.

Hopefully.

Steve closes his eyes and finds a place inside of himself between the chaos and serenity and focuses on that one single point.

He looks for the bond, searches for it and once again it's easier to find this time than last time as if he's been stretching a muscle out every time he tries.

Now that he actually knows what he's looking for it's like following a freshly paved road and he pulls.

He's between again.

Except this time he sees Billy a few feet in front of him and he's sitting in the darkness with his head between his legs.

Steve cautiously moves toward him.

"Billy?" Steve says out loud and Billy slaps his hands over his ears. The sound he makes is like that of a wounded animal and it breaks his heart, makes him want to pull the guy into his arms and soothe everything out of him.

"Get out, get out of my head!" Billy cries out.

Steve makes low shushing noises to try and calm him as he continues to move forward slowly.

He's already experienced what it's like when Billy starts falling into himself.

“Hey big guy, it's okay, you're okay." He says, placing a gentle hand on his arm.

Billy jolts his head up and tears are streaming down his face. He has that young look to him, the one
he gets when he's utterly vulnerable and afraid.

Something *bad* happened and Steve can't help the urge that rises inside of him to destroy whoever or whatever did this to him.

There's a sudden chill that settles around them and Billy starts to shiver as they lock eyes.

He can see Billy looking behind him a moment later with a confused look on his face and when Steve gets up to turn around he blinks rapidly, considering the possibility that he might be hallucinating.

There, not even twenty feet away from them is his house surrounded by trees, *Steve's* house.

It's just sitting there in the darkness as cold gusts of wind surge toward them making the tall trees sway violently.

A terrified feeling settles in his gut and chains rattle in the distance as he shakes his head and puts his hands to his ears to block it out.

“*I don't have time* for this.” He hisses out quietly.

*Billy needs* him.

“*Anyway.*” He says out loud before turning back to tend to Billy again, ignoring the display behind him, ignoring anything that *isn’t* Billy.

The chill starts to recede and Billy just looks up at him with a lost expression on his face.

Worry settles even deeper beneath his skin.

Steve doesn't hesitate and rests their foreheads together, combing his fingers through his hair soothingly.

“It's ok, I'm right here and I'm not goin’ anywhere, okay?” He whispers soothingly.

Billy whimpers and Steve opens his eyes when he feels his knees get damp.

Water starts pooling in around them and when he looks behind Billy he sees what's happening.

The beach.

The tide starts slow, coming and going as it pleases and Steve blinks, reaching his hand down into the sand underneath them, feeling it between his fingers, not unlike his last experience.

The darkness gets closer, the gentle sloshing becomes small currents that start to reach up to their waists.

*Shit.*

"Hey, hey, Billy, focus on my voice. Remember the lab, remember when you needed somewhere to go, to get away from the pain? I'm right here.” He says, trying to keep the panic out of his voice as he clutches one of Billy's hands to his chest.

Billy had reached inside of Steve that time, hiding himself within the bond and tucking himself neatly away to be shielded and cared for, protected so that he didn't have to feel what was happening to him.
anymore.

So he could just feel whatever Steve had felt.

"I'm right here, I'm not leaving you. It's okay, we'll figure it out. Whatever happens it's going to be okay." Steve says, putting his forehead back against Billy's again, trying to will him to listen, just wanting him to be okay.

Billy sobs out, shifting himself fully to be held while gripping onto Steve's shirt with the hand that was against his chest.

He slowly rocks him back and forth, chin resting on his head as he pulls him closer.

Steve isn't sure how long they stay in that position but he tilts his head and rests his cheek against the top of Billy's head instead, carding fingers through his hair as soothingly as he can.

The tide slowly starts to recede until finally he can't see it anymore.

Thank god.

The relief he feels ripples through the bond, coaxing Billy into an even more relaxed state as things become less tense, less stressful.

It's just them now.

Us.

"Look at that, see?" Steve says gently, propping his chin up on Billy's head again, rubbing his back and letting him cry it out and stay here for as long as he needs.

Chapter End Notes

The final scene of this chapter was actually not going to be in this one at all, I was actually going to have this at the beginning of the chapter after this one but I changed my mind because I'm easy and I didn't want to keep you guys waiting on it because I really love writing anything pertaining to their bond.

Also I feel like it works better in this chapter considering what I have planned for the one after this.

*rubs hands together*
Steve jolts awake violently to the sound of his alarm.

He'd been holding Billy in his arms for god knows how long when the sound began bleeding through, pulling him back to reality and just like that suddenly the illusion was broken.

It felt fucking painful.

It was like being ripped apart and Steve groans out, clutching at his head.

He almost falls out of bed except thankfully he somehow stops himself from rolling right off last second, foot catching on the floor.

A migraine slams into him as he groans even louder this time, getting up on wobbly feet as he uses his nightstand to keep upright.

It's like shards of glass are being inserted directly into his skull. He wonders if it's because they don't
have very good control of the bond yet and if it's always going to feel like that.

He hopes to god it's not the latter.

Steve goes through his normal routine of getting ready for school much slower than usual while knocking things over along the way.

He worries about Billy and wonders if he is ever going to *not* worry about him.

*That'll be the day.*

He hadn't been able to get details out of him but he does know that whatever happened it had something to do with Neil, his *piece of shit* father.

*Motherfucker.*

He thinks as he spits out his toothpaste into the sink far more viciously than is warranted and looks into the mirror with a grimace.

Getting anything personal out of Billy was like *pulling teeth.*

The guy keeps himself very guarded, doesn't like to talk about his past and Steve has respected those wishes to a degree but at some point he knows Billy will need to talk to someone.

That someone will undoubtedly be Steve. He just can't help but want that time to come sooner.

He also hopes that the splitting migraine is only on his side.

Eventually, he makes his way into his kitchen to one of the cabinets and pulls out something for the pain, popping a couple of pills.

He turns the bottle over in his hand and stares at it for a long while.

He's pretty sure there's no guide to the proper dosage you should take when you've gotten mentally ripped away from-

A realization hits him that he doesn't have a proper word for what Billy is to him.

Friend isn't right and they certainly aren't lovers. When this all first started he'd called it a connection because it felt less intimate.

It had gone well past that and straight into territory he couldn't have ever concocted even in his wildest dreams.

He pops two more pills to be on the safe side and pockets some for later, just in case and feels exhausted, like he didn't get any sleep at all.

So, he makes himself a cup of coffee because he knows he has the time and when he goes to pull a bag of sugar from his pantry he gets frustrated with it, can't seem to get it open all the way and he doesn't know why he does it but he just gets so *angry* as he slams the bag down onto the counter violently.

Maybe it's the migraine or the fact that it feels like everything is closing in on him all at once. The upside down, the lab, Nancy, the amount of times he's almost died, *Billy*, the list goes on and on.
All of these things add up and finally he feels himself snap as he takes the closest thing next to him and hurls it at the wall.

It's his coffee cup.

It shatters, coffee and porcelain pieces go everywhere as he takes in a shaky breath and runs an even shakier hand through his hair.

There's a part of him that realizes coffee might not be such a good idea when he's got a migraine and sinks to the floor, leaning back against the wall away from the mess he's made as he grabs his pulsating head with both hands.

He's lucky his parents aren't home and at work, otherwise they'd probably be losing their shit on him right now.

He closes his eyes and presses his palms into them and lets out yet another frustrated groan before getting back up; standing there staring at the mess that looked like a perfect analogy for his life right now.

He's going to be late for school now.

_Fucking great._

At least his migraine was starting to fade into a dull headache but he's not sure how the painkillers could have possibly started kicking in that fast.

_Whatever._

Steve looks at the bag of sugar on the counter and curses it into oblivion, putting it back inside the pantry and pulling out the dustpan and broom, propping them up against the counter and going under the sink afterward to grab a towel.

When he gets it over his shoulder and turns on the sink to put his hand under the water he hears a knock at his door as the doorbell rings right after.

_The hell?_

He thinks, suddenly annoyed because _who the fuck_ is knocking at his door this early in the damn morning?

A part of him prays it isn't those Mormons that keep going door to door.

Steve sighs and puts his towel on the counter after turning the sink off.

When he walks to the front door to open it, he may or may not wrench it open a bit more violently than necessary but that's just because not only is he _not_ a morning person but he's already pissed off at himself enough as it is.

His face goes through a multitude of different expressions as he takes a physical step back, blinking a few times.

"Billy?" He says incredulously, who happens to be standing at his front door at the _bum fuck of dawn_ and with a-
"Is that-" He says, pointing to the coffee Billy's holding in his hand.

"I got it for you, I thought if I felt like I got run over by a fucking truck you probably do too." He says and he actually looks nervous, like he has no idea what he's doing or why he's even here.

Steve can't help himself as he inhales deeply and it all just hits him again but for different reasons this time.

All control leaves him as his eyes water while he looks from the coffee to Billy a few times.

He knows he's crying and doesn't even care because Billy's here, came to see him, got him a fucking cup of coffee.

Are you fucking kidding me?

He takes it from him like it's a prized possession and puts it on the side table next to the door and when he looks back up at Billy the guy looks utterly confused.

Steve slowly walks toward him and puts his arms around his neck, burying his face in the crook of his neck and inhaling his scent.

He feels bad that he's getting the side of his neck and the collar of his shirt wet but he can't help it.

It's overwhelming as his resolve crumbles to the fucking ground like a pile of rubble and he tightens his grip on him.

"Are you okay?" Steve asks into the side of his neck with a shaky breath.

Billy finally puts his arms around Steve's waist and just holds him and suddenly the roles are reversed.

He has no idea how that happened, how it had gone from Steve comforting him the whole night to Billy comforting Steve and he really can't actually bring himself to care right now.

“Pretty sure that's my line.” He says gently, letting Steve have whatever he needs.

A large part of him wants to say fuck it.

He wants to stop pushing Billy away, keeping him at arm's length, pussyfooting around this whole thing.

They're both just a couple of fucking idiots and Steve wants to say all of these things but he doesn't; just stays this way, stays here in this moment because it's all he can handle right now as he holds on for as long as he can.

When Billy walks into the kitchen of Steve's place he's not expecting the mess against the wall and all over the floor.

He whistles loudly, highly impressed.

Who knew Harrington had it in him?

Certainly not Billy although he supposes it shouldn't be too shocking.
If he had to equate Steve Harrington to anything he'd equate him to an earthquake, sometimes you get foreshocks before the big one hits and if Billy had to take a wild guess he'd say this was one of them.

A large part of him is genuinely terrified of the day the big one hits.

He knows it's coming, he can feel it.

Or maybe he's just being his usual paranoid self.

He's surprised it hadn't happened sooner in all honesty though, some form of a meltdown. The guy is a tough fuckin’ cookie, much stronger than anyone gives him credit for.

Steve's sheer force of will to stand strong in the face of literal insanity is what Billy aspires to be. Not that he'll ever tell him that, he doesn't need that shit getting to his head.

"The fuck happened in here?" He asks anyway in case Steve wants to actually talk about it and unload.

He probably won't, it isn't really his style.

"I got into a fight with the sugar and the coffee cup became collateral damage." Steve tells him as he goes to sit down on the stool next to the counter with the coffee Billy had gotten him in hand, drinking it like it's the greatest thing he's ever seen.

It probably is judging from the crime scene that was his kitchen right now.

"By collateral damage you mean-" Billy goes to say only for Steve to nod his head, interrupting. "I hurled it against the wall, yeah."

Billy just nods his head while pursing his lips.

Steve makes a noise like he's just remembered something and puts his coffee down, fishing something out of his back pocket and throwing it to Billy who catches it effortlessly.

He turns it over in his palm to see pain pills.

Thank fuck.

The wake up call this morning had been a painful one and he has a dull headache at this point as opposed to the screaming migraine before he'd left his place.

The pills are greatly fucking appreciated either way.

"Cups are second cabinet from the right." Steve says, holding his own cup in hand again and making a cheering gesture with it.

Billy nods, making his way over and he doesn't really know why he did this, why he came here.

The problem is he'd woken up feeling like death warmed over and more than anything else he felt awful for pulling Steve down with him into his moment of weakness.

That feeling of being encased in warmth only to have it forcibly ripped away had shaken him in a way he wasn't expecting either.
It hurt so much worse than what he'd experienced the night before that caused his panic attack in the first place.

He's tried giving Harrington as much space as he needs but it was starting to take a toll on his psyche.

Ignoring it had been easy at first but as the days went on it became harder and harder to stay away and he knew the moment he woke up he needed to see Steve.

It physically pained him to even think of trying to stay away, boundaries be damned.

When he got here he'd expected Steve to slam the door in his face or tell him off.

Or both.

His hypocritical ass told Steve not to worry about him not too long ago and there he went; freaking the fuck out and having himself a panic attack.

The strange part is Steve hasn't even called him out on it yet so he's still kind of holding out for the bitch session to begin at any given moment.

Also, he certainly hadn't expected Steve to open the door and start crying, asking if he's the one that's alright.

Clearly Billy was not the one struggling right now.

However he's the one standing here in a kitchen like an idiot, buying coffee for a guy he's trying to win back even though he never actually had him in the first place.

Goddamn did he try that night in the parking lot though, he'd done everything in his power to keep Steve from spooking.

Except he failed and not only did he spook but any attempts afterward were met with obliviousness or they were both too fucking busy with life in general.

He doesn't blame Steve for anything though, for pulling away, keeping his distance. He understands and gets the logic in retrospect but every time they try to pull away something happens to pull them right back in.

The magnetism was impossible to ignore and he finds that he genuinely enjoys Harrington’s company anyway.

He sighs heavily as he pops the pills he'd been given after grabbing a glass and filling it with water.

When he puts the glass down he looks at Steve, taking him in.

There's exhaustion and a difference in posture like he's all pent up aggression and Billy wonders absently if he's rubbing off on the poor guy.

"Let's ditch school today." He blurts out, not thinking.

Too late now, he'd just have to roll with it.

Steve just looks at him in confusion and Billy starts worrying about getting turned down so he comes
up with a game plan on the fly before either one of them can think twice about it.

Usually if Billy catches him off guard he has a much better chance of getting him to be agreeable.

"I dunno bout’ you but I'm hungry, we can eat and go from there.” He says with a shrug.

"So that's why you don't have coffee for yourself. You planning to dine me, Hargrove?” Steve says suggestively over the top of his cup, wagging his eyebrows and the corners of Billy's mouth turn up.

Oh yeah, he was definitely rubbing off on the guy.

When they make it to the diner Billy decides on, Steve realizes this is the first time he's ever gone out to eat with him.

Or done anything like this in general.

He's reluctant to call it a date, it could have easily been Billy wanting to ditch and not have to deal with life after his rough night and Steve just happened to be there so he brought him along.

It's strange when he really thinks about it though, how little he truly knows about Billy and yet he can't imagine his life without him, doesn't remember what life had been like before Billy Hargrove.

"I'm not going to ask you for details because we're in public but I want to know what Neil did to you last night.” Steve says after they've been sat down at a booth for a bit and settled in.

He looks at Billy, tries to see if there are any marks on him but he doesn't see any that are visible and notices that Billy didn't tense up earlier when Steve had pulled him into a hug like he was in pain or anything.

He supposes that might be a good sign...possibly.

"Well, he didn't hit me. I can tell you that much right now so you can stop undressing me with your eyes there, pretty boy.” Billy says as he pours coffee from the canister into his empty cup and then into Steve's.

It's a small gesture but it still gives him damn butterflies in his stomach, Billy taking care of him.

It seemed to be happening more often.

Steve rolls his eyes and looks at the menu, wondering what he'll actually want to eat by the time the coffee that's already in his stomach has settled.

"So what's the update on Nancy's fancy footwork?” Billy asks before taking a large gulp of his coffee.

He takes it black.

Steve notates that away in the back of his mind for later.

"She said it was all for nothing, wasn't able to get anything.” He tells him with a shrug.

Maybe Steve should get waffles.
A flash of Eleven appears in his head and he can't help but smile at the thought of her. He hopes she's not getting too stir crazy and wonders if he should visit her again soon.

"Mm, that actually sucks. What's got you smiling all of a sudden?" Billy asks, raising his brow.

"I was thinking of getting waffles. Made me think of someone and if we should visit her soon." Steve says honestly as he grabs his glass of water.

"With how things are right now, probably not. Hopper's been getting an aneurysm just dealing with Mike." Billy says and Steve chokes on the big gulp of water he'd just taken.

"How did you know Billy was the one?"

"Ah, yeah Mike talked to me about it when I saw Nancy yesterday." Steve says, clearing his throat and Billy just stares at him with an 'I can't take you anywhere' kind of look.

"Hopper means well but she's a child. He's gotta find some sort of balance." Billy says absently while looking at his own menu and lightly shaking his head.

"Wow, look at you being thoughtful for once. You sick?"

"Very funny. I take you out and this is how you repay me? Ungrateful little shit." Billy says sarcastically.

"Hey, you haven't paid for me yet, there's still time." Steve says with a chuckle.

"Oh no, I fully expect you to put out after this. That's obviously my master plan." Billy says and there's a heat to his voice that wasn't there before.

"I'm not that easy, Hargrove." Steve says and he knows his face is getting red but he's more than willing to play along.

"Mm, I can be very convincing." Billy says, voice husky and it makes Steve take a deep breath to keep himself from getting an embarrassing erection in a fucking diner.

There are small miracles in the universe however because the waitress chooses that moment to take their order.

Steve isn't very religious but he sends thanks to whatever god above there is because Billy had gotten that look in his eye where he knew exactly the effect he was having on Steve and probably wanted to see just how far he could push it.

He orders the waffles and gets himself a side order of bacon, because why not?

Billy gets whatever random special they've got going on right now. He's not sure what it is because he'd stopped listening halfway through the waitress doing her spiel.

It's downright nice, being here with Billy, not fighting, not needing to worry about anything and just enjoying each others company.

He's aware it won't last, but for now he just enjoys it for what it is because that's all they can do.

Before reality has to settle back into place.
They're in the car on the way back to Steve's place when Billy finally talks about it.

"It hasn't happened in a long time. This is the first time he's done it since we moved here but back in California he'd get a certain kind of drunk." Billy says, like he's not telling his own story but the story of someone else with a detached, factual tone.

Steve just listens, letting Billy do this in his own time, doesn't want to rush him, doesn't want to somehow fuck it all up.

"I eventually got good at being able to tell when it would happen, the signs and all that-" He says with a wave of his hand, stopping for a moment to wipe at his nose absently.

"I would usually just leave for the night because all it took was the one time." He holds up his index finger and he clearly can't help the emotion that starts creeping into his voice.

"He put me in the hospital this one time and I knew from then on out what I was dealing with." He goes on to say with a small shrug of his shoulders like he had no other choice, like this was just a normal thing to put up with.

Steve can't help his involuntary sharp intake of breath as he takes in that information.

Why?

Why do that to your own son?

It doesn't make any sense, how could someone be that vicious?

"Other times I just go into my room and lock the door, like last night and he just-" Billy stops and rubs a hand over his face.

Steve wants to just pull him into his arms again.

"I wait him out. He tries to get in, bangs on the door for what feels like a fucking eternity." Billy says as he bangs on the steering wheel for emphasis. "He spouts shit at me through it until he eventually just passes out."

Steve looks at Billy's hands that have started gripping the steering wheel tightly and can't imagine what it must be like to be in such a hostile environment.

Sure, his own father doesn't give a lot of fucks but he doesn't make things hostile.

He doesn't ask what things Neil shouts at him, can tell he isn't ready to talk about it because it probably falls under that category of 'things I don't want you to make me talk about'.

He's honestly surprised Billy was willing to tell him this much.

"It just- it caught me off guard because I thought now that Susan is around it wouldn't happen again and not being in California anymore would help but Susan is seeing family and Max was at some party last night with her friends. He got that way and I just lost it." Billy says as they pull into Steve's driveway to park the car and he just stares into space, reliving the things he's talking about and probably much worse.
He isn't sure what to say so he just turns and cups Billy's face, making him turn toward him as he pulls him in and kisses him gently on the lips.

It's impossibly sweet, nothing like how they usually are: all fire, passion, and fighting.

This was purely comfort because Billy doesn't like the word sorry, isn't good with his words, would rather touch, hit, kiss or punch if it means getting his point across.

So, Steve likes to think he knows how to speak his language, has learned a little bit about him.

Billy doesn't need words, doesn't want them, doesn't want to be pitied.

Steve touches him, kisses him, conveys all that he wants him to know through it and when they pull away Billy huffs out a small chuckle.

"You are the biggest sap, you know that Harrington?"

Steve smiles.

"One of us has to be."

When they get into the house Steve sighs. He'd cleaned up his mess but left the broom, dustpan, and rag out.

He goes to put them back into their respective places in the pantry and walks over to the sink to pick up the dirty rag when he notices Billy leaned back against the wall just watching him.

Steve shakes his head, wringing it out while mouthing a 'what?' to him.

Billy doesn't answer, instead coming to stand directly behind him.

Steve can't help the involuntary reaction his body has. He tries to act calm and collected, pretend his task at hand is far more interesting but in reality he's hyper-aware of everything around him.

His mind is racing because the guy is such an unpredictable force and he never knows what to expect.

Billy grabs him by the waist, pulling him back against his chest while using his other hand to tilt his head to the side as his breath fans over his ear.

He doesn't do anything else, just waits there.

Steve can't help himself as he fidgets, wanting him to just do something.

Billy's grip tightens on his waist, stilling him and he takes a deep breath through his nose.

"I was thinking the other day." Billy finally says and it's that tone, the one that can get Steve to do anything.

"The marks I gave you are gone, we should do something about that."

Steve can't help himself as he pushes back against Billy, head lolling onto his shoulder, exposing more of his neck.
He doesn't even think, his body moves before his brain can catch up as he notices he didn't even make Billy work for it, just displayed himself immediately for him to do as he pleases.

Billy chuckles, probably noticing the exact same thing as he kisses down Steve's neck, nipping gently.

He gets down to Steve's shoulder and pulls his shirt out of the way, sucking a bruising mark onto it.

Steve shudders and grips the counter. He's so impossibly hard already that he can barely think straight and he realizes he really is easy.

He's never felt so out of his mind about someone before, not like this. It feels like his body is overclocking and all he can do is roll with it.

"You would let me do anything I want, wouldn't you?" Billy suddenly asks with a dark, heated chuckle.

Steve just groans and hangs his head down. He's pretty sure he could come just from Billy's voice alone if they tried hard enough.

He turns Steve around so they're facing and runs his fingers through his hair gently before gripping it with just the right amount of pressure, making them lock eyes.

"I asked you a question."

Oh fuck.

If that isn't the hottest thing Steve has ever heard in his life.

Okay, so...he might really like this.

He's not sure what's gotten into Billy but he's fucking here for it, totally down with whatever was suddenly happening.

A wave of lust crashes into him as he tries to remember what Billy had even said in the first place.

Would let him do anything?

Right.

"God, yes." He says reverently, not even caring anymore that he sounds fucking needy.

Billy smirks at him and let's go of his hair, moving his hands down Steve's body teasingly slow as he reaches Steve's belt, jerking him forward.

Steve grunts, brushing up against Billy's clothed erection with his own.

"Here's what's going to happen." He says as he undoes Steve's belt meticulously slow and it's just so frustrating but there's an obvious unspoken question.

He's giving Steve the chance to pull away but all he wants right now is for Billy to touch him, to do anything.

He's sick of the teasing.
This is probably his own fault in a way, he keeps pushing and pulling at Billy, leading him in whatever direction he feels is best at the time.

Luckily Billy has been patient but it was starting to look like that patience was wearing thin.

"I'm going to get on my knees and suck you dry. You okay with that, pretty boy?" Billy asks, grabbing at Steve's ass to pull him forward.

They both take a moment to breathe into eachother's mouths, savoring the friction, the electricity coursing through their veins.

The touches they've shared haven't been new by any means, it's not the first time Steve's found himself grinding against someone but for some reason with Billy everything just feels...

 Amplified.

“I certainly won't say no if that's what you want.” Steve tells him, voice pitching lower.

“Of course it is, I've been wanting to get you in my mouth for a long fuckin’ time.” Billy says breathlessly and his eyes have gone a bit wild.

Not for the first time Steve has a feeling they're experiencing the same kinds of sensations.

It doesn't make sense to Steve's brain that Billy actually wants him like this though.

He hears the words, sees the actions for what they are yet there's still that voice in his head telling him this can't be real.

Billy is far too smart for his own good, he has a heart of gold even though he'd never admit it and the soul of someone who wants to save the world.

That's another thing he'd never admit but Steve sees it, has felt it when all of Billy's inhibitions go out the window, all of those walls come down and all that's left is his essence of self.

He wants to do good, he just thinks he can't because when the walls come back up he thinks he doesn't deserve to be loved.

Someone like that, someone as capable of being whatever the fuck he puts his mind to could never want a guy like Steve.

Shit grades, can't keep it together half the time, uses far too much hairspray for it to be healthy, the list was a long one in regards to how utterly terrible he knows he can be as a functioning person.

“Hey.”

Billy says, interrupting him from his daily dose of self deprecation.

“I don't just say shit to blow smoke up your ass.”

Steve blinks, not knowing how Billy could have possibly known he'd been having a minor mental meltdown.

Otherwise known as ‘The three M’s’ he liked to call it because it seemed to be a pretty regular occurrence for him.

“Can we not talk about my ass like that when we're sucking face?” He says instead, in case he's
wrong and Billy hasn't actually magically learned how to somehow read his mind.

Wait, can we do that?

“Wow Harrington, you're such a fucking romantic.” Billy says with a snort, his hand moving to the back of his ass to grab it again playfully this time and Steve can't help the smirk he gets on his face.

He should be terrified, worried, running for the hills from someone like Billy but for some reason he doesn't feel afraid.

He just feels like...himself.

There's no reason to put up a front or to impress, no reason to be impressive, he can just be Steve. Billy seems to like him well enough, hopefully.

For now.

Billy gives him a look, like he knows. “What have I told you about thinking?”

“That it's a bad idea.”

“Am I right?”

“Probably.”

Billy shakes his head, hands cupping his face as he pulls him in for another heated kiss that makes his toes curl before pulling away and Steve may or may not try to chase after his lips.

“You gonna let me get this show on the road?” Billy asks, tone rough.

“It shouldn't feel like this.”

Steve realizes he just said that out loud a few seconds later as Billy frowns.

“I- it's intense, you make me feel...intense.” He says, trying to reassure him he doesn't mean that the way it sounded.

“Was that proper english just now?”

“I don't know how to describe it, I feel aware when I'm with you.” He clarifies, feeling a little bit embarrassed but when he tries to pull away Billy just holds onto his waist, pulling him closer.

“Oh god, please don't get sappy on me right now.” He says and Steve averts his gaze, feeling a bit out of place, like he's said too much.

So stupid, why don't you ever shut your damn mouth.

“Sorry…” He mumbles out like an idiot, not really knowing why he struggles with having any sort of filter around Billy.

“Hey whoa, that was a joke don't twist it up in that pretty head of yours.” Billy says with a grimace and Steve can't help but just gape at him.

“Wait, what?”

“I like it when you get like this, makes me feel all fond of you and shit.” Billy says flippantly but all
Steve can hear the word *fond* and he feels warm all over again as those fucking butterflies come back full force.

“How come you never told me you’re even more of a romantic than me?” Steve says, stupid smile on his face as he tilts his head.

“Very funny, Robin Williams.” Billy says with an eye roll.

Steve can’t help the laugh that comes out of him unbidden as he leans his weight into him.

“Billy.” He says, feeling all kinds of stupid right now and a little brave but still pretty fucking uncertain so he just rolls with it, risking putting his foot in his mouth.

“What now?”

“Your eyes.”

“Huh?”

“I've always really liked your eyes.”

There's utter silence as Billy stills for a long time and just stares at him like he's rebooting.

Steve remembers the saying ‘give an inch, take a mile’ and considers that maybe he should have just kept quiet instead.

Except Billy bursts into laughter, draping himself all over Steve, gripping his upper arm to keep from face planting straight into the counter before righting himself again.

“You have such a way with words.” He says, leaning back in to gently kiss at his neck and Steve doesn't know what to do, feeling flustered all of a sudden.

“I uh- I try. Oh *fuck-*” He tries to say but Billy runs his tongue over a spot at his neck, biting into it hard enough to leave a mark before whispering in his ear.

“Steve, *stop talking.*”

“Okay.” He says, immediately going pliant in his hold.

Billy drops to his knees soon after and Steve tries to tell himself not to come in his pants like an amateur.

"Do you know what I'm going to do after this?" Billy asks and Steve squeezes his eyes shut, swallowing hard and shaking his head.

"I'm going to get you into your room and pin you to your bed, get you all worked up for me again and make you come a second time." Billy says, all heat and temptation, rubbing him through his jeans and *holy fucking shit."

Steve's eyes nearly roll into the back of his head and he has to dig his fingers into Billy's arms for purchase.

"Oh fuck, *Billy.*” He breathes out, trying to get himself back under control.

He only does because he doesn't want to come in his pants before he's felt Billy's lips around him.
The hot as fuck visual he has in his brain doesn't help matters and he imagines reality will be much better.

Billy gets Steve's jeans off masterfully quick and he can't help the low whine in the back of his throat that comes out when he gets to watch a sinful mouth at his still clothed cock which he's imagined happening more times than is probably healthy.

It's the hottest fucking thing he's ever seen in his life as he slams his hand down on the counter and runs the other through his hair.

Billy relents, pulling his boxers down, thumb coming up to swipe the precome as he brings it to his lips, sucking it off in the most outward display of debauchery Steve has ever seen in his life from anyone he's ever been with.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

Billy pulls his hands away, staring up at him through his lashes and all Steve wants to do in that moment is paint his face with his come, can just imagine how beautiful he'd look.

It's primal, animalistic even and he's never been this out of his mind before but there's a possessiveness he feels when it comes to Billy.

Mine.

Once again, fucking intense.

He wonders if Billy feels it too or if it's just a Steve thing.

“I can stop if you want.” Billy says with a smug look on his face, the fucker.

“What? No, please-”

“Begging already and I haven't even gotten my mouth on you yet.” He says and honestly blue balls fucking sucks and-

“You fucking tease-”

“I wanna hear all those pretty noises you make, Harrington.”

Wonderful, so that's the catch.

“Fuck, okay.”

He can do that, he can totally do that. It'll be embarrassing but he's pretty sure Billy could tell him to jump off a cliff right now and he'd do it.

His mind gets even hazier with lust and for a moment he tilts his head up to look at the white ceiling when he feels the first sign of wetness at his cock.

He groans low when Billy takes him down his throat almost immediately as if he was made for it and Steve strings together a line of curses.

He knows he's not going to last, it's going to be embarrassingly fast.

There's just no way he can draw this out.
It's unlike anything he's ever experienced.

Usually in his own sexual escapades he's the giver, likes bringing pleasure to who he's with so it's foreign that Billy seems to be a lot like that as well.

People don't take care of him and usually if they try, it's not like this, they're not this attentive to his body.

With Billy it feels like he's being worshipped, he's savoring every second, enjoying himself and it's kind of scary but only because Steve's never experienced it before.

It helps that Billy is eager and skilled, far more skilled than he is and maybe he should be a little worried by that but right now it's fucking magnificent and while Steve does last a little longer than he thought he would, he still grips a hand into Billy's hair a little too fast for his liking, bites down into his own lower lip and comes down Billy's throat.

Except he just takes it.

A part of Steve expected him to just spit it out, give the universal indicator of resistance by pulling off or something.

A lot of the chicks he's been with have told him they don't like the taste so he doesn't ever push it.

Billy however laps at him like a fucking pornstar and Steve can't help the arousal that scorches itself into him with such an intensity he almost questions whether or not he just had another orgasm.

He has to pull away from Billy who seems very content to just drink him to the very last drop and that's the hottest fucking thing Steve has ever seen in his life.

Billy lifts himself up, lifting Steve's jeans up with him. He doesn't button them but takes out the buckle instead, throwing it onto the counter behind them as they just hang low around his waist.

Billy wastes no time, immediately going to kissing him again like he's starving for it.

Steve can taste himself on his lips and his list of hottest fucking things is quickly getting longer and longer.

He reaches down eventually, undoing Billy's belt buckle and starts stroking him through his jeans.

It's downright exciting, the idea of getting Billy hot and bothered for him which he lets happen for a while until hands grab at Steve's wrists, making him stop, leading them upward and he takes the hint, wrapping his arms around his neck instead.

Billy makes good on what he said before and he feels them start to move.

It's a joint effort, it takes a lot of teamwork, embarrassing tumbling and making out on the stairs until he's finally on his back, in his room, on his bed.

Billy hovers over him, staring down looking like the best kind of dream.

It's reminiscent of the last time they were here and got into that fight after that dinner at the Byers place.

Billy must notice too because he mirrors it, tucking his legs underneath Steve's like last time, pinning
his hands to the bed but this time he buries his face into the crook of Steve's neck.

"Do you know how badly I wanted to just kiss you? It's how I wanted to shut you the fuck up when we last did this." Billy whispers out, chuckling. Steve smiles and barks out a laugh.

So it had been on purpose.

"Honestly, I had no idea. I was just pissed off at you that night." He admits.

"Mm, I know, I almost let you hit me." Billy says, kissing his throat and lightly biting at his adams apple.

"Wow, how generous." Steve teases, thrusting his hips up against Billy, causing the best kind of friction, making them both groan which Steve considers an accomplishment.

"You're talking way too much." Billy says after he recovers.

"You started it." Steve replies childishly, pulling him in for more kissing as he worries his bottom lip between his teeth for a few seconds.

Billy uses one hand to pin both of his wrists together as the other one comes down around his neck, applying light pressure as he licks into his mouth in a filthy display of dominance.

Honestly, Steve just wants to touch Billy, make him feel as good as he does right now. It's insane the way he makes him feel, it's almost too overwhelming.

"Let me touch you, please." He breathes out heavily, hand still around his throat and he's getting close enough to really start to beg if he needs to.

He could get his wrists free if he really wanted to, they both know that but it's Billy's game right now and he makes the rules.

Steve doesn't want to break them, wants to play this out, let him have the control he wants.

Billy just chuckles and says. "You sure you know what you're doing?"

"Won't know unless I try." Steve says with a shrug or as much of one as he can manage with Billy's weight on top of him.

"That's the spirit Harrington, why don't you bring this kind of enthusiasm to our fuckin' basketball games?" Billy says with snort before nuzzling into the crook of his neck again.

"Basketball doesn't suck me off like a pornstar." Steve retorts.

"Touche."

Billy let's go of his wrists while the other hand grabs his hip and Steve takes advantage, running his fingers through his hair, pulling him back in as he smiles into their kiss, can't help himself because it's just a thing he's always done when he's happy.

When they pull away to breathe Steve nips right under his jaw, getting a groan out of him as he feels himself get braver and braver by the minute.

"I think I really like you.” He whispers, wondering how flustered he can get Billy this time.
In true fashion he hears Billy grunt, pulling back so they can stare at each other. “First off, if I suck dick that good maybe I should start looking into the profession and secondly, I'm not good at the sappy worded shit.”

“No way, I had no idea.” Steve says sarcastically with a snort, jolting the next moment when his hip gets pinched as he divulges into light laughter.

“You're being a fuckin' brat, you know that? All fuckin’ day I've had to deal with your shit and I took you on a date and everything.” Billy says, lightly tickling at his ribs, making him laugh even harder as he pushes at Billy's shoulders but he can't seem to get the upper hand before finally giving up and the tickling relents.

“Wait, it was a date?” Steve says next when he recovers, brain catching up.

“Did you think I asked you for shits and giggles?” Billy asks, brow raised and his hands have started absently tracing up under Steve's shirt like he doesn't even know he's doing it.

He certainly doesn't mind.

“I thought...I dunno, I figured it was lucky coincidence or something.” He tells him honestly, looking off to the side.

“Lucky coincidence I brought you coffee, I drove to your house, Steve.” Billy says after grabbing his chin and forcing them to lock eyes.

“I figured you already wanted to ditch and had me tag along.” Steve says quietly, swatting his hand away except Billy just leans more of his weight into him instead, grabbing his face with both his hands to keep him still.

“Tag along, like you're just some random fuckin’ guy I hit up or something?”

“Uhh…”

“Our souls aren't connected or anything, I didn't spend last night sobbing like a child into your arms, or spend three days in hell with you or some shit and live to tell the tale, as if we aren't soulmates or whatever.”

Oh.

Billy seems to realize what he just said, looking utterly horrified with himself and Steve can't help the big dopey grin he gets on his face as he lifts a hand to rub circles into one of Billy's wrists.

“Soulmates?”

Somehow it doesn't shock him like he thinks it should as he tastes it on his tongue. It feels a lot like when you're trying to think of a word you've forgotten and you finally remember what it was.

“I- I don't fuckin’ know, it's just what popped into my head, you were the one throwing around that we’re bonded and shit.”

It's not often Billy stutters, let's his filter get away from him completely. He's pretty deliberately an asshole most of the time and Steve tries to sear this moment into his brain.

He imagines he won't get many of them.

Especially since Billy is starting to get this look on his face like he just sucked on a lemon and Steve
feels the need to reassure him.

“No, I uh- I like it...it feels right.”

“Of course it does, I'm never gonna hear the end of this.” Billy says with a groan, sitting up to straddle him as he runs a hand over his face in exasperation.

“You said it, not me, you called us soulmates.” Steve says as he threads their fingers together because those butterflies are back and if he doesn't hold his hand or something he feels like he'll shake apart.

The best part is Billy let's him as if it's no big deal.

“Things were so sexy before this, I'm literally flaccid at this point.” He says and Steve tilts his head, looking up at him fondly.

“You said you were gonna make me come again, you took charge and everything. It was hot as fuck.” He tells him as he lets go of his hands and grabs his wrist, tugging him forward.

He needs Billy closer, doesn't like him being so far away and he obliges as they kiss gently again for a few moments.

“I've literally never had someone kill my boner faster than this, congratulations Harrington.” Billy says between kisses.

Yet he's still here, still sensually grinding down on him.

He's actually half hard from what Steve can tell.

It's fucking adorable that he feels the need to put up a front but for some reason any nervousness Steve had been starting to feel starts melting away like butter.

He likes this, enjoys their playful and comfortable banter so he bites back again, keeps it going because he feels like he could stay here all day with Billy on top of him, just listening to his voice.

“I think it's cute how you try to pretend like you aren't super fucking into me.” He says, tone smug.

“A few moments ago you had no idea I took you on a date.” Billy retorts and okay, he might have a bit of a point.

“That was before you called me your soulmate.” Steve whispers into his ear as Billy groans out, resting his head against his shoulder.

“I fucking hate you.” He says, tone muffled into the fabric of Steve's shirt as he realizes they're both far too clothed.

“No you don't.” Steve says moving his hands down Billy's chest to tug at his shirt and gets with the program as they both lift themselves up to get their shirts off, throwing them in wildly random directions.

“I really do.” Billy huffs out except he pulls him into another kiss like he can't get enough.

“I think you really, really don't and you should shut up and let me touch you.” Steve says as he maneuvers them so he's on top of Billy instead, undoing his belt buckle this time.

“Well, if this is all it took to get you this hot for me maybe I don't regret it-”
“Billy, shut up.” Steve says, giving him a pointed look.

“Shutting up.” He replies, putting his hands up in surrender.

Steve struggles at first but only because Billy starts getting even more tactile, even more touchy than before like a floodgate has suddenly been opened but eventually he gets his pants off.

The nervousness starts creeping back up when he's finally got a hand around Billy, using his precome to ease the way a little bit but not completely but his face is scrunched up in pleasure as he reaches a hand down to cup his face gently before running his fingers through his hair.

He leans into the touch for a moment before finally getting his mouth around Billy's cock and the response is immediate. He only gets the head in and feels it twitch in his mouth as Billy arches his back a bit and Steve has to pin him down by his hips.

Billy mumbles a 'sorry' and digs his palms into his eyes and Steve thinks he can hear him cursing under his breath.

Steve could definitely get used to this.

It's a bit strange and a little foreign but he's definitely eager, wants to show Billy he's willing to learn and honestly he just likes being with him, experiencing things with him that he never has before.

It's nice that Billy seems to be enjoying himself because Steve honestly has no idea what the fuck he's doing.

*It'll be like riding a bike.*

Okay, bad analogy but still-

Billy huffs out a breath like its been punched out of him as he grips a hand into his sheets.

“Fuck, you're so fucking pretty like this. You have no idea how beautiful you look right now.” He choke's out and Steve starts to feel warm all over and he can feel the flush on his chest as his blood rushes south, filling him back up again at the words.

He sinks down a bit further, has him about halfway into his mouth as he uses his hand to make up for what he can't get to.

Steve knows what he likes on himself, has watched the girls he's been with enough times to understand the basic gist.

He starts experimenting, seeing how far down he can take him down his throat and every time he makes a choked off sound he gets a whine that comes from deep in Billy's throat.

Billy let's him, uses encouraging words and is downright sweet.

Although he supposes any guy would be when you've got your lips around their cock.

He starts using his other hand to trail his fingers up and down Billy's thigh and he can feel goosebumps rise under his touch.

“Please, Steve—”

He almost has to stop, almost needs a moment to grind against his bed because Billy begging is something he never knew he craved.
It drives him on to give him what he needs, the strained weight in his loose pants becomes an afterthought as he doubles his efforts.

He's not able to comfortably take Billy all the way yet but he supposes with more practice he'll do well enough in the future.

Regardless, what he lacks in experience he makes up for in eagerness as he uses his hand to pump at Billy, working his head around his tongue because that's where Steve knows he likes attention focused the most so he's pretty sure it's probably similar for other guys too.

“Oh god, yes- just like that.” Billy says, confirming his suspicions.

He keeps up the effort without relenting and Billy’s breathing gets louder and louder when he suddenly grips a hand into his hair, pulling him off.

“I- I wanna come on your pretty face.” Billy growls out and holy shit he remembers earlier when he'd wanted to do the same fucking thing to him and fuck-

“Yes-” He says a little too quickly and Billy full blown moans, gently grabbing his chin and tilting his head up slightly as he thumbs over his bottom lip.

Steve doesn't think, goes off of baser instincts as his tongue comes out to pull the digit into his mouth while looking up at Billy through his lashes, still using one hand to pump at him, wanting to keep him keyed up like this for him.

“Oh fuck, you're so perfect.” Billy groans out wantonly as he puts a hand over Steve's and he doesn't take control back, simply places his hand on top as if he wants to feel it too.

“Steve, I'm so close.” He chokes out and it only takes him a couple more seconds as if he's not expecting his own orgasm to hit him and Steve closes his eyes, feels it hit his face and it's just as satisfying as he thought it would be.

Being able to get Billy to this point, being the reason he can let go like this, it's fucking hot.

He feels a thumb rub circles into his cheek, smearing the come and even more heat builds inside of him as he reaches down to palm at his own erection for a moment.

He hears Billy make a choked off noise.

“You have no idea how incredible you look right now.” He says in awe and Steve can't help the blush that rises to his face as he reaches off his bed to grab a nearby shirt, wiping the come off and feeling immensely glad that it didn't get in his hair.

“I can't believe you actually let me do that.” Billy says after a moment, pulling him forward so that Steve is straddling him once more.

“I...wanted to do it to you earlier.” Steve admits, running a hand through his hair.

“I had a feeling you'd be the type. Next time, promise.” Billy says with a snort, looking completely blissed out.

“I'll hold you to that.” He says and it's a nice contrast from this morning.

He'd assumed the day would just stay shitty but he's been pleasantly disproven.

“Mm, for now I still need to make you come again.” Billy says, flipping them over all of a sudden.
Honestly, he'd forgotten completely and the pleasure he'd felt from giving pleasure to Billy was more than enough for him.

Billy clearly has other ideas however as he pulls his loose pants off with ease, wrapping a hand around him and breathing into the crook of his neck as Steve feels lips at his ear a moment later.

He definitely doesn't waste his time and Steve finds that he really doesn't mind.

“I wanna open you up for me next time, has anyone ever done that for you?”

Next time.

Steve's brain takes a detour and his statement from earlier turns moot as he feels arousal slam into him.

“N- no…” He breathes out when Billy moves his wrist in the best kind of way and his nails dig into his shoulder as his legs fall open further, giving him more room.

“I’m gonna make you feel so good, gonna take care of you.” Billy whispers into his ear and he can feel his smirk.

The fucker clearly knows the effect his voice has and Steve can't find it within him to complain as he lets out a whimper.

It's pathetic that he's probably going to come any second, mostly because Billy is whispering in his ear like this, getting him worked up.

“I want to ruin you. You're like a wet fuckin’ dream and I keep thinking I'll wake up and none of this will have been real.”

It's a little embarrassing but that's what does it for him for some reason, tilts him over the edge and he's pretty sure he's already been ruined for anyone else.

It's probably a stupid thing to think, they've barely done much but already nobody else compares. There's no one else that invades his mind the way Billy does, makes him crave everything.

“Guess you'd like that, huh?” Billy says with a chuckle as he moves to get up, reaching for a shirt to wipe his hand off onto before crawling back into bed.

Steve realizes he's gonna need to do plenty of laundry after this and finds that he really doesn't mind all that much.

“You're fucking filthy, Hargrove.” He says as they both settle in together side by side and Steve pulls the covers up around them.

“Look in the mirror, Harrington.” Billy says as he lays down on his back, puts an arm behind his head and closes his eyes.

Steve turns over to look at him and takes note of the fact that they didn't even do the whole awkward ‘hey, I should get going’ dance that people usually play but instead immediately settled down into bed as if they've been doing it for years.

It's nice.

A little bit scary too.
Billy opens his eyes and turns to look at him like he wants to say something and Steve looks back in confusion.

“That place you brought me to when I was having my panic attack...what was it?” Billy finally asks.

For some reason he had assumed Billy knows what that place is, has just assumed he can do it too but from his tone Steve's starting to question if that's true.

“Oh...the in-between?” He replies with a frown.

“The what now?” Billy asks, scrunching up his nose in confusion.

“That's what I call it, the place between.” Steve says with a shrug.

“Between what?”

“Everything and nothing.”

“That doesn't make any fuckin’ sense.”

Steve sighs and turns on his back to look up at the ceiling fan rotating above them, trying to think of a way to properly describe this without sounding insane.

He's pretty sure that ship has sailed.

“The Mind Flayer took us to some place outside of time, remember?” He starts with, hoping it'll be a good comparison.

“Right...okay.” Billy says as if he's just agreeing to agree but Steve keeps going because maybe it's just taking him a second to catch up.

“It's like that, but it's ours.”

“You lost me.”

Steve purses his lips, trying to think of a way to describe it without divulging into riddles.

“It's a place for our bond.”

Billy still looks at him like he's insane so he simply blurts out whatever he can think of next.

“It's us.”

Somehow there's dawning in his eyes as if that just explained everything and he's not sure why.

“Okay, for some reason I kinda get it but how do you know any of this?”

Steve blinks.

Actually...he has no idea how or why he knows these things.

“I...don't know.”

Billy just nods in understanding as if that somehow makes sense and maybe it does, maybe he does know things and doesn't know why he knows them.

“You pulled me there, one second I was on my bedroom floor and the next I was in that place.” Billy
tells him and Steve's heart aches at the thought of him all alone with nobody to help comfort him.

He's glad he was able to be there for him, bring him back from that precipice.

“You can't do it too?” Steve asks curiously.

“No.”

“Have you tried?”

Billy gets a thoughtful look on his face as he shakes his head.

“When I helped you through your panic attack it was nothing like that.”

“That's true.”

That experience had been far more emotional, Steve could feel that someone else was there with him but he couldn't see him.

“Wanna talk about the fact that your house was behind you in that place?” Billy asks and Steve feels his blood run cold as his mind shuts down and he feels himself start to breathe heavily.

“No.”

Billy stares at him for a while and he can see it out of his peripheral that he's being dissected. Every nuance of a reaction is being catalogued in that beautiful brain of his and Steve wants to pull away, leave, run as far as he can.

He's too smart.

After a few more seconds he feels a hand at his wrist and jolts, looking over at Billy threading their fingers together.

“Hey, it's fine. I'm not gonna force you to talk about it.”

It's not what he's expecting and feels every ounce of tension leave him.

“Okay, thank you.” He says, a little mesmerized as he watches Billy bring his hand to his lips, kissing the back of it gently.

That immense sensation of safety curls around him like a warm blanket as he turns back over to face Billy again.

“Thank you for a wonderful day, by the way.” Steve tells him, smiling as he squeezes his hand.

“Nice segway.” Billy says with a snort, putting their joined hands down between them.

“I'm serious.”

“I know. Thanks for keepin’ me from doing something really stupid.”

Steve frowns as he unthreads their fingers, making Billy lay his palm out so he can trace it gently with his fingertips.

“What do you mean?”

“I usually do dumb shit after...stuff like last night.” Billy says and Steve can feel him shiver as his
eyes track the movements.

“Oh...anytime.” He says a little sheepishly, not really all that used to Billy being candid and vulnerable with him outside of the bond.

He supposes that Billy might not see the point anymore after something so...intimate.

Billy gets a look on his face Steve hasn't ever seen before, he's not sure what it means so he just continues tracing his palm lightly until he threads their fingers together again, squeezing tight.

Steve can't help but smile up at him, shifting closer so they're breathing the same air as they lock eyes.

It's silly but it brings such a deep form of comfort he can't stop himself.

For everyone else Steve struggles to keep eye contact for prolonged periods of time, it feels too intimate but with Billy it doesn't feel intimate enough.

Eyes are the window to the soul but he's already seen inside of the soul laying next to him more than once. It's as close as they can get to that same feeling and still it doesn't feel like enough.

They stay that way until the exhaustion finally hits and he watches Billy's eyes close, falling asleep.

He has half a mind to set his alarm before doing the same.

For the second time today Steve's alarm jolts him awake and for a moment he doesn't know what's going on or where he is.

He groans and presses the button to turn it off when he turns back over and sees Billy glaring at him.

"Good afternoon, sunshine." Steve says jokingly as Billy just snorts.

"Why the hell'd you set an alarm?"

"So that my parent's won't come home, see your car in the driveway and wonder who the fuck is in their house." He answers like it's obvious, because it is.

"Yeah alright, that's fair." Billy says, running a hand through his own messy hair and Steve just stares at him with a stupid smile on his face.

When Billy notices he turns to look at Steve and smiles back, pointing at him.

"Fucking sap, that's you."

Steve just shrugs in a 'guilty as charged' sort of way.

"That little Snowflake dance is tonight." Billy says all of a sudden after stretching a bit.


"Yeah well I gotta take Max and I bet you she's gonna dance with fucking Sinclair." Billy says with a grimace.

"I don't get you, just because he's black you hate the poor kid. You know how fucked up that is?"
Steve says, frowning at him.

Billy just turns to him with a look of accused shock on his face. "Black- wha- of all the fucking things- I don't give a shit that he's black." Billy says, like he can't believe he just said that.

"Oh, so what's your beef with him then?" Steve says rolling his eyes, not really believing him.

"I see this little shit talking to Max one day and you know what I saw, Harrington?" Billy goes to say, pointing at him.

"What's that?" Steve says, entertaining whatever excuse Billy has come up with and he's highly amused at how worked up he is about this.

"I saw us. You and me, a couple of fucking players. He gets her all worked up, says some shit to her and she comes stomping toward the car all pissed off, but that's what we do. We act like douchebags, pretend we don't care, get them pissed off and that's how we get them. Works every time." Billy says, using his hands very expressively as he snaps his fingers at the end and Steve can't handle the laughter that bubbles out of him because he said the same shit to Dustin.

“Didn't work very well on me in the parking lot.” Steve says with a smirk.

“Oh fuck you, it totally did. You just like to play hard to get and drive me up the fucking wall so you can get the satisfaction of seeing me follow you around like a lost fuckin’ puppy.”

"Alright, okay, you've got me there but I have never been a player." Steve finally says when he can get his laughter under control as he wipes the tears from the corners of his eyes.

"I heard how you got Nancy, you horny little fuck." Billy says and there's no real heat to it, if anything he's amused and Steve can't help the new bout of laughter that comes out of him as he holds his sides.

"Okay, okay, fine, you win."

"Damn right I do. I might murder Sinclair tonight." Billy says and Steve puts his hand on his arm. "Come on, you really think little ole' Lucas is a player?" He asks him honestly.

"Yes." Billy simply says.

Steve realizes he'd been wrong about him.

He'd thought he didn't give a shit about Max but it was pretty clear he was just unbearably overprotective of her, which honestly explained a lot.

It explained a little too much actually. How he was always so willing to destroy his own personal relationships if it meant keeping the people inside of his circle safe, even if he went about it the wrong way most of the time.

"Alright, well I'm taking Dustin tonight so behave. Don't make me land you on your ass."

He wonders if he'll have to keep Billy from killing a child.

“That’s cute, Harrington. I'd like to see you try."
"Don't tempt me, Hargrove."

That night when he drops Dustin off, assuring the kid he looks great after giving him the grand ole' Steve pep talk; he sees Nancy through the window and smiles.

It's almost weird that when he sees her now there's no ache.

Just fondness.

She's his friend, his best friend and he's actually started thinking that Jonathan has warmed up to him too.

When he turns his head he sees Hopper and Joyce leaned against her car, talking amongst themselves and Steve smiles because there's only one reason Hopper would be here.

Looks like Hopper found that balance.

He's happy for Mike, almost wants to go inside and cheer him on but knows he'd just embarrass the kid and he doesn't wanna mess up his game.

Granted, Mike doesn't need any help in that department because Eleven is just as crazy for him as he is for her.

He spots Billy leaned up against his car further down and parks next to him.

He's smoking a cigarette as usual and he looks pissed.

Well, Billy always looks pissed but Steve can tell the difference.

"You haven't murdered any children while I haven't been looking right?" Steve asks as he gets out of the car and Billy just glares at him. "Not yet, she made me promise to fuck off so whatever."

Steve just rolls his eyes and pops his hood and then his trunk.

Billy raises a brow while taking a puff from his cigarette.

"I need to put oil in my car." He explains to the inquiring brow and Billy just shrugs as he helps him latch his hood up, taking the cap off for him while Steve walks around to the back of the car to grab his oil.

When he goes to prop open his trunk he just stands there for a really long time and stares.

He rubs his eyes a couple of times too, for good measure.

Steve likes to think he's gotten used to his own freak outs and panic attacks to some degree but he supposes hallucinations must have just been late to the party.

He purses his lips and closes his trunk, takes a step back and goes around to his driver side to pop it open again while Billy looks at him like he's insane.

When he walks back over to look inside again he's hoping it will have broken the illusion his mind was creating in front of him.
It didn't.
Okay.
Right.
This is happening.

He might be freaking the fuck out a little bit now as his palms start to sweat and he starts visibly shaking.

"Billy?" He chokes out and it sounds frantic and pathetic, even to his own ears.

He sees Billy in his peripheral already starting to walk toward him, putting out his cigarette as he just lets out a 'hn?' noise.

"Am I hallucinating?" He asks because second opinions are good.

Billy gives him what might be considered a look of concern as he walks over and looks down inside of the trunk.

He hears Billy take in a deep breath like it's been punched right out of him.

So, he isn't hallucinating then.

"What the actual fuck?" Billy whispers in absolute disbelief and that's pretty much all Steve can think too.

Inside of his trunk are the bloodied bat and bent crowbar that had been left behind from the upside down.

Chapter End Notes

Oh man, finally, finally! Do you know how long I've had that last scene written? It's a long time.

Also finally addressing the racism? Only took me like 17 chapters jesus.

So Dacre thinks Billy isn't actually racist and personally I'm still not entirely convinced and while I did go back and watch the scene and what I wrote into the story makes sense I'm still just like "Ok you say that but you're not the one writing the show" so Billy could easily be racist in canon but for the sake of Dacre and the sake of my story we're going this route lol.

Also god this chapter was all kinds of tedious, it was so delicate I ended up having to stop myself half way through and just go to sleep and wake up refreshed to finish the rest because it was taxing and just wow.

I love the chapter, I'm happy with how it came out, it was just this huge beast in regards to Billy and Steve and making sure I got every little subtle nuance that I'd been leading up to thrown in and making sure it was all done correctly.
*lays down on the ground*

*2019 Ceru Log*

I'm looking at this old note and facepalming.

Why was I happy with it? IT SUCKED.

Anyway, now I've got this new version to probably eventually hate LOL
"I don't understand." Steve says and he feels like he should be freaking out more but it feels too surreal as they both continue to stare into the trunk.

Billy is silent for a very long time and that makes Steve even more nervous than the sight of the bat and crowbar.

He tries to think about it logically, considers the idea that they might be fake, it could be a prank.

They don't look fake.

Who put them there?

The Chicago group?

That wouldn't make any sense.

They wouldn't know anything about these two items, wouldn't know their significance.

There's only two people that could possibly have knowledge of their existence.

Steve and Billy.

That's it.

He can't wrap his head around how they got here though, more than anything else.
Forgotten, left behind, never to be seen again in another dimension yet here they were staring them right in the face.

Steve has half a mind to look around, look for anyone suspicious but there's nobody that catches his eye.

"When's the last time you opened your trunk?" Billy finally asks as Steve whips his head around to look at him.

He ponders the question because he's not sure. It's been a while and he tries to back-track events in his head.

It's not exactly pertinent information he keeps floating around in there.

"Come on, think." Billy says and the tone in his voice is slightly panicked and Steve can tell he's a little freaked out too.

It just makes it worse because if Billy's freaked out and letting it get to him then that's how you know shit is bad.

This is a guy who got stuck in the upside down and took it like a fucking champ.

_Ah!_

Dustin.

He remembers _Dustin_ in his trunk last.

"When Dustin jacked my keys. He took his bike out of my trunk and these weren't here." He says, nodding.

Billy just furrows his brow and purses his lips. "That still gives us a pretty big window of time."

"We should go talk to Hopper." Steve says and they're lucky the guy is further down the lot, making this whole thing a little bit easier to wrap his head around.

When he starts to walk away Billy grabs his wrist as if it's a knee-jerk reaction, yanking him back so hard that he stumbles.

"_Hey-_"

"I'll go get him. You just sit tight pretty boy." Billy says after letting him go to slap him lightly on the face and Steve swats him away.

There's no chance to respond as Billy starts walking away briskly and Steve watches his retreating figure with minor confusion.

"That makes no sense!" He yells out to him, causing him to turn around and walk backwards as he gives him a full body shrug.

"Shouldn't you be putting oil in your car?" Billy yells back before turning around again.
Oh yeah, that is why he opened his trunk in the first place.

It's a welcome distraction as he pulls some of the oil out that's tucked near the back behind everything else and grimaces at the items of interest.

He stares at them for a little bit longer, willing them to disappear because this was the last thing he wanted to deal with right now.

He really thought things were finally starting to calm down.

It doesn't take a fuckin' genius to be able to tell very quickly the road this is all about to go down when Steve starts to walk away toward Hopper.

Internally there's a moment of absolute panic as he curses himself for acting thoughtlessly.

When he yanks Steve back a little too hard he sees the beginnings of confusion creeping up into his expression.

He wonders if he's already given himself away considering Steve has some uncanny knack for seeing right fucking through him.

Luckily it seems that he's too scattered and stuck in his own thoughts to notice.

Hopper had mentioned on more than one occasion how much easier it would be to use Richards as their entry point into this whole mess of a situation.

Having the bat and crowbar with blood on them was something they could use as an excuse to visit the lab, run tests.

Find out if it's fake or not.

The possibilities are endless in how they could swing this to their advantage if they play their cards right.

Sure, it's disconcerting but it was always best to find a silver lining.

Hopper had personally wanted the lab to pan out because of how much easier it is for a place like that to pull off a potential kidnapping when it already has a history of being totally fucked up anyway.

Billy stood his ground however.

If they didn't have to go to the lab then that was his preference.

He still tries not to think about what it was like to be inside of that place and if he never has to see it again or step foot inside of it his life will be set.

Hopper of course whined and complained about how much harder going through the cop would be but ultimately he respected Billy's wishes.

Something had changed recently though.

They were a go for the plan but a couple days had gone by and the Chief started to spook for some
unknown reason.

Billy assumes going down the cop route had unearthed information that threw Hopper off kilter.

The problem is he has no idea what it could possibly be.

The Chief had become tight-lipped, locking that shit up all nice and pretty with a bow on top, sending it off somewhere else to never be seen again.

At least that's what it seemed like to Billy.

He'd even tried talking to Joyce on the down-low, tried using her compassion for him to his advantage but she didn't seem to know anything either.

Hopper's clearly hiding something, keeping them all in the dark and Billy doesn't like it one fucking bit.

Now his hand was being forced, he'd have to start playing along on terms that weren't his own anymore.

Not a good day overall.

Well, maybe not all bad. He'd gotten to spend most of it with Steve so at least there was that.

Billy isn't stupid though.

The logical road will be the lab.

_Fucking fantastic._

The bat and crowbar were probably placed there by the Chicago group or something, he's not fucking sure and he doesn't really care.

It could have even been planted by the lab themselves to freak Steve out and make it more appealing to finally show up to the lab.

The whole thing was probably a fuckin’ trap.

He still can't wrap his brain around how they'd gotten a hold of the bat and crowbar in the first place.

Nobody could possibly know they exist.

Even if they're fake it's just not possible.

Something wasn't adding up.

_I'm missing something._

It's infuriating but he can't stand around with his thumb up his ass so he files it away in the back of his mind to access at a later date.

There are more important things to worry about right now.

He suddenly gets an idea as he reaches Hopper and Joyce and he must have a look on his face
because they frown at him.

"We have a problem."

"Steve's going to try and turn himself into bait. You aren't going to let that happen." Billy states after explaining everything to them.

"How do you propose I do that?" Hopper asks, tone clearly amused and Billy's just glad he's not being fought on the matter.

Yet.

All he has to handle is Steve, which is an endeavor in and of itself.

"We pretend they were found in my car." Billy says and he wants to leave no room for argument. Make it simple. Clean-cut. Get it done.

They don't need Steve to try and turn it around on himself because he's a fucking idiot who's going to try to do exactly that.

Billy was already mentally preparing himself for it.

Over my dead body.

It takes a moment for Hopper to catch on but Billy can pinpoint the moment understanding dawns on his face.

"I'll throw them off that we know. If they did put them in that trunk they might not want to try anything stupid and we'll know if it was them or not." Hopper says voicing Billy's exact thoughts.

Except for the part about knowing if it's them. Billy doesn't see how it could be them.

No matter how strange it may be it's impossible that they could have acquired the bat and crowbar with the gate still closed.

There's a new player, there's gotta be.

For all they know there could even be other Eleven's running around out there in the big ole' world.

It's narcissistic to assume Indiana is the only place affected by all of this crazy interdimensional shit.

Except wouldn't there have been more information at this point on a more global scale?

Strange occurrences in other states?

Perhaps he just hasn't been paying attention or looking for the right signs.

Billy isn't sure and he also isn't much for conspiracy so he stops himself before he starts to go down
that rabbit hole to focus on the task at hand because regardless of anything else, getting Hopper on board was his only chance of deterring Steve.

Honestly, he'll probably listen to Jim in the long run; it's what Billy is hedging his bets on but he's also fully aware that this is Steve they're dealing with.

"He'll still try to fight you on it but he'll eventually listen to you. He sure as fuck won't listen to me." Billy voices out loud, knowing with absolute certainty he's right.

All he had to do was keep his mouth shut and let Hopper do the work.

Easier said than done.

Hopper snorts and Joyce has an amused smile on her face.

"Well, I'll see what I can do." Hopper says and Billy shakes his head, expression turning thunderous.

Both Hopper and Joyce look at him in confusion.

If there's anything Billy hates it's when people don't take him seriously.

He looks over at Steve across the lot to make sure he isn't watching or making his way over to them and he's glad to see his back toward them, still working on the car.

"Chief let's be honest, you don't know me and I don't know any of you all that well." Billy says with a shrug.

Now he's got their attention.

"If you're sending me to my death you need to start asking yourself what's going to give you a clearer conscience."

They both frown and share a look.

"Someone you don't give a shit about who none of you really care for?" He asks rhetorically, pointing a finger to himself.

Because it's true, he knows it is. He came to terms with it a long time ago.

He's just collateral damage that got pulled into their little supernatural club of weirdos through unfortunate happenstance.

Steve has always been right about that one thing no matter how bad he felt about saying it.

Nobody would have saved him if Steve hadn't been there.

He pauses to look into Hopper's eyes, willing him to see reality.

"Or Steve, who those kids look up to like the sun rises and shines on his ass?"

He lets that sink in for them, wants them to see what they're risking by potentially fucking this up.

"What aftermath do you wanna plan for if this goes south?" He finally asks, hoping he's gotten his
Hopper looks visibly startled for a moment before recovering as he looks over to where Steve is and then back at Billy and then to Joyce.

Joyce just looks overly concerned like she's going to cry but is trying to keep it together.

Billy makes it a point not to look at her, that's too much for him.

"Jesus." Hopper says as he shakes his head. “Steve's right. I really don't understand."

Joyce stares at the ground, crossing her arms over her chest as she frowns and Billy fears her words the most for some reason.

A part of him really hopes she won't say anything at all.

"Look kid, I don't know what happened to the two of you in that place and I clearly don't want to know but you're family now." Hopper says with a shrug as if it's just a simple fact of life.

It's a nice notion but Billy doesn't believe him in the least bit, that couldn't possibly be true.

"We won't let this shit go south because we aren't going to be stupid and you should be more willing to trust us." He says and Billy kind of wishes he had a father like this guy instead of his shit one.

Even though Hopper is a shady motherfucker.

Joyce comes over and rests a gentle hand on his upper arm as comfort and he almost startles, wants to pull away but doesn't want to be disrespectful to her.

"Sweetie, it's going to be okay." She says and he almost believes her.

Billy shuffles his feet, puts his hands in his pockets and hangs his head down, feeling a little overwhelmed.

He turns to look at Steve again before looking back at Hopper.

"This mushy stuff is great and all but it doesn't change the fact that you know I'm right." He says because he needs to make sure they understand.

"Yeah no, it's pretty clear I'm someone's main target Hop, it should be me." Steve says and it's already going as swimmingly as expected.

Things had gone haywire the moment Hopper suggested pretending the weapons were found in Billy's trunk instead and the reasoning behind it.

"That's because you're an easy target and we shouldn't be making this easy on them." Billy tells him as Steve shoots him a glare over his shoulder from where he's pouring oil into his car.

“Don't give me that look, they fucking hate me at that place and I punched a couple of their lab rats. Honestly, I should have landed one on Richard’s but they had me restrained by that point.” He says with a toothy grin.

Out of his peripheral he sees Ms. Byers run a hand over her face.
"Oh yeah, let's just make it more appealing to not only kidnap you but kill you instead. Sounds fucking great!" Steve yells as he slams down the hood of his car aggressively.

"It's a good plan, we might get the upper hand by doing it." Hopper says with a huff.

_Aw fuck._

Steve whips his head around to look at the chief and it looks like he almost gives himself whiplash doing it, pinning him with a look of shock before squinting at him.

He fucking _squints_ at him.

_Oh man, here we go._

"A 'good plan'?" Steve spits out and it almost comes out as a growl.

So much for this being easy.

"So there's a plan? We just somehow out of the blue came up with a plan." He goes on to say, barking out a harsh, fake laugh as he nods to himself while looking at all of them.

"Whose plan might this be exactly?" He asks them and when the chief goes to open his mouth Steve puts a hand up to stop him.

"This sounds a lot like some stupid fucking shit you would say." Steve hisses out as he gets in Billy's face, pointing his index finger into his chest, digging it in hard.

Billy just stares him down, giving nothing away.

Not that it matters since Steve has already seen through the whole thing anyway.

_Fucking asshole._

It makes him want to shake him as hard as he can, scream in his face, tell him _'just let me do this'_ and he _hates_ this, _hates_ that Steve just somehow seems to _know._

It was cute at first, but _now?_

Billy just wants to punch him in his fucking face and chain him down, lock him away where nothing can happen to him because _nothing can happen to him._

The idea of a single hair on his pretty little head coming to harm just isn't a thought Billy's capable of entertaining.

Nothing was going to stop him from keeping Harrington safe, _nothing._

Not even Steve Harrington himself.

He's just flat out _not_ going to allow it. Steve and his savior complex be damned.

"It was _my_ idea." Hopper suddenly says, lying through his teeth and Billy almost drops his poker face.
A multitude of emotions cross over Steve's face and he doesn't like where this is going.

Steve drops his arm down and turns to look at Hopper, stalking over to him.

They have some sort of stare down and Billy starts to wonder if Hopper will admit he's lying but he stands his ground.

Joyce looks between all of them with concern and she's about to say something, mouth opening but Steve beats her to the punch.

"I don't know if you're telling the truth or not. Personally I think you're all completely full of shit."

There's a tone there Billy has never heard before.

It's actually kind of terrifying.

"I don't know what he said to get you to lie for him but if I find out you are lying to me, I will never forgive you, Jim." Steve says with his arms crossed against his chest, standing his ground too.

It sends a chill down Billy's spine and he'd be more turned on if he wasn't so fucking pissed at him right now.

He almost wonders if Hopper is going to just call the whole thing off, cave in completely.

Except his expression just hardens instead.

"Yeah well either way kid, I think I'll live."

Chapter End Notes

So while this chapter is short I wanted to single it out due to the importance of it for a large multitude of reasons some of which I can speak on and other's I cannot and it was rough to write because it was so emotionally charged for me.

Again some reasons I can speak on, others I cannot. XD

I love the boys as much as you guys do so your pain is my pain and sometimes I cringe because I'm like "Eesh this is rough"

Anyway

I really don't want to write off the trauma Steve has endured at the hands of Billy's past decisions.

Especially the accidental memory alteration/block, I don't think it's easy to shake an experience like that off.

The desperation Steve felt while he had no idea what was happening yet the one fundamental factor that stayed with him was wanting Billy to be safe and alive and it was the one thing Billy couldn't take away from him.
So of course there's this underlying rift between them born of distrust when it comes to how far he knows Billy is willing to go to protect the people he cares about that I just can't bring myself to ignore because I've foreshadowed it a bit anyway so it would just be wasted potential if I don't hit on it a little bit lol.

Also I wanted to display Hopper's ability to detach due to his own personal experiences with losing a child and how broken a person becomes from something like that, to lose a piece of your soul that allows you to make the very tough decisions no one else is willing to make.

Especially when Hopper knows things that nobody else knows. ;)

Also I feel like Steve was a bamf in this chapter and I wanted more bamf Steve. ;D
So no lie I rewrote the first sequence of this chapter 6 times.

I had 6 different possible outcomes that all branched out into different variations of completely different ways the story would go.

I finally decided on this lol

"You and me, let's go for a drive." Hopper finally says, pointing to Steve.

They'd been hashing it out for the past eternity.

It was an annoying circle of Hopper telling Steve how things were gonna be done and then getting shot down at every turn.

Meanwhile, Billy has been trying to help calm him down which meant the opposite was occurring.

He was a pro at getting him riled up but calming him down?

It had worked like...once.

Specifically when Steve had worked himself up into thinking Billy didn't want him for some dumb ass reason so he kissed him to shut him up.

He's pretty sure that won't work this time.

"How about we don't. I need to take Dustin home when the dance is over." Steve says with a scoff.

"Billy?" Hopper says and he can take a cue when he sees one.

He's leaning against Steve's car when he salutes him with a ‘You got it Chief.’

Steve turns to glare at Billy for the millionth time and it's intense, it really is.

Hell, it would be pretty fucking sexy if it wasn't so fucking annoying.

He just shrugs at him, not really caring because regardless of what Steve wants it doesn't change anything.

Billy was going into that lab whether they both liked it or not. All he was doing at this point was prolonging the inevitable.

"There, that's settled. Let's go." Hopper says jerking his head toward his car for Steve to follow.

Billy figures now would be the time to possibly save some face as he walks up to Steve who puts a
hand up to stop him.

"You stay the fuck away from me right now, I can't even stand to look at you. Don't fucking talk to me and I don't wanna see you, we clear?" Steve gets out through clenched teeth and he looks wound tight, ready to lash out completely if prompted hard enough.

Billy just sighs in response, taking a step back as he raises his hands in surrender.

"Crystal."

He understands that Steve is just angry and needs time to cool off.

He can read between the lines.

There's an unspoken 'don't come to me, I'll come to you.' in there somewhere so he doesn't take it personal.

Instead he watches Steve's retreating form and knows that all he can do is wait him out.

"I know you're upset and worried, you have every right to be."

It's the first thing Hopper says to him when they start driving and Steve just rolls his eyes.

"I'm not going to sit here and tell you it's going to be fun, it won't."

"Your point?"

"Billy will be fine." Hopper says like he's willing him to understand that.

"At what cost though?" Steve asks quietly.

"At the cost of keeping us all safe, himself included. We can't keep sitting here waiting for things to happen, we need to strike."

Steve understands, he does. Hopper is worried about El first and foremost, everything he does is for her.

They do keep getting thrown into shitty situations they have no control over, it does suck.

Having the upper hand would be nice.

Except he feels like he's going insane at the thought of what might happen to Billy.

"Hopper, I get it but I can't... he's been through too much already." Steve says and it comes out broken and pathetic.

"How can I make this easier on you kid? Help me out here." Hopper asks and Steve sees the manipulation for what it is.

"Call it off, don't use Billy or anyone for that matter." Steve says with a shrug.

"What do you prefer here? You can't have it all. We have an opportunity to do this on our own terms with a good plan set in place."
"You keep saying good plan, it's-

"I'm not talking about Billy, I'm talking about my plan to get him in and out of that place." Hopper interjects.

"So you were lying." Steve says darkly.

"Of course I was kid, keep up and I don't need your forgiveness if it means this ends up working." Hopper says without a care in the fucking world.

"Anyway, the alternative is that these people take one of the kids one day like Will and then where will we be?" He goes on to say.

“We're just kids too, Jim.”

“You think I don't know that?”

“Feels like you don't, feels like you're willing to put Billy in danger without a second thought.” Steve says pointedly.

"I asked El.” Hop says all of a sudden, fingers tapping the steering wheel like it's a nervous tic.

“What?”

“I asked her who would be the better option if I go through with this.”

“What did she say?”

“There's a decision I have to make when we do this, I need to send one of them in and there's no right answer."

It's right after movie night and El finally asks about the plan to go after Brenner’s men.

She'd been unusually tight lipped ever since he got back from Chicago.

He usually uses her as a sounding board more than anything, she doesn't ever really have a lot to say.

There had been nightmares plaguing him lately which wasn't unusual but they were about Steve.

He keeps dreaming that if he sends him, he'll die.

They're vicious and lucid too, they feel too real like he's lived them.

Every dream, Steve dies.

It fucks with his day and he doesn't know why he keeps seeing it, just that Steve dies a different way every time.

They'd already agreed it would be Billy yet he kept dreaming of Steve like somehow in the long run it was going to be him that was going to get taken.
It must be the guilt.

His little girl visited him the other night too. He was sitting at the foot of his bed, it had been a long time since he’d hallucinated her but it’s a welcome distraction.

There’s a sick part of him that missed being able to see her.

She’s on the floor, playing with toys she’d gotten for Christmas one year when he had stood inside of a store for what must have been hours trying to find something she would like.

It was worth it though because he’d felt nervous, wasn’t sure if she’d like the things he’d gotten her and when she opened them but she’d gotten so excited and happy.

In her eyes no matter what he’d gotten her didn't matter because she claimed that ‘it came from dad, so it’s the best.’

She looks up at him healthy, young, happy.

Nothing like the way she looked near the end of her life.

It’s a small relief and he tells her everything, unloads it all to her.

Even the one thing that was eating away at him the most, the one thing that had set everything in motion and was forcing him to question if he’s doing the right thing.

He asks her what he should do and she just looks up at him with that big bright smile, his baby girl, his Sara.

Always looking at him like he can do no wrong, the way she always used to look at him before things got bad.

The way a child foolishly looks at their parent no matter what they do to them, no matter how bad it gets they will always love them.

These poor kids will always want to love their shitty ass parents who can't even protect them from the worst of the world.

You're supposed to be capable but he's never felt more worthless.

The simple fact of the matter is he can do wrong, very wrong.

So incredibly, terribly wrong that he has no choice but to live with his decisions.

Sara holds her hand out to him and as he goes to reach for it she disappears like it had never even happened.

Hopper cries that night for the first time in a long time.

"I just don't know what I should do, do I call it off? I have to do something El." He says the next morning, running a hand through his hair as he takes off his hat and sets it down on the table.

El just shrugs.
"It needs to be on our terms, our rules, I've gotta stick to one thing and just do it, it's gotta be Billy." He says, nodding to himself in agreement.

"The friend." El finally says.

"What?" Hopper asks, turning to look at her.

"His friend." She states and it's not a question.

"Billy? Yeah, Steve's friend." He clarifies.

"Yes, it should be him."

They share a look as if she knows what has been haunting him, as if there's something more that she sees that he doesn't.

This isn't the first time he's seen that look.

He doesn't ask.

Steve doesn't know how to take any of that, hadn't known how much thought Hopper had put into this.

How much it haunted him.

Steve isn't superstitious but he knows an omen when he sees one. Chances are if he pushes and tries to be the bait.

He will die.

Then again, maybe he won't.

Maybe it's bullshit, maybe Hopper is just blowing it out of proportion because of a guilty conscious.

Maybe he's lying.

He turns away and for a moment when he looks up at the moon in the sky through the car window he swears it bleeds red.

When he blinks it's gone.

Weird.

Steve isn't sure about anything anymore but there's something in the way Hopper said everything, something that makes him feel like the next thing he says will set an entire series of events into motion and none of them can ever come back from it.

It convinces him and he doesn't know why.

Maybe it's El's words, who better to trust than El?

She saved his life and the lives of others more than anyone will ever know and she's so much more than any of them will ever be.
Who the hell is he to question her opinion?

She'd gone back for Billy and saved him too, she’d seen that thing, she saw what it did to them, understands in a way no one else can or ever will.

She had shared in that pain, she's the only person that can even begin to comprehend what it was like to be in that place.

El knows what they'd been forced to become from it.

Survivors.

"Okay, fine. Let's do it."

At school the next day Steve pulls Billy aside.

The look on his face is priceless but he can't even laugh about it because a permanent knot of anxiety had lodged itself into the pit of his stomach since last night.

"That was fast.” Is the first thing he says.

"What was?” Steve asks, confused.

"I thought I'd get at least two days of the silent treatment." Billy says with a snort as he leans back against a locker.

Steve can't help but roll his eyes as he huffs out a sigh.

"I still don't really wanna talk to you but I wanted you to know I'm on board."

Billy just looks at him and stares.

He stares some more.

There's more staring and Steve starts to feel uncomfortable.

Billy shakes his head and puts a finger in his ear as if he's cleaning out earwax from it.

"Come again?"

Steve runs a hand over his face in frustration.

"I'm going along with the plan."

"How'd Hopper manage to do that?” Billy asks in disbelief, suspicion written all over his face.

"Does it matter? I'm agreeing." Steve tells him with a frown as he shifts his backpack from one shoulder to the other.

"What did he say Steve?” Billy asks, tone turning demanding.

"He was convincing, it's probably better if we do things his way.” Steve admits, avoiding answering the real question at hand.
"Why aren't you looking me in the eyes?" Billy asks, tone dark.

Oh.

Steve hadn't noticed he'd been averting his gaze this whole time.

A large part of him doesn't want to tell Billy because he'll take the information and run with it, use it against him.

Just because he might be right doesn't mean that gives him the right to manipulate everyone into making him into the group martyr.

"Drop it. You're lucky I'm even fuckin' talking to you right now after the shit you pulled last night." Steve says, grip tightening on his strap as he shoots him a glare.

"I dunno what you're talkin' about."

"You aren't slick Billy, I'll admit I was a little slow on the uptake but this needs to stop."

Billy doesn't seem to like that because he tilts his head and Steve heaves an internal sigh.

There was no winning against this guy.

"Let me ask you something, what makes you think you're a good option for some shit like this?"

"Don't." Steve warns him.

"Seriously, you can't win in a fuckin' fight, you've got the attention span of a small child, you-"

Steve steps into his space, interrupting him.

"Oh that's crushing, really. You've truly wounded my poor sensitive soul, Billy."

"Fuck you, Harrington."

"When are you gonna drop the act?" Steve asks and they're getting looks now even though they're in their own little corner of lockers but people keep hurrying by, avoiding them at all costs as he feels Billy tug him by the arm even further into the corner under the archway of a classroom that's not in use.

"What act?" Billy spits out aggressively, not missing a beat.

"You keep trying to drive me away because you think you're some sort of monster." Steve says a bit quieter but with the same kind of heat behind it, unable to stop himself now that he's worked up.

"The fuck did you just say?" Billy hisses out, face contorting into a grimace.

"There's this guilt inside of you that's eating you alive and I don't know why it's there, I don't know what happened to you but I know it exists." He says, pointing a finger at him before gripping the strap of his backpack with both hands instead.

"You go poking around in my head one time and you think you suddenly know everything there is to know about me?" Billy spits out, getting into his space.

"I-"
"Nah, you know what? Let's fuckin' tango, Harrington." He says with a snort as he steps away to lean back against the classroom door, arms crossed.

"Billy-

"We can chitchat all about your roaring insecurities, how worthless and unloved you feel."

Steve breathes in through his nose, counting down from five in his head just for good measure.

The involuntary beginnings of tears start filling his eyes before he quickly gets a handle of himself, channeling it into anger instead.

It's in that moment he sees realization dawn on Billy's face that he fucked up before his expression hardens again too.

God forbid Billy drops his fucking pride for even three seconds.

"Wow, alright...fine." Steve says with a hollow laugh.

Billy frowns and it looks like the steam rushes out of him almost immediately upon hearing his tone.

"You win, hope you're happy." He says, feeling more detached than he's felt in a long while as a wall goes up in his mind, blocking it all out as he steps completely out of the archway.

"Steve-

"Whatever, it's not a big deal. We've got basketball practice soon." He says, waving a hand in the air, feigning indifference as he starts his trek toward the boys locker room.

He doesn't look behind him, refuses to look back to see if Billy follows him or just stands there dumbfounded.

He's not even sure why he tries.

He's not sure what he was expecting but it shouldn't shock him, shouldn't hurt.

Billy can go fuck himself.

The worst part about fighting with your soulmate is that the underlying sense of synchronicity doesn't just turn off and take a break.

It's always there.

They're more in tune now, aware in a way that probably wasn't normal by human standards.

Basketball was always a true testament ever since he'd gotten back on the team to how close they'd started to become.

It feels like Steve knows every move Billy is going to make before he makes it and today they wipe the floor so expertly together the coach stares at them for a moment in suspicious disbelief.

Even Tommy side-eyes them.

The energy is palpable like they've hit some sort of sweet spot and the adrenaline is a nice distraction from the anxiety in his gut and everything else.
Especially the fight with Billy.

In a way it feels like a form of payback.

Sure, Steve barely knows him a surface level but staring directly into someone's essence is a totally different ball game.

Billy can sit there and act like an asshole all he wants.

At the end of the day Steve knows he's *full of shit* and that's probably what pisses him off the most.

The fact that Steve *knows* he's full of shit.

On the plus side, he doesn't have to worry about *anything* right now. He can just be *normal*, playing *normal* basketball at school like a *normal* person.

Except it isn't all smooth sailing. The moment he ends up on the opposite team against Billy all hell breaks loose.

At one point the coach has to get between them.

Halfway through, Billy gets the ball and realizes he can't get past Steve because they know what move the other is about to make so he just drops the ball and gets in his face instead.

To anyone else in the room it looks like Billy wants to lay him out.

They're not entirely wrong but Steve knows better, there's more going on behind those stormy blue eyes.

It brings him utter *elation* as he watches the coach pry Billy away and Steve shoots him a smirk.

There's a certain kind of fire that ignites in Billy's eyes that doesn't leave him for the rest of the match after that and those eyes stay on Steve the entire time.

He ignores it and continues to feign indifference.

When it's all over and done with, when they're all beyond exhausted and the bell finally rings he beelines out of the gym without looking back.

He's proven his point loud and clear.

*Bullshit.*

He stays behind in the locker room, waiting for everyone to leave, specifically Billy.

He needs a moment, a minute alone to just *breathe*.

It takes a while but Hargrove packs his shit and leaves without a single glance in his direction.

He's not sure why that pisses him off.

However, soon after everyone is finally gone he turns around to grab his shirt and startles, leg hitting the bench next to him as he starts to fall back.

"Oh *fu-*" He gets out because Billy is suddenly standing *right there.*
Also, he's fucking falling.

Billy grabs him by his arm, righting him again to keep him from planting flat on his ass.

"Can you not?!" Steve yells, putting a hand to his chest over his rapidly beating heart.

He literally watched Billy leave so the last thing he was expecting was for him to go stalker mode all of a sudden.

When he looks up to meet Billy's gaze his eyes shift around, stopping on the marks he'd given Steve from yesterday.

Oh right.

His shirt is off.

Steve feels himself flush involuntarily.

This was partially the reason he'd waited for everyone to leave so that no one would see and start asking questions.

White hot anger simmers under his skin at the thought of Billy touching him and being sweet to him the way he was the other day and then turning around as if none of it had ever happened.

He's just back to acting like an asshole again.

Steve knew all too well what it felt like to have someone sit there and pretend they want him.

What's he even trying to prove?

Billy doesn't say anything, just tightens his grip on Steve's arm and when he tries to pull away his expression turns dark as they struggle until he's manhandled against a locker, completely trapped and at his mercy.

"What the fuck is your problem?!!" Steve hisses out, breathing heavily.

Hands are at his face and Billy's lips are on his in an instant and for a moment he forgets that the guy is an asshole, forgets he's supposed to be angry, forgets everything.

For one blissfully fleeting moment he gets weak, kisses back, involuntarily moans into his mouth and it's too much but in the next moment he puts his hands up against his chest and pushes.

Billy stumbles back a bit, looking dazed.

"Fuck you." Steve spits out, feeling a little bit pissed at himself now.

"Steve-"

"No." He says, feeling red in the face and like a complete idiot as he starts going into his locker to grab his bag.

"Please, I'm sorry."

"That's not going to keep working." Steve tells him, slamming the locker door shut aggressively.
"I am though, I'm a fucking asshole and I didn't mean that shit."

A part of him wants to cave, he's never heard Billy this desperate before.

It could just be bullshit.

"Yes, you did." He says instead.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, that wasn't what I was trying to do."

"That's exactly what you were trying to do, you wanted to hit me exactly where you knew it would hurt." Steve says dropping his bag on the ground to point a finger at him.

"You're not worthless."

"Can we not do this? I just wanna go home." Steve says as he rolls his eyes and scoffs.

"You're not unloved, you've got a whole fuckton of people that love you."

"Stop."

"Those kids, Ms. Byers, Hopper, my own stepsister likes you more than she likes me, I could go on."

"Stop."

If he goes on, keeps saying things like this his walls will crumble, he'll lose it and he doesn't want to give Billy the satisfaction.

"The point is I'm an asshole."

"You're right, you are an asshole."

Billy just stares at him for a moment looking completely frazzled, running a nervous hand through his hair when he gets a determined look in his eyes as if he's gathered his resolve.

"You look at me and you see right through me and it fuckin' scares me Steve."

For some reason that pisses him off, makes the anger rise up even more.

"Is this the excuse we're going to keep using? Cause it's getting really old."

There's a moment of silence and Steve just shakes his head, grabbing his bag as he steps over the bench to get to the other side so he can walk past Billy.

The problem is he steps over it with him, blocking his path.

"Billy!" He says in exasperation.

"A few months ago I was living in California, now I've learned that interdimensional monsters exist." That gives him pause as he frowns.

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"I blinked and when I opened my eyes I was dropped into an episode of The Twilight Zone!" Billy says a little hysterically like he's on the verge of losing it and Steve drops his bag again, stepping
"I've had an entity burned out of me, my soul is so intimately bound to yours we've turned into a couple of fucking mutants."

"Ouch okay, that's a little harsh." Steve says with a snort, taking two more steps.

"I feel like I'm losing my goddamn marbles."

"Look I get it, but-" He says, trying to placate him and calm him down but he just keeps going, interrupting him as if now that he's saying it out loud he can't stop himself.

"I'm not like you, I don't just take this shit in stride, I'm on the verge of a mental fucking breakdown all of the time."

Steve laughs, outright laughs at that and Billy shoots him a glare.

*How could he possibly think-*

"You think I'm not? I went to Jonathan's house a year ago and almost got my face ripped off by a demogorgon. Trust me, I've had my share of full blown mental breakdowns."

Honestly he's starting to feel like Billy gives him a little too much credit.

He feels just as lost, if not more.

"Stop, wait. Why the fuck were you at his place a year ago?"

"Wh- seriously?! I was trying to apologize to him and Nancy for being an asshole." Steve says, voice pitching up.

Of all things to freak out about-

Is he serious right now?

What is his beef with Jonathan?

"Are you kidding me?"

"What?"

"You got dragged into this shit because you were trying to be nice?" Billy asks, squinting at him.

"Well I mean...I guess, yeah."

"What'd you do?"

"A lot of dumb shit, okay? I'm not fucking proud of any of it."

"In your defense Wheeler was fucking around on you with Pee Wee Herman." Billy says with a shrug.

"Jonathan does not look like Pee Wee Herman." Steve says, trying not to laugh.

How does Billy always do this?

They could be angrier than they've ever been at eachother but somehow Billy can make him laugh at
the most inappropriate of times.

"They've got the same level of creep factor goin' on." Billy says, stepping into his space again to pick up his bag off the floor and put it on the bench next to them.

"You're such an ass." Steve says but there's no anger behind it anymore, he feels completely diffused for some reason as he heaves out a loud sigh, running a hand through his hair.

"I'm just saying." Billy says quietly and Steve just shakes his head.

"She tried to convince herself she wanted me but I couldn't really compete with all of the upside down shit they went through together." He tells Billy honestly, he's never really talked about it much other than with Dustin.

"Yeah well, she's fucking stupid."

"Billy."

"Sorry."

Steve chuckles this time, looking down at his feet before looking back up at Billy again.

"You know, for a guy that hates the word sorry you sure do say it a lot."

"Well you see, there's this guy I really like and I kinda fucked up."

Steve's heart does a bit of a flip at that, kickstarting in his chest like a stalling engine as he takes in a deep breath.

Fuck, I've got it bad.

"Did you now. What happened?" He asks, playing along.

"I acted like a total piece of shit, I'm talkin' raging piece of actual garbage."

"That's pretty bad." Steve says as he feels the beginnings of a fond dopey smile forming on his face, stepping closer to Billy.

"Yeah, so I'm trying really hard to get him to forgive me."

"Why is that?"

"Because if anything were to ever happen to him I'd lose my fucking mind."

Steve takes a physical step back and blinks rapidly a few times, feeling Billy's hand on his arm as if he's afraid that he's about to bolt and never be seen again.

"That's…"

Not what he'd been expecting, he didn't think Billy would just say it outright like that, as if it simply is.

"That's the truth, I need to know you're safe for me to not feel like I'm gonna fuckin' lose it. The only thing keeping me together is knowing you won't be in danger."

Steve doesn't know what to say to that, has no idea how to fully process this information.
It's one thing to know it but it's another thing entirely when Billy says it out loud when he has control over the guards around himself.

Which means he's purposefully letting them down right now, letting Steve see past them as opposed to being forced into it by the bond.

It's…

Steve feels *giddy*.

"Do you realize how ridiculous that sounds?" He says yet there's a huge, stupid smile on his face.

He can't help himself.

"It's the truth." Billy says again with a shrug and he seems a little terrified.

He's probably afraid of getting rejected which is the stupidest thing because Steve isn't sure he could if he tried.

"Billy, there are just certain things you can't control." He tries to tell him because the sentiment is sweet but it didn't really address the true issue at hand.

"I've done pretty well so far."

"You're missing the point."

"If I can do something that's going to keep you and everyone else safe I'm going to do it." Billy says putting a heavy hand on the back of his neck

"What about how *I* feel?"

"You don't understand."

"*Help me* understand."

Because there's something there, something that's making Billy unbearingly overprotective. That doesn't just happen out of nowhere, there are usually reasons behind extreme reactions.

Time and again Billy has taken the word overprotective and given it a whole new meaning.

Steve has his theories but he keeps them to himself, locked away because it's not his place to pry until Billy is ready.

"I can't...I- one day, when I'm ready."

Right, of course.

"Okay, alright." He says out loud with a nod.

They've probably got time, hopefully.

"You still haven't told me how Hopper convinced you." Billy says next without missing a beat and *of course* he isn't going to let it go.

Steve's not sure why he expected anything different.

"Really?"
"Yes, really."

In retrospect he should probably keep his mouth shut but Billy tried really hard to be honest for once so he opens his mouth like an idiot, decides to be generous.

"He...keeps dreaming that I'm going to die if he sends me and El told him that he should send you."

Billy stares him down, eyes going dark and yeah, that's pretty much the reaction he'd been expecting.

"You were gonna keep that from me?"

"Well yeah, it's just going to make you feel right and reinforce this bad fucking habit you have."

Steve says with a shrug, ignoring the fact that Billy looks like he wants to strangle him right now.

"What habit would that be?"

"Your habit of being self sacrificial to the point of suicide."

"Somebody needs to be." Billy says a little too quickly for his liking.

"No, nobody needs to be."

"We'll just have to agree to disagree."

There's a sense of finality in his tone and Steve wants to scream at him, kiss him, punch him the fuck out so he knows, so he'll understand.

But he refrains.

He doesn't understand yet, doesn't have all of the pieces.

"Look at the bright side, whatever happens won't be worse than being stuck in the upside down."

Billy says as if that's supposed to somehow make everything better.

It doesn't.

"Other than maybe getting killed?" He retorts.

"Pretty sure getting killed would still be better."

And okay, Billy might be right about one thing.

"Fair point." He replies with a frown as he looks down but he can still feel Billy's body heat and it makes him want to crawl into bed and curl around him, hide from everything so it can just be them. Us.

"Hey come on, look at me." Billy says, hands reaching out to rub at his arms and it's a sweet gesture, Steve knows he's just trying to be comforting.

However...

"I feel helpless." He says truthfully.

"This is nothing, we've both been through worse and I think because everything feels so…"

Billy stops himself, mouth dropping open like he isn't sure what word to use.
"Intense?"

"Intense between us, we both feel like we've been thrown directly into a fucking supernova."

"That's...actually a good way of putting it." Steve says with a chuckle as they smile softly at each other.

"It'll probably balance out at some point as we get more used to it."

"What if we don't?"

"What do you mean?"

It's something that's been bothering him ever since his encounter with 'the beach', something that was making him struggle to wrap his head around everything.

"What if we get lost in each other?"

Billy blinks like the thought hadn't occurred to him as his hands stop moving and instead grip him gently as they slide down to his waist, pulling him forward.

"We just figure it out, one day at a time." He says, completely unbothered as he leaves a kiss under his jaw and Steve melts.

"Okay, right...okay. This is nothing, yeah? We just get it done, we'll figure it out." He says as his eyes flutter shut as Billy starts nipping gently right under his ear, moving to his neck.

It's insistent, there's a tinge of desperation to it like Billy has wanted nothing more than to get his mouth on skin.

Steve's skin.

It's a lot like being drugged up, he feels light headed with it, hazy and invigorated at the same time.

It's like having a constant natural high.

When Billy finally pulls him into a kiss any tension he'd been feeling leaves him, his whole world zeroes in on this one moment.

It's just a kiss but with Billy everything feels like more.

Billy pulls back, rests their foreheads together like they always do when they need to ground themselves back in reality.

For a moment Steve thinks everything is going to be fine.

_________________________________

"I don't want you going into this blind." Hopper says.

Two days later the chief calls him up, tells him they need to talk, hash out details.

So here Billy is in all his self sacrificial glory as Steve Harrington would put it.

Things were...okay between them.

There's a certain level of detached distance and Billy can't necessarily blame him.
It sucks but he knows that Steve is trying to protect himself, shut all of the bad shit out and ignore his problems like he always does.

They've hung out after school, Billy took him out on a movie date the day before and made sure that he knew it was a date.

Seeing Harrington blush is probably one of his favorite things to watch happen in real time because he's seen the way it travels down all the way to his chest.

It makes him want to lick him all over, climb him like a fuckin' tree.

Touching has been minimal which is hard especially when he can see the longing being reflected back at him.

Billy *likes* touching him, likes having hands on his skin and it's not that he's bad with words per say it's just that he doesn't want to send Steve running for the hills.

He was afraid he'd almost done exactly that in the locker room the other day but Steve didn't seem to actually mind.

If anything he seemed more shocked that the words came out of him in the first place, not the actual words themselves.

He should know by now that Steve has this ability to just *know* things about him even if he doesn't fully understand them.

It's a double-edged sword, things seem to get lost in translation at times between them.

They're doing pretty good though, all things considered.

Somewhere between seeing Steve Harrington for the first time and becoming soul bound to him Billy had faceplanted directly into something much deeper than simple infatuation.

There are words he wants to say but he traps them in his throat, keeps himself from saying them.

It's too early, too fresh, too soon, *too much.*

What sucks is every time Steve walks into a room it's like being blinded by the sun, his center of gravity shifts and he gets pulled into his orbit.

It's burning hot warmth and he feels like a moth to the flame.

The most frustrating part is Steve doesn't even notice, he's totally oblivious like the asshole that he is.

Go figure.

So, Billy just suffers and craves, desires from afar in a way that Steve is never going to understand because he still doesn't believe that Billy could *possibly* want him.

It's like Steve's waiting for the other shoe to drop and Billy can't figure out why.

Every now and again he swears he can hear thoughts that aren't his own which can get a little disorienting at times.

*'He likes me, for now.'*
'It won't last, he'll get tired of me.'

'Bullshit.'

It's always along those same lines but that last thing is one he hears a lot. He's not sure how or why he's picking up on it but he knows it's happening.

The reason he hasn't brought it up is because it feels...private.

He's pretty sure Steve has absolutely no clue that he can pick up on his random straying thoughts at times.

There's no control over it, it just happens.

If anything he considers it a blessing because it helps him approach Steve the right way, come at him from the side.

Although that's a lot easier said than done.

Navigating Steve was a lot like stepping into a field of landmines.

Right now he has no idea Billy is here with Hopper.

What he doesn't know can't kill him which was really the whole point.

Keeping him safe, even from himself.

"Lay it on me Chief." Billy says, gesturing with his hand.

"First I need you to tell me about the bond."

He obliges because, why not?

He tells him everything in vague detail, leaving out the bond coming to life when he had Steve under him that first time.

It's none of his fuckin' business.

He tells Hopper about his own panic attack and how Steve had helped him through it but he doesn't got into details and Hopper doesn't push him for any which he's grateful for.

"Alright, what are the chances they could use you to get to Steve?" Hopper asks after they've gone through everything.

It's honestly a good question.

"I think if they pressed the right buttons they could, I've never tried." He says with a shrug.

If something ever happened to Steve would Billy be able to find him?

He tucks the thought away for later.

"I thought you might say that. We're going to keep Steve somewhere safe, somewhere you won't know about just in case." Hopper assures him.
"Yeah alright, that's a good idea." He says in agreement.

"They're going to torture you Billy, I can't stop them from doing that and I need you to know this but it won't be for long." Hopper says suddenly, tone impossibly serious.

"I know."

"I need to make sure that when we do this, when they take you, they all die for the things they've done." Hopper clarifies, looking a bit more heated than usual.

Billy just nods, he knows all of this. He knows this is going to fucking suck.

"You don't understand, these men have spent years tracking people like El."

"Okay?"

"They're good at what they do, they hunt her kind."

"You don't say." Billy says sarcastically but Hopper just ignores him.

"They're adept, they've dealt with all different kinds of abilities."

"I get it." Bily says with a sigh, wanting to get to the point.

"I hope you do."

Actually, his prior statement about Hopper being less calm seems to be wrong.

If anything he seems too calm if this is really the shit that awaits them going into this.

For all intents and purposes the chief is just a corrupt cop at this point and Billy wonder's if the line had started to blur for the man yet.

He takes a real hard look at him, sees the lines on his face, years of stress, pain, and work.

There's exhaustion, he looks like he hasn't been sleeping well and he remembers what Steve told him about the nightmares.

Nightmares that Steve was going to hide from him, the son of a bitch.

He'd need to keep a closer eye on things in the future.

"I will get you out alive, I need you to trust me, to trust us. Can you do that?" Hopper asks and Billy isn't sure.

"I can try." He says because lying isn't going to help.

Hopper just looks at him until he seems to feel placated before leaning back in his chair as he sighs. "I probably have to make your cover story into a kidnapping, we may not have any other choice."

Billy just shrugs, "It is what it is, the old man might have a little compassion anyway." He says with a snort, thinking of how pissed his dad will be if he hears about a kidnapping.

Hell, maybe he'd die and not have to deal with it, that worked too.
Hopper nods and leans forward, rubbing a hand over his beard that seemed to need a bit of trimming.

"Alright, let's walk through it all again."

Something wasn't right.

The plan was going perfectly but when they'd brought the bat and crowbar in; trying to get a reaction out of Richards there was no obvious tell.

It wasn't them.

Dick seemed about as shocked as they were that the items even existed in the first place. If anything they seemed excited, wanting to get their hands on them to see if they're actually from the other side or not.

It seemed genuine enough and Billy was a pretty good bullshit detector.

He chances a look at Hopper who seems very not surprised by much of anything.

He remembers the wording Hopper used, how strange it was that Hopper seemed unsure that the Chicago group had done it. If anything he seemed unconvinced at the time but looked like he'd wanted to make sure just in case.

Billy reminds himself that Hopper is definitely hiding something but unfortunately the task at hand was more important so there really wasn't anything he could say or do about it right now.

They stage the scene properly just like rehearsed and he starts to bicker with Hopper.

The chief gets a fake call and leaves the facility, telling Billy he'll be back later to pick him up as they try to convince him to 'chat' with Richards.

He puts up a fight to make it look authentic but ultimately he agrees to being left alone.

Just as planned.

Very quickly Billy learns that Richards has a shitty poker face because he ends up looking positively elated and he has to make it a point not to look at him to give anything away.

Richards finally walks back into the small office room they've had Billy wait it for far too long.

Hopper mentioned off hand it was actually home to that Dr. Owens guy before the gate fiasco and Richards had already started making the whole place his own.

Fake pictures of an obvious cover story of a fake family on his desk.

Fake everything and Billy wonders if any of it is real.

"So, Mr. Hargrove, we got a sample of the blood off of the bat and crowbar, it's the same blood on both weapons but it's very much not human." Richards says as he looks through the blood test and sits down in his big fancy fucking chair.

No shit Sherlock, the blood ain't human.
That's genuinely disconcerting actually.

For a lot of reasons.

"If anything it actually doesn't match anything in our records of the different species we've taken samples from in the past, can you run me through why this might be?" He asks and Billy doesn't really see any reason to deny these assholes.

He tells him about the cricket creature they'd encountered in as many vague details as he can possibly get away with to the point that Richards gets visibly annoyed and it's incredibly satisfying to watch.

All the while he tries to figure out how it's humanely possible that the items got here.

A forest flashes behind his eyelids.

It's there and gone in mere seconds as he blinks rapidly.

"Let's talk about Mr. Harrington." Richards says after he gets frustrated enough to give up, realizing Billy isn't going to budge as he puts his clipboard down, folding his hands onto the desk and clasp ing them tightly.

Billy has to stop his knee jerk reaction to punch him in the face and tell him 'how about we don't' because that isn't part of the plan.

He's supposed to be agreeable.

"Sure." Billy says, leaning back in his chair while putting his leg up to rest on his knee and letting his arms fan out, waving a hand absently at him.

Richards gets visibly excited again and if Billy wasn't positive that Chicago hasn't planted the weapons in the car, he sure is now.

This guy can't hide shit if his life depended on it.

"Have there been any new episodes, anything note worthy?" He asks and Billy knows he's being watched by more than just this guy right now.

He can feel it.

"No, I think you were right it was just a weird side effect of that place." He says, lying completely because fuck them.

Richards smile falls and he sighs, picking up his pen as he starts clicking and unclicking it which makes Billy want to grab it from him and gouge his eyes out.

It's tempting but he holds himself back.

"Are you sure? You seem to be spending more time with him than you used to." Richards says and Billy just stares at him.

Hopper warned him they would have vague details from people watching them, phone calls, wire taps, they'd use whatever they had against him and to not let it get him riled up because it just came with the territory.
"I spent what felt like an eternity in that place with him, of course we're spending more time together." Billy says with an eyeroll.

Richards just puts his pen down and lowers his head and rubs his thumbs over his temples before getting up out of his seat.

"You're a very tough cookie to crack Mr. Hargrove, did you know that?" He says as he starts to walk closer to him.

"Usually people just tell me I'm an asshole and that's the nicest term I've heard, give me that pen you had and I'll write your inquiry down too." Billy says giving him a toothy smile while holding his hand out.

Richards comes to the front of the desk and leans against it, folding his arms over his chest and stares creepily, doesn't even give him the pen like the dickwad he is and Billy puts his hand down.

"We only want to help you both, we have people who can help you find out what happened, help you understand, help us understand."

Blah, blah, blah he just goes on and on.

Billy was really starting to hope that the whole kidnapping part would commence soon because he was getting really fucking bored.

"No offense Doc but no means no. I feel like you're that scrawny little nerd trying to get with the super sexy babe that ditches school because she has a troubled home life and rides a motorcycle and fucks all the guys." Billy says with a wink.

Richards doesn't look amused and if anything there's a new look on his face Billy hasn't seen yet.

Oh, is it go time finally?

Richards goes to walk behind him and every part of Billy is screaming at him to turn around, every nerve in his body is firing up, telling him to keep his eye on the guy because alarm bells are going off in his head but he squashes the feeling down, clenching and unclenching his fist.

It only helps a little bit.

"I've tried to be nice Billy but you make it absolutely impossible, we really could have done all of this differently and things could have been so much better." Richards says and Billy braces for what he knows is about to happen.

A few moments later everything fades to black.

Hopper drives Steve to some randomly huge cabin in the middle of the woods that he'd think was impressive if he wasn't so painfully aware that this was his new prison.

As usual he's fighting with Billy and already pissed off.

They'd told him nearly last second that he'd be taken to some remote location that Billy wouldn't know about, that even he doesn't know about because Hopper says they'll most likely try to get to
him through Billy.

There's a lot to unpack there.

They went behind his back, kept him in the dark for as long as possible.

Needless to say he's not fucking happy.

As for the tidbit about them trying to find him through Billy he'd never tried that, to find him through the bond willingly.

The only reason Billy knew where he was at the grocery store was because of the panic attack, it had been uncontrolled.

The bond was still completely out of their control, he couldn't try to sit here and search for Billy at will.

Most everything they'd done had just happened.

Steve could reach inside, pull them into that strange in between but that was about all he had control over and even then he still didn't fully understand how it worked.

"I know you're annoyed kid but this is what we need to do to keep you both alive, to keep you safe." Hopper says and it causes something inside of Steve to stir, he can feel himself getting angrier.

"What about Billy's safety?"

"We talked about this-"

"So, we're just gonna throw him at every bad situation until he breaks?" Steve asks and he's never been more upset at someone in his life, not even Billy.

He almost wants to drive them off the side of the road.

How dare he?

"This is only happening because Billy's the best option, there's no right or wrong answer we can only make the best out of it." Hopper clarifies.

It doesn't placate Steve, he still wants to unleash all of his anger and fury at the situation, onto Hopper but refrains because there's no point.

When they finally get to the cabin and get to the door it opens for them and Nancy is standing in the doorway smiling at him.

Steve almost drops his bag because he'd expected to be here alone and soon Jonathan comes up behind her and then all of the kids file in from every corner as well.

Nancy, Jonathan, Joyce, Mike, Will, Lucas, Dustin, Max, even Eleven was here and he can't help the overwhelming relief that floods through him.

"Why the hell are you all here?!" He chokes out in disbelief.

"We thought you'd want the company and we twisted Hopper's arm pretty hard about it." Mike says
with a shrug as he looks over to smile at Eleven.

"We also want to be here when we get Billy back." Joyce says and Steve feels his heart clench involuntarily.

Steve turns to Hopper who just smiles with a shrug, helping them load his things inside before saying his goodbyes.

*Son of a bitch, he let me chew him out too.*

Steve grabs Hops arm, stopping him just before he walks out the door to leave and he just stares at him like he knows what to expect.

"Thank you for this Jim but if Billy dies I'm going to kill you myself." Steve states as if it's a fact because in the moment it's the most truthful thing he's said in his life.

He *can't* lose Billy.

He doesn't know what he'll do other than make Hopper the first person on his list.

Hopper just looks at him, nobody interrupts them as they all just stand and watch.

There's a nodsl of his head and tip of his hat.

"Wouldn't have it any other way kid." He says as he turns to leave.

The place is huge and being surrounded by everyone is a relief, it doesn't stop his anxiety but it definitely helps keep his mind off of it.

Hopper installed a radio for communication so that they can't be tapped into and now it was like everyone was going out of their way to distract him.

They brought board games, Joyce cooks, they watch TV, they all sit around and talk.

It's actually *nice*.

It's an incredibly welcome distraction for everything else that was shit until Hopper radios to them that the plan is in motion.

They've finally taken Billy.

Steve stays in his room for the rest of the night and curls up into bed.

He's afraid to reach through the bond or even *try* in fear of messing everything up.

What if they *can* track him somehow?

What if they hurt Billy *more*?

What if they *kill* him?

He's not sure he can handle something like that, he's pretty sure if one of them died the other would probably follow.
It's a theory but there's something inside of him that tells him he's right.

There cannot be one without the other.

The logical side of his brain tells him that Hopper wouldn't dare set everything up like this unless he had a solid plan in place.

It's too much and he can't help the broken sob that wracks through his body at the complete feeling of helplessness that wells up inside of him.

There's nothing he can do and it fucking kills him.

The first sob sets off a chain reaction as he just lays there and shakes, can't help himself from sounding like a pathetic wounded fucking animal.

It hurts, it hurts, it hurts.

Why does it feel like this?

Just a few hours ago he'd been beyond pissed at Billy but now he just wants him back, wants to see his face again, touch him again.

He wants to tell him he'll go crazy too if anything were to ever happen to him, the feeling is fucking mutual.

Nobody knows what this is like, none of them could possibly know what it feels like to be so intimately connected to another person that you feel like you've lost your fucking mind.

He doesn't even remember what his life was like before Billy anymore.

It's probably not healthy but he doesn't even care right now.

There's regret, he wishes they weren't fighting and wishes he'd said something different instead.

He wishes they weren't fighting, wishes Billy would stop trying to deceive him at every turn by using the stupid excuse of trying to protect him.

He curses the bond, wishing it didn't make him feel like he's sinking inside of a black hole.

There's a distant part of him that remembers what it felt like to be normal.

That doesn't exist anymore, not for them.

Another part of his brain tells him it's not just the bond doing this, he's become attached to Billy in a way he never thought possible.

Except he might lose that now.

It just throws him deeper into despair.

At some point he feels someone lay down next to him and it takes him a long time before he realizes it's Nancy.

"Steve, you need to calm down." She says gently.

"I know, my head knows it but my body won't listen and-"
"Hey, shh it's okay."

He feels her lay down, curl around him the way she used to and he doesn't know why she's doing this but it's helping him from going into a full blown panic attack.

"You've been through so much, it's okay." She says whisper quiet as she holds him through it, whispers words of comfort, starts telling him that Billy will be alright and that he'll come back alive.

It's nice, it helps.

She starts spouting logic, saying the things he needs to hear.

It helps.

She soothes him in any way she can until he finally falls asleep.

Chapter End Notes

This is probably the biggest setup chapter I've done so far.

I know it's probably the most boring chapter I've done but just gotta get through it because of the plot but I also really liked anything in this chapter that had to do with Hopper because I love him. ;(

Just purely all complete setup into the next chapter now that we've finally caught up to the 'main event'

Holy shit I can't believe I foreshadowed this all the way in chapter...*goes to check* 10
We're finally here fam. Get ready lol
"Looking forward to it, Mr. K." Billy says with a wink.

In that moment, he knows the gauntlet has been thrown.

All in all, Billy feels pretty good.

Sure, he'd been hit a few times but it wasn't anything he wasn't already used to.

In the back of his mind he knew it wasn't going to last, shit was going to go sideways and take a left turn at 'let's fucking not' to pointedly stop at 'i'm fucked'.

Just in a days work.

After he antagonizes Kirkman quite a bit of time goes by and he's not sure how much but it's enough that he starts to get restless, his muscles and joints ache like crazy from being tied to a chair for an extended period of time and he's definitely hungry.

Billy wishes they'd put him in handcuffs, he knows how to get out of those.

But no, of course they'd used some sort of threaded metal wiring that was cutting into his skin and most likely going to draw blood because he can't help himself, he'll still try to get free.

He's not a fan of being restrained.

Although he's pretty sure he'd be fine with it if a certain someone was doing it instead which would probably have to wait to be addressed when he's finally back on that person's good side again.

If he lives of course.

The fact that the chair is bolted to the ground is particularly unhelpful and they hadn't even done a shitty job like he'd hoped.

Tossing himself from side to side to find a weakness did nothing.

Somebody had put some actual effort into making sure the chair stays bolted to the floor.

Billy wonders if he might be able to get away with cutting out the middleman.

Hopper said himself that he wanted to make sure they pay for all they've done so if a chance presents itself he's definitely not afraid to get his hands a little dirty.

He knows it's a pipe dream but it's the only entertainment he's got right now imagining different
ways to slowly *murder* them.

Or quickly, whatever works best in the moment.

A voice in his head tells him he should be concerned that he's so willing to kill and it sounds a lot like Harrington but he knows he's just imagining how Steve would react if he could hear his thoughts right now.

It doesn't actually bother him, the idea of killing these *fuckers*.

If he dies Steve's probably going to find a way to visit him in his grave though and it's something he'd *really* like to avoid.

He's pretty sure if anyone can find a way to do it, it'd be his very *literal* soulmate.

Maybe they can just haunt each other if one of them kicks the bucket too soon.

*That'd be kinda neat.*

His daydreaming doesn't last long however as Kirkman re-enters by himself without the muscle behind him.

If Billy had to take a guess he'd say that the big guy from before was the cop Hopper had been raving about.

Billy still hadn't seen Richards though.

The last time he had seen the guy had been at the lab before he'd been knocked out by him.

He starts to wonder if Richards is even *here*. His cover story definitely seemed far more complicated than that of a cop or a school nurse.

Kirkman drags a chair in with him, letting it scratch against the floor loudly like he thinks it's intimidating or something. He places it right in front of Billy so they're sitting face to face and takes a seat before wiping at his suit with his free hand.

It's the sight of two separate syringes in his *other* hand that makes Billy realize this is *probably* the moment where things were *really* going to start to suck.

Everything before this had been a warm-up.

"I was going to have you moved to a different room, strap you to a bed. It would have made things a bit more comfortable for you but you're being quite difficult so I decided against it." He says taking the cap off of one of them, flicking it lightly as a small drop comes out from the top of the needle.

"You say that to all the little boys you kidnap or just me Mr. K?" Billy asks sarcastically and he really has no idea what could be in either one of those syringes.

If he had to take a guess he assumes nothing good.

The man blanches and shakes his head, "don't be disgusting Billy."

"I'm sorry it's just I'm getting mixed signals here. What's with the nurse at a high school cover story, you draw the short straw or something?" He asks because he's curious and wants to buy himself time.
Kirkman just purses his lips and shrugs, wiping at his suit again.

"I was point of contact. My job was to monitor and find the easiest way to extract one or both of you but you made it easy by going to the lab so we adjusted our time table. Apologies for not having everything ready like we wanted." He says like they're talking about the weather or some shit.

That was disconcerting.

*Ready for what?*

It explained why everything in this room was white and honestly a lot of other things.

It did seem half finished.

"Why us?" Billy asks because it was the most obvious question he had no direct answer to yet.

"Richards of course, he let us know that there were a couple of subjects that seemed to be emitting synchronized behavior, it piqued his interest." Kirkman says and this guy *really* liked to hear himself talk which was good for Billy.

A shitty villain that wants to give away his master plan for world domination.

Good.

It's also good to hear that they had been the only targets this whole time and not Will or god forbid *Eleven*.

"So, that's when you planted the weapons in the trunk." Billy says because it's time to clear the air about that one.

Even though he knows it couldn't have been them.

Kirkman just looks at him and tilts his head in confusion.

"That was not us actually, we're at just as much of a loss as you are and we've been the ones monitoring you." Kirkman admits and that just makes Billy's blood run cold because *what the fuck did that mean?*

It was one thing to assume it was someone else but to hear it was another thing entirely.

"Both of us, monitoring both of you mean. So what, we got a stalker other than you three musketeers? Can't believe how popular we are." Billy says with a snort as he pulls at his restraints and it causes an uncomfortable rub against his skin.

Kirkman frowns and sits back in his chair, tapping his finger lightly against his leg.

"Actually, there was a man following Steve for a few days. We thought perhaps we were being intercepted but eventually he just…vanished. One moment we had eyes on him and the next he was gone, it's like he was a ghost." He tells Billy like he's also trying to figure it out, like it was still some annoying occurrence they couldn't write off.

*What the actual fuck.*

It takes every ounce of his self control to keep from *tripping out* because that means *Steve* is probably *still* in some form of danger.
Fuck these guys, there was something far worse going on.

The forest flashes behind his eyelids again as he shakes his head in confusion.

"Interesting, you seem concerned. Would you like to tell me where Steve is then?" He asks and Billy just snarls at him in response.

Kirkman smirks.

"It's alright I know we're going about this the hard way, I figured I'd ask anyway." He says, getting up slowly to roll his sleeves to his elbows.

"This first injection is to help amplify your senses. In past subjects that emitted psychic or telepathic behavior this has helped induce episodes when they needed a bit of a boost or a pick me up." He says clinically, wasting no time as he injects him without any forewarning.

Billy grunts, glaring up at him.

"Can't warn a guy?"

Kirkman shrugs as he uncaps the other syringe and places the used one onto the chair.

"You've been rather rude, I'm not feeling particularly generous."

Billy can feel the effects almost immediately and if it hadn't been intense before, it was now.

It feels like Steve is right next to him.

Cedar, the smell of pine, chocolate chip cookies, a cabin in the middle of nowhere-

He rapidly blinks, trying to shut it out and pull away but it's impossible.

He was everywhere.

It was like the injection had opened every sense possible to anything and everything Steve Harrington.

God.

He could even catch a whiff of his fucking scent here and there, it was overwhelming.

Joyce laughing, the scraping of metal on an oven, occasional radio static in the other room, Nancy and Jonathan walking down the stairs.

Will at a table in the kitchen, Jonathan cooking breakfast, worry, anxiety-

Things were coming at him disjointed, out of order and almost dream-like and he wonders if this is how Steve felt when his mind got put into a metaphorical blender and his memories got all fucked up.

The kids are laughing in the other room.

Max-

"This second one is going to cause you pain, if pain is the trigger then this will do nicely. It sets your nerves alive and it's very uncomfortable. I do apologize to Steve because I get the feeling he'll feel
this one.” He says, tone apologetic as he quickly injects the other one into his right arm.

When Steve wakes up Nancy is still sleeping next to him.

He smiles down at her, pulling up the other blanket she'd grabbed for herself at some point during the night before heading downstairs.

It's nice if not a little embarrassing that someone was there to help him through his break down.

Definitely more embarrassing because it was his ex that did it.

He wonders if it should feel strange that the sexual chemistry he felt for her had somehow vanished.

If anything he thought he'd always have that lingering sexual desire with Nancy of all people.

For a brief moment that feels like an eternity ago he'd entertained the thought of her being the woman he'd spend the rest of his life with.

Now he can't even remember the person he was back when he was with Nancy, it all felt hazy and not himself even though it was himself.

His desire to be with her just wasn't there anymore and maybe it never would be again.

He shrugs it off and as he walks down the stairs he can hear voices coming from the kitchen, when he goes inside he sees Jonathan making breakfast and Will sitting at the table.

Steve flushes.

Oh my god, I slept with Jonathan's girlfriend.

In the same house.

Wait, she was my girlfriend.

But she's my ex.

Oh shit, he's going to kill me.

Nothing happened though.

Fuck.

At some point Jonathan had turned to look at him, watching his internal freak out happening in real time as if it's the highlight of his morning.

"Have fun sleeping with Nancy?" Jonathan asks and Steve starts to freak out even more.

Jonathan looks like he's trying not to laugh and he sees Will covering his mouth with his hand out of his peripheral.

"Steve calm down, it's fine. We're good." Jonathan says reassuringly.

"I am so sorry, nothing happened I swear-"

"Seriously, I'm fully aware I have nothing to worry about." He says, holding up his hand to stop him.
Wow, ok rude.

Steve stops, feeling pretty offended that he's not seen as a threat.

Which he's not because he has Billy but that's besides the point.

Jonathan raises an eyebrow as if he sees that Steve has taken it as a personal attack.

"You threatened to kill Hopper yesterday. I'm pretty sure Nancy is the last thing on your mind at this point." Jonathan says with a snort.

Point taken but still, he could at least act a little bit put off about it.

Of course he's also aware he spent the night sobbing like a bitch so he shouldn't really be all that shocked.

He's pretty sure the whole house heard him which is something he's probably never going to live down.

Absently he wonders what it must look like to everyone else around them.

Billy was ready to beat the shit out of him that night at the Byers house and then three days later they're pulled out of another dimension with their souls bound to each other.

It must look absolutely insane from the outside looking in.

Steve knows they all talk but he doesn't worry about it too much because he's too busy worrying about Billy.

He may as well tape a fucking paper over his forehead that says 'hey, I have feelings for Billy' at this point.

That hollow feeling comes back at the thought and his entire demeanor changes, reality finally settling back into place now that he's fully awake.

Billy is in danger while he's stuck here with a thumb up his ass.

Wonderful.

Jonathan has gone back to cooking and has his back to him but Will is looking right at him, watching like a hawk.

"Can I talk to you?" Will asks as he gets up out of his chair to walk into the living room, beckoning for Steve to follow him.

He obliges and Jonathan just lets them, barely glancing in their direction as they sit on the couch to have a bit of privacy to themselves.

"I'm sorry this is happening." Will says and Steve just smiles at him, ruffling his hair.

"Hey, come on don't you go saying that to me now." He says, trying to reassure him.

He needs to keep his shit together, he can't keep making these poor kids worry about him.

Will just smiles back and readjusts his hair but soon he's got a look on his face that looks a little worse for wear.
"I didn't want to say anything because of-" he says, waving his hand in the air, "but I need you to know something."

Steve's brow furrows and he frowns as he leans back against the couch waiting for Will to go on.

"I've had this feeling lately, it's a bad feeling and I don't know what it means." He says as he stares off into space.

Steve gets a concerned look on his face, leaning forward and resting his elbows on his knees.

"Have you talked to your mom or Jonathan?"

Will shakes his head.

"It's not like that, it's something only Billy would understand and it's just...I know you have that thing with him so-" Will says as he trails off at the end, looking nervous.

Steve smiles and wishes more than anything Billy was here right now but does his best to act strong for Will in his place.

"Well lay it on me then, I'll pass on the message when we see him again." He says, acting hopeful.

Will just nods and looks up at him.

"Sometimes I feel like I can feel him and it's never for very long, only a split second like he's on the outskirts of my mind and then when he touches it, it's like he's cautious...like he hadn't meant to."

Steve takes in a deep breath trying to process the information, trying to understand it.

"By him you mean, the Mind Flayer?" Steve asks trying to clarify and Will just nods and glances over at the kitchen, clearly worried someone else might hear.

"It's different though, it's not like he's trying to get in or anything it's the opposite...like he's trying to hide. I haven't felt it in a while though." Will says looking down at his hands.

Steve just stares at him not really knowing what to do and he wonders if maybe Will wants a second opinion from someone like Billy who may have felt the same thing before going to his mother or Hopper.

He probably feels like he's gone crazy.

Steve can relate to that feeling all too well.

Everyone knows how Joyce can get in regards to Will, he understands not wanting to worry her and he sees how much happier Joyce has been lately.

It's understandable that Will would want to get more information before bringing it to her attention.

He knows he can't really say much on the subject though which sucks. The Mind Flayer never actually got inside of him, never attached itself to his mind.

It only got to Billy.

Steve could only feel what it felt like through their bond but even then Eleven and Billy were fighting against it, keeping it from reaching inside of him.
It's probably the only silver lining they have from that whole situation.

Granted the whole thing was still confusing as fuck and there were still a lot of unanswered questions.

First and foremost being: Why and how?

How did the connection occur and why?

That barely there connection that Billy and Will have with the Mind Flayer isn't something Steve can relate to.

Billy hasn't mentioned feeling anything recently but Steve also hasn't asked and it seemed that anything regarding safety meant that Billy was going to operate under fucking smoke and mirrors and flat out lie while hiding shit from him.

For all Steve knows Billy has far more information than he lets on.

It was getting really fucking annoying.

"Hey, whatever it is, it's going to be fine, ok?" He says putting his hands on Will's shoulder, making them lock eyes.

"I know and I'm sorry, this isn't what you need to hear right now but-" Will goes to say and Steve shakes his head.

"Don't ever worry about coming to me about anything alright?" He says pointedly.

Will just looks at him for a moment before smiling and nodding.

"Hey, breakfast is ready!" Jonathan shouts from the other room.

When Steve goes to get up Will grabs his arm.

"Billy is going to be okay."

Steve gives him a sad smile, averting his gaze.

"I know."

He wishes he could believe those words and as the day goes on, the only thing he can think about is Billy and it's agonizing.

He remembers their time together before everything changed, before Billy had to go and get himself kidnapped and Steve had to be taken to this cabin.

Steve had gotten Hopper to help him arrange a way to get his parents out of town for a while so Billy was able to stay at his place without interruption.

Interruption meaning the constantly looming dark cloud over Billy's head that was Neil Hargrove.

Things had been amazing, there were no complications which was weird but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

It was nice.
They'd been able to take their time with each other for a couple of days and just be *normal*. The movie date Billy had insisted on having was probably the most unconventional thing he's ever done.

---

*Two Days Prior*

"Get ready." Billy says as he walks down Steve's stairs and into the living room, looking all kinds of done up.

"Huh?" Steve asks around the pencil between his teeth he'd been chewing on anxiously.

School work in general was not his forte and writing was his *worst* fucking subject.

"Get ready, I'm taking you on a date." He says with his hands in his pockets as he leans against the archway.

If Steve had to describe what he looked like right now it would be *suave*.

It's way too distracting.

"Aren't you supposed to ask me first?"

Billy raises a brow and walks over to sit down across from him.

"Do you want to go on a date?"

Steve snorts but when he realizes Billy is actually expecting an answer he clears his throat and puts his pencil down.

"I mean yeah but-"

"Then get ready." Billy says quickly as he brings his ankle up to rest on his knee after moving forward and snatching the pencil between his fingers, twirling it around absently.

"I gotta finish-"

Billy sighs and groans out in frustration as he leans forward, rubbing at his temples before flinging the pencil off toward the other couch furthest from them.

It makes him look kind of adorable and petulant.

Steve almost wants to make him work for it a little harder but he can also tell there's a nervous energy that usually isn't present between them.

Billy was usually all confidence, all the time but Steve was very quickly starting to notice that if it had to do with *him* it went out the window.

Seeing a nervous Billy was probably going to kill him one day, Steve never thought he'd use cute and Billy in the same sentence yet here he is.

Billy is just...cute when he's nervous but trying to take charge and act like it isn't a big deal.

This clearly meant something to him right now and Steve doesn't know exactly why, but it doesn't
matter because it's impossible to deny him.

He's developed quite the soft spot for Billy Hargrove and it was getting worse by the day like a fungus or a rare form of cancer.

Okay, so maybe he's just trying to put up a front with himself but it was getting harder and harder for him not to adore the kind of person his self proclaimed soulmate really is.

Nobody would believe that Billy Hargrove is actually just a big teddy bear pretending he's all big and bad.

Which yeah, sometimes he could be but there's this other side to him, the one that might have a morally skewed compass but tries his best with the shit hand he got dealt.

If he could just let go of all that pent up anger, resentment and crushing guilt he carries around with him like a flesh eating disease, it'd probably be a whole different story.

He wishes Billy could see himself the way Steve sees him.

His life choices would probably improve and he'd probably be less of an asshole.

It's funny that he feels the need to act like one to try and get Steve to go on a date with him when all he needs to do is ask though.

There doesn't need to be theatrics.

"Steve, it's still going to be here when you get back so let me take you on a fucking date."

"You're being so damn pushy." Steve says with an eye roll as he gets up to retrieve his orphaned pencil.

No harm in making him work just slightly harder.

"Yes, now go." Billy admits without contest.

"Okay but at least let me pay-"

"I swear to fucking god if you try to pay for anything I'm going to set your wallet on fire."

They stare eachother down and as usual Steve loses because he knows Billy will actually do it and he's starting to regret thinking the guy could maybe be a better person a whole five seconds ago.

"Fine."

Getting to the movie proves to be a rather hilarious endeavor.

Steve gets nervous the moment he realizes it's actually a date.

Like a date, date.

The kind that people who are together go on.

It takes him longer to get ready and they're late so now he's getting chewed out as usual.

"Because of you I'm going to miss the previews." Billy says and he's going a solid ten miles over the speed limit.
"Oh god, you're one of those people?" Steve says with scoff as he gets a glare thrown at him in return.

"Eyes on the road, Hargrove" He says as he snaps his fingers in his face and Billy's hand comes up to swat him away.

"Damn straight, previews are the best fuckin' part."

"I think you'll live. The point of the movie is watching the movie." Steve says as he brings his foot up to rest it against the dashboard, pulling the lever on the side to lean back.

Billy reaches over with one hand to pull the lever back up as the seat snaps forward and Steve can't help the distressed yelp he makes as he quickly puts his foot down while reaching a hand out to keep from face planting into the dash.

"Oi, you do that shit in your own car." Billy says as Steve glares at him, adjusting the seat a third time.

"Asshole." He mutters under his breath.

"Hard to watch the movie if you go take a small vacation in your bathroom by the way." Billy says as he rolls his eyes.

"In my defense you told me to get ready last second."

"That didn't mean take ten years, Harrington."

"I need more than like five minutes, Hargrove."

"You look hot no matter what, calm the fuck down."

Steve blinks. Looking over at him, the beginnings of a smile on his face.

"That's probably the sweetest thing you've ever said to me."

In the next moment he realizes they've zipped into the parking lot and watches as Billy puts the car into park, quickly getting himself unbuckled.

"You're welcome, now step to it." He says as he gets out of the car only to turn around and peer back inside to see Steve staring at him still buckled in, unmoving.

"What?" Billy asks impatiently.

"We can't go into this without popcorn." Steve says because he's safe in here, Billy won't risk harming any part of the car and lunge for him.

"I'm going to fucking kill you."

"Please, I'll blow you when we get home." He says, trying to find a middle ground and honestly it was probably going to happen anyway so he may as well preemptively strike now, keep him on his toes.

"You could also just blow me on the way home." Billy says without missing a beat and Steve can't help the chuckle he lets out.

"Of course you want roadhead."
Billy chooses that moment to slam the car door shut and Steve blinks as he watches him walk around to the passengers side, yanking it open and leaning in.

"You don't?" He asks and it takes Steve a moment to realize he's responding to his comment from eight seconds ago because his face is now level with Billy's pelvic region and it's really fucking distracting.

"Yeah but-"

"It's decided, I'm holding you to it Steve Harrington." Billy says as he ducks his head down, leaning into the car as he puts a hand on his thigh for leverage, reaching over in the next moment to unbuckle his seatbelt for him.

"Do the words personal and space mean anything to you?" Steve asks, flushing as he looks around the parking lot full of people filing into the cinema.

Somehow nobody had started giving them strange looks.

Yet.

Billy moves away, backing out of the car as Steve finally gets out.

"Not my fault you're taking too long." Billy says, shooting him a smug grin.

"How long have you been concocting a plan for this moment? Be honest."

"The date or getting roadhead?"

"Both."

"The date was spur of the moment, the roadhead has been a work in progress for a while now."

Which…probably isn't true.

Billy looked like he'd taken a long while to get ready and Steve kind of wishes he'd been a fly on the wall for it because he's not sure what brought all of this on.

"There's this thing that people do, it's called asking." Steve tells him.

"Not as fun as you coming up with it on your own, adds an extra dimension of sexiness to it." Billy says as he leans against the car and Steve wonders where his urgency from earlier went.

"Really, that's what does it for you?"

"Makes me feel like I'm slowly corrupting you, turning you to the dark side." He says, wiggling his fingers dramatically before crossing his arms.

"I'm not exactly a fuckin' nun here, Billy."

"How many guys have you given roadhead?"

"I feel like we can turn this into a drinking game, who can say it more, out loud, where all of these people cam hear us? Also, that's besides the point." Steve says a little sheepishly.

They're not exactly being very quiet but also nobody seems to be paying attention.
"My statement stands. I ain't no Nancy Wheeler, bucko."

"Can we not bring up my ex when we're talking about my mouth potentially being on your dick later?" Steve says quietly with a grimace.

"Potentially he says. So, I still have a chance to make this happen." Billy says, raising his eyebrows suggestively.

"That chance is dwindling by the second."

"Do you realize how late you've made us to this movie?" Billy says, tapping his wrist.

"I already said I'd do it in exchange for popcorn."

"You're really going to sell your services for a bag of popcorn?"

"It's a tough economy out there Billy, we do what we must."

For the first time since Steve has known him he watches Billy burst into genuine laughter and it's one of the most beautiful things he's ever heard in his life.

He doesn't really consider himself a very funny person but he'll take it.

A distant part of him wishes he could record this, Billy enjoying himself and having fun, letting loose and looking relaxed for once.

He deserves good things even if he tells himself otherwise.

Definitely worth the all-nighter he was probably about to pull for this paper he's still gotta write.

"You're somethin' else Steve Harrington." Billy says but there's a fond look on his face, one that Steve usually doesn't get to see.

The butterflies have decided to swarm around in his stomach yet again and he fidgets, bringing a hand up to scratch at his head, not really knowing what to say to that.

He honestly has no idea how he got Billy to look at him like that, doesn't understand how he could possibly want to go out of his way to stress over a tiny date with him.

Or have a date in general.

He didn't think Billy was the type and always assumed he enjoyed the idea of fucking more than anything but he's been slow, gentle, easing Steve into the sexual part of their relationship.

It was kind of creepy how good Billy was getting at reading his social cues, knowing when to push and pull.

Sometimes it really felt like Billy was in his head, hearing his thoughts because more often than not whenever he started feeling down on himself Billy says or does something to make him forget what he'd been so upset about in the first place.

If anything Steve feels very...courted.

"Let's go get you that popcorn, pretty boy." Billy says as he tilts his head toward the cinema and Steve nods in response moving past him and a few moments later they fall into step together, shoulders brushing, enjoying each other's company.
Strangely enough, it's in that moment that a thought occurs to him that hasn't yet.

A thought that should feel terrifying but makes him feel relief instead, one that's been swirling around in the back of his mind but he's ignored it because this whole thing with Billy was absolute bananas crazy.

There's no guidebook for being someone's soulmate so he's just winging it, taking it all a day at a time.

It's too early but maybe it isn't, he's not sure.

Steve realizes he might be falling in love.

Later that day it gets easier to distract himself.

Steve is in the kitchen holding a tray of snacks Joyce made for everyone. To keep his mind off of things he'd decided to help her and Jonathan with the occasional Nancy fluttering to and from to help entertain the kids.

Granted, none of them needed very much entertainment since the backyard was literally the forest itself.

He was quickly learning he isn't that bad at the whole cooking thing, he kind of has a bit of a knack for it after helping with the first couple of batches of chocolate chip cookies.

Steve realizes it's the first time he'd really gotten to talk to Joyce, it was nice and they'd just talked about random things, they'd talk about Will or school, his future plans, anything they could think of, it was fantastic.

*Normal.*

He remembers back when everyone thought Will was dead and how they all thought she was a whack job, the whole town.

Steve included.

People still think she's crazy but after what she's been through, how could she not be?

How could anyone not be a little bit insane?

He'd even tried to rub it in Jonathan's face when they'd gotten into that fight long ago when Steve was just some stupid asshole.

Or rather, more of a stupid asshole.

How wrong he'd been about everything.

Everyone else is gathered up in the living room and he can hear them fighting over what movie to watch next as he silently snorts to himself.

A tingling sensation starts from his fingertips and travels to his arms.

He imagines it's mostly Mike and Dustin calling the shots while El doesn't care and simply likes that she gets to be around everyone.
Especially Mike.

Meanwhile he imagines Max tries to get El to like her while Lucas stares longingly at Max as Will just looks at them all in amusement.

Of course Dustin is being the loudest but Max has lungs on her that puts them all to shame but he's pretty sure Mike could win in a battle like that if it came down to it judging from that fight he’d had with Hopper at the Byers house that one time when they found out about El being alive.

The tingling sensation gets stronger like the feeling you get when your foot is asleep except it's all over his entire body and the smell of stale air fills his senses, cheap cologne and flashes of white walls filter through his mind.

_Max-

Huh?

Jonathan is right behind him carrying the other tray when Steve gets past the threshold and feels the bond suddenly come to life with a vengeance.

For a moment it's like having the air rush out of him as he stills and then rocks back on his feet and all he can feel is _Billy_.

_Everywhere_, all around him.

He clutches the tray tightly, too tight and he isn't sure what's happening.

Until suddenly it hits him.

It feels like every nerve inside if his body fires up and it's like having an electric current running through him except it's constant, it doesn't go away, it's just there.

Distantly there's an awareness that he drops the tray, it tips over onto the carpet and he feels himself fall to the floor.

He starts convulsing uncontrollably feeling as though he's been submerged underwater and he can barely breathe.

It's impossible to focus and all he can do is attempt to ride it out.

Jonathan is kneeling beside him, probably saying his name but he can't tell. His head lolls over as he looks past the threshold and into the kitchen.

Except it's not the kitchen anymore.

He sees a white room.

Billy is in the middle of it tied to a chair and he sees what looks like Kirkman standing next to him. _Oh god, no._

"No." He hears himself say out loud.

Billy's head shoots up, turning as they lock eyes.

"Billy." He cries out weakly and the convulsions are still there, wracking through his body but he
thinks he has slight control over himself again, gripping at the carpet under him with one of his hands, trying to ground himself.

Billy is also in pain, he can feel it.

He's gritting his teeth, staring at Steve with a look of horror on his face, trying to pull away to keep Steve from being able to feel it too.

It's useless.

Syringes flash through his mind, pieces of a conversation hit him in disjointed pieces.

They did something to him, Kirkman injected something into him and it's amplifying everything.

Kirkman kneels down and Steve sees the man tilt his head and follow Billy's line of sight.

"Do you see him right now?" Kirkman asks.

"He must be in a great deal of pain, it's a pity, he doesn't need to be." He taunts.

Steve feels Billy's emotions like they're his own melding together into one as uncontrollable livid anger courses through them.

Us.

Billy turns to look at Kirkman.

"I'm going to fucking kill you."

Their voices come out distorted, a combination of them both along with something else not quite human.

The sound of metal breaking fills their senses, a chain falling in Steve's mind as he goes cold all over, a surge building beneath his skin.

The lights flicker briefly, not only in the white room but in the living room of the cabin.

The surge slams against the chains in his mind, bending around them, trying to get free but it can't, it has nowhere to go and in an instant it dissipates, fading away like a dream you can't quite remember.

"Oh, that's interesting." They hear Kirkman say as if he's hit some sort of jackpot.

Billy turns his head back over to look at Steve and in that moment he knows he can see more than just him because his eyes flicker around like he's looking inside of a room.

Which means Billy can see where he is too.

Hopper was right, they're trying to find him through Billy.

"I wonder if Steve can hear me right now." Kirkman says, gripping Billy's chin.

"Steve, Billy doesn't need to be in pain and neither do you, turn yourself over to us. We can help you, we can help Billy." Kirkman says, staring at Billy like a fucking psychopath.

He just stares back at him for a long time, trying to get a handle on the pain.

"He can't- hear you...dipshit" Billy grits out with a low chuckle, probably to fuck with him.
"How unfortunate, I'll have to try harder." He says as if he doesn't quite believe him.

Steve can feel whatever drugs are inside of Billy start to wear off, they're slowly getting control of their bodies back when someone stands over him.

Steve turns his head up to the sight of Eleven.

She's standing there, looking into the kitchen while everyone else seems to be panicking around him. Now that he can focus a bit more he notices what's really going on like he's come back to himself after an out of body experience.

Joyce is frantically getting the kids out of the room but they're fighting her, trying to get to Steve. Jonathan is still trying to get a response from him while Nancy is clutching onto his arm and they're trying to lift him up after having turned him on his side.

However, El is simply looking into the kitchen like she can see Billy too and her eyes flicker down to Steve and then back to the room again as her expression hardens.

She holds out her hand and Kirkman falls to his knees, gripping his throat.

"Oh fuck." Billy says as he looks from Kirkman to them and then back again.

Steve can feel his hold on the bond getting weaker but El doesn't seem to care, focusing all of her attention on Kirkman.

She does a sharp jerking motion with her hand and the loud crack of his neck breaking reverberates in his brain as Kirkman falls to the floor in a lifeless heap.

Steve lets out the breath he didn't know he'd been holding in.

In the next moment he doesn't think, he lifts himself up and while he knows Billy isn't really there he still starts to go toward him anyway, can't help himself.

He eventually grabs hold of the frame leading into the kitchen but he can't fully get his limbs to properly cooperate so it's more of a crawl than anything.

"Billy!" he cries out, barely getting past the threshold of the doorway as Billy just looks back at him.

They both stare at each other in complete and utter disbelief.

He can feel him slipping away, can see the illusion start to fade but it's not an illusion he can see him.

Billy's right there.

Steve reaches out but he knows it's no use.

The last thing he sees before Billy fades away from him is a metal rope binding fall to the ground.

Chapter End Notes

Have I mentioned how fun this is?

Cause this is fun.
That shit had looked wild from Billy's side.

All worries he may have previously had in regards to Steve's safety fly right out the window as he looks down at Kirkman's dead, lifeless body.

He laughs hysterically.

Good.

He thinks because he won't be distracted, his mind won't keep going down the dark path of thinking it had been a trap all along to get to Steve.

They'd have to get past Eleven first.

He'd gotten a pretty good look at whatever cabin Steve was being held in with the others.

Now all Billy had to do was get there.

He looks down at Kirkman's body again and lifts his leg up to bring it back down as hard as he can, laying into it a few times just to make himself feel better.

When he's done he runs a hand through his hair, taking a deep breath before picking up the metal rope to wrap it around his hand to cover his knuckles.

This was something he could do, something he was good at.

Billy feels comfortable all of a sudden like he's in his element as he cracks his neck.

He figures enough time has gone by and the big guy would probably be coming in soon to check up on his friend.

He'd taken note of which direction the door opens and counts himself lucky that it'll hide him for a moment to give him time and a possible element of surprise.

He takes one more look at Mr. K's body and smirks.

What a retard.

The guy expects to get Steve's location and gets himself killed for it by a little girl.

Poetic justice at it's finest.

He hears the door start to unlatch and goes to hold himself flat against the wall so he's behind the door when it opens and simply waits it out.
The guy is much larger than he is and clearly trained, cover story or not he must have been a real cop at some point.

He holds himself like one.

But that means he's slower too. Also Billy has been known to fight dirty.

Really dirty.

Muscle head actually walks into the room which is his first and last mistake as he stands over Kirkman's body.

"Wha-" He says, clearly not expecting to walk in on his colleague being dead on the floor.

_Idiot._

Billy moves up behind him and he must have been too loud or something because the guy whips around but Billy doesn't give him the opportunity to react as he takes his fist covered in metal wiring and punches him in the face.

It does what he'd intended and Billy howls in delight as he pulls his hand back to see the blood on his knuckles, a mixture of his own from it digging into his own skin as well as the blood now coming from the side of the cops face.

He doesn't really care about the pain, kind of prefers a little pain when he's in a fight, keeps him aware, gets his blood pumping.

It's downright _exciting._

The cop takes a look at him after falling back a few steps and recovers, his face having gotten shredded a bit from the impact.

Billy feels it, knows that he's starting to lose himself to the rush and knows he gets a crazy look in his eyes as he pulls his hand back and hits him a few more times for good measure and he's pretty sure his own hand is going to scar.

The cop eventually pushes himself away only to fake him out and run forward like he's a wild bull.

Luckily head wounds bleed like crazy and this guy has blood pouring down his face like a waterfall to the point of obstructing his vision as Billy easily side steps him.

"Come on big guy, you're better than that." He taunts, licking his lips as he gets an idea.

The syringe that caused him pain, that caused _Steve_ pain was now lying on the floor next to him.

Mr. K hadn't used all of it on Billy and after knowing first hand what it feels like he can see why.

That shit had hurt like a _bitch._

An image of Steve writhing in pain on the ground flashes in his mind and the anger he feels is indescribable.

The uncontrollable need to unleash _rage_ washes over him.

He grabs the syringe off the floor while the cop goes to turn toward him and acts quickly, slamming it into the guys neck as hard as he can, injecting him with the rest while giving him a hard push back.
"No, no, no!" The man starts screaming like he knows what's coming and it doesn't take long for the guy to slam himself into the wall, falling to his knees.

Billy can tell when he finally feels the effects because he starts writhing on the floor and convulsing violently, crawling forward.

"Hurts doesn't it? You fucking cunt." Billy growls out as he takes the metal wire off from around his knuckles, hissing a bit as he peels it from his skin where it had imbedded itself into his hand as he starts to laugh even harder.

"Fuck, I haven't had a good fight in a long time!" He yells out gleefully to the cop who was probably in too much pain to listen.

His last fight had been with Harrington and that hadn't even been much of a fight.

Last time he'd actually gotten to let loose was back in the upside down.

It feels fucking good.

Not that this was a good fight of course, pretty one-sided if he's being honest, he'd expected more and he's almost tempted to let the guy recover and land a few on him.

Almost.

"Wa-it." The guy gets out through clenched teeth and Billy goes up to him, turning him over with his foot so he's lying flat on his back as he digs it into the guys throat.

He considers just crushing his windpipe now but there's really no fun in that.

"Sorry, what was that?" Billy says cupping a hand over his ear as he puts more weight onto his foot.

The guy starts writhing around and choking and it's incredibly satisfying to watch until he finally gets bored and takes his foot off.

"No offense, this has been fun but I got somewhere to be." Billy says with a shrug.

The cop grabs his ankle and Billy lands on his back pretty hard but it just causes him to laugh again and hold his sides as the cop struggles to get a firm grip on him.

"Told them- first." The cop goes to say after giving up on grabbing him, mumbling more nonsense but Billy can't hear him.

"You say something?" Billy asks, laughter fading as he tilts his head up to look at him.

"That boy- of yours, I told them- get him first- woulda been nice." The cop hisses out with a laugh between his labored, pained breathing and the way he says it implies something he doesn't like.

Billy sees red.

He has a straight shot and kicks the cop in the face as hard as he can.

The man groans and holds his face in his hands and he hears the clanging of a few of his teeth fall to the ground.

Billy rights himself, grabbing the wired rope again, wrapping it around his palm to create a taut string in front of him to come up behind the man, lifting the wire up over the man's head and leveling it
with his throat.

When the cop finally drops his arms down he wraps the metal around his neck but he's fast, pulling his fingers back up just in time to keep from suffocating immediately and Billy doesn't care.

He pulls anyway.

The metal digs into his fingers as Billy uses all of his strength to keep him there.

Turns out metal wiring can go pretty deep if you pull hard enough as it cuts into skin and there's a lot more blood than he's expecting.

The guy goes crazy, howling and screaming for mercy.

Billy can feel himself grin maniacally, barking out a laugh as he keeps him there a while longer.

"Shoulda kept your mouth shut." Billy growls out before unwrapping the cord from around his neck.

"Fuck you!" The man cries out curling in on himself as he holds his shaking, nasty looking, fucked up fingers together to try and stifle the bleeding and fails miserably because of the convulsions still wracking his body.

Billy just tilts his head to the side, smiling down at him as he stalks toward him.

He's so far past the point of caring.

All it takes is one large stomp right onto the man's jugular and Billy feels it underneath his foot like a cockroach. The loud cracking crunch of a neck breaking gives him a strange sense of satisfaction.

Motherfucker had to go and say some shit, had to put himself in that hot seat.

He'd been feeling moderately merciful but now he just wants to burn the whole fucking place to the ground with everyone inside.

How dare they target his soulmate.

They were going to try and put their hands on Harrington, they wanted him first all along.

He breathes heavily, bringing his foot back up and when it comes back down again he loses himself to the anger coursing through his veins.

---

When Billy comes back to himself he realizes he probably shouldn't have exerted so much energy.

Oh well.

He thinks as he searches the pockets of the dead bodies.

His knuckles are still all kinds of fucked up and his hands in general look like shit, he wishes he'd had gloves or something.

Gotta do, what you gotta do.

Billy rips the shirt from the cop and uses it to bandage the worst of the damage and he comes back out with a set of keys from Kirkman's body.

He's not sure what they go to if he's being honest but he hopes one of them is to a car.
If shit hits the fan and Hopper can't find him a magic pumpkin ride out of this place he's going to need options.

The strange thing is that he'd expected more people to show up upon hearing the ruckus because they'd been especially loud and yet there was complete and utter silence.

Those two can't be the only ones in this place, it wouldn't make sense.

When he walks out of the room there's a long hallway on either side of him.

There are three doors to his left and two to his right, the one at the very end of the hall to the right looks promising.

He decides to check each room first and finds that two doors are locked and one leads into a small kitchen.

It's dingy and old like they just recently made this their new hot spot and were still trying to make it all nice and pretty.

There are several dishes stacked in the sink and they only look a few hours old.

Which means there's more people here.

_Bingo._

That, confirms that.

Billy opens the fridge and doesn't really see how it would be a bad idea to make himself something.

He's fucking famished.

Sure, he's on a time table but he's pretty sure he's well ahead of it at this point.

Hopper was coming for him so he may as well take his time with it.

Billy grabs himself a few things and starts making himself a sandwich with a little bit of ham from the fridge on it.

Finding a knife is what takes him the longest but he eventually finds a drawer full of them and things were just _really_ looking up for him today it seemed.

When he goes to turn around there's a man standing at the door staring at him in shock.

Billy just stands there, tiny plate in one hand, sandwich in the other just as he's about to take a bite.

"Oh." Billy says as he puts the sandwich down onto the plate and puts it on the table next to him.

The new black haired man just continues to stare and Billy scratches the back of his head.

"You mind if I like, finish my sandwich first?" Billy asks because he really _is_ hungry.

The man gets himself out of whatever shock he'd been in somehow and rushes toward Billy.

"Guess not." Billy grunts out as the man grabs him by his shirt and slams him against the counter.

Billy isn't stupid, this isn't a situation in which he can just hope to maybe incapacitate someone and be done with it, if there were more people here he didn't need them to get back up.
Whatever these people were doing here it was inhumane and Hopper saying they were going to kill them was all the validation he needed because he knows Hopper isn't the kind of guy to just mindlessly say things like that.

Billy isn't going to question it.

He also isn't going to waste time because firstly he needs to survive and secondly he's got a sandwich to eat.

Billy grabs the knife he'd hidden under one of the towels in case someone tried to come up on him and lodges it right into the man's skull just as he's about to throw a punch at Billy that doesn't connect.

He pushes him back as the man falls to the ground and Billy watches as the life eventually fades from his eyes after he struggles a bit longer than expected.

Billy just shrugs and picks up his plate, stepping over the body to leave the room.

Ever since the upside down something had changed inside of him, things didn't phase him as much as they used to.

If anything it had all been put into perspective for him instead.

This shit, the kidnapping, needing to survive.

It was nothing compared to being stuck inside of that place.

He'd get himself kidnapped over and over again if it meant he'd never have to be in the other dimension ever again.

If he's being honest the only reason he'd stayed relatively sane in that place was because Steve had been there trying to hold it together just as much as he had.

He'd grappled onto Steve like a lifeline back then, the guy had balls of steel unlike anything Billy had ever seen and he was certain the moment he saw that hole close he was going to lose his shit and turn into a bumbling mess.

Except, when he'd turned to look at Steve he'd been completely floored.

Steve just stood there, looking up at where the hole used to be like it was an inconvenience, sighing like he was mildly annoyed.

It was as if they hadn't just been pulled into something Billy couldn't even begin to comprehend.

*Who the fuck is this guy?*

Was all he could think and Steve had turned to him, seeing the clear look of panic on his face as he put his hands up with a *'hey man, we're good, we'll figure it out.'*

We'll figure it out.

The phrase had become Billy's mantra ever since and whenever Steve had used it on him a sort of calming effect would wash over him.

So, it's what he'd started telling himself to keep going, in the moments when shit would get too real, when it felt like he was going to spiral out of control.
He continued to watch Steve as well, gauge his reactions to know if something was actually fucked up or if Billy was just inexperienced in this whole supernatural business.

The hardest part had been trying to make it into town when Steve would have nightmares like he was reliving memories of things that had already happened and Billy was positive by that point they weren't going to make it.

Steve had told him what it was like when he'd encountered the demogorgon for the first time and Nancy had pulled a gun to his head, how his entire life had changed after that and he'd just become a completely different person.

Until recently that's all Billy had known, he didn't didn't know that all transpired because Steve simply wanted to 'right his wrongs' after going on a journey of self discovery.

Poor sap.

Look where it got him.

Billy unfortunately understood exactly what he meant by all of that now, though.

His entire world was now tilted on its axis.

That's why when the Mind Flayer had found them Billy knew they were fucked.

Steve, the strongest guy he knew had looked like he didn't know what to do anymore and he was putting on airs.

Billy knew better, had been watching him the whole time, had learned all of his little nuances.

When Steve had told him sorry Billy knew for certain what he had to do because he didn't deserve this.

Steve Harrington had way more to live for than Billy did so he'd knocked the guy out and given himself up for the taking.

Little did he fucking know the chain of events that would be set into motion.

So now, here he was.

Billy Hargrove.

Stepping over the dead body of some asshole eating a sandwich without a care in the world.

When he exits the room and turns to go to the door that will most likely lead him out of here he stops dead in his tracks and blinks in utter disbelief at the person standing down the hall.

"Chief?"

"Billy?"

They both say at the same time, catching sight of each other.

Hopper is down the hallway dressed different than usual coming out of a room with a haunted look on his face and Billy realizes it's the room with Kirkman and that other asshole's dead bodies in it.

Jim just gets an even more horrified look on his face as he looks down at the sandwich in Billy's
hand that he still hasn't been able to finish due to multiple distractions.

"What the fuck happened kid?" Hopper asks like he's afraid to know the answer as he looks Billy up and down.

"Oh, I was hungry so I just popped into the kitch-" he starts to say, gesturing towards it while grimacing at the dead body inside of it.

"Not the sandwi-" Hopper holsters his gun and pinches the bridge of his nose, interrupting himself. "This!" He says, gesturing to the inside of the room beside him and Billy just takes another bite of his sandwich while looking at him sheepishly while shrugging.

Hopper just waits for him to finish his bite as they stare awkwardly at each other.

When Billy does finish he sighs and suddenly he's not hungry anymore as he puts it back on the plate, throwing it haphazardly on the dead body in the kitchen.

"So, they hit me up with some hardcore drugs. It backfired and El killed Kirkman, I killed the cop. He was the cop right?" He asks at the end because he still didn't know for certain.

"Wha- El? What the hell are you talking about?" Hopper says and now he's glaring at Billy.

"Calm down, the drugs amplified the bond and she could see what Steve was seeing so she snapped Kirkman's neck all nice and sweet and undid my bindings for me." Billy says like it's the most obvious thing in the world.

Hopper rubs a hand over his face, mumbling to himself and Billy imagines it's probably something like 'I'm getting too old for this shit.'

"Oh, this guy is dead too." Billy says, pointing his thumb into the kitchen even though he knows Hopper can't see from where he is.

Hopper just looks up at him like he has no idea what to say.

"But yeah, the other guy...that was the cop you'd been telling us about right?" He asks again.

"Yeah, that was him." Hopper says as if he can't believe that's the question Billy is asking him right now as he glances back over into the room.

Ok, so Billy hadn't been wrong about that, nice.

Also he has a feeling Hopper is going to have a conversation with him after this.

Suddenly they hear gunfire from a distance and Hopper gets his gun out again while looking to Billy.

"We gotta go, our ride is here."

Billy nods and doesn't dream of arguing.

He follows Hopper's lead and when they come up to a door leading into a large room that looks to be a small warehouse attached to the compound it seems like most of the gunfire is coming from inside of it.

Hopper goes to open the door and Billy grabs his arm to stop him.

"Why are we walking to the gunfire?" He asks and usually he wouldn't care but that seemed a little
counter intuitive right now.

"They're shooting at each other, let's go." Jim says like Billy is the one being ridiculous.

When they go inside there's storage steel everywhere with pallets loaded into them of things Billy is pretty sure he doesn't want to know about as they slowly use it as cover, walking closer to the gunfire.

Which still seemed like a stupid idea to Billy, but what the fuck does he know?

He quickly notices that the loading dock they use for freight trucks is open and a shitty looking off-white van with brown decals on the side of it is outside.

He wonders if that's their ride.

Through the steel he can see that a group of at least twelve men are indeed shooting at each other, acting hysterically like they're seeing something horrific and Billy has no idea what the fuck is going on.

Just as they're about to round the corner they both hear footsteps behind them and a short looking man with dirty blonde hair holds a gun up to them.

Hopper trains his gun on him as he turns around and they're all at a stalemate.

Billy puts his hands up and just stares him down, feeling utterly useless and he really wishes he had a gun of his own right now.

He'd expected it to get bad but this was getting pretty awful.

"My boss wants you alive." The man says looking to Billy but keeping his gun on Hopper.

"Yeah, and who's your boss?" Billy asks because sometimes people were dumb enough to talk.

"Richards, but you already knew that." The guy says and Billy snorts.

"That dipshit is your boss. He's the head honcho to all of this, you're joking right?" Billy says incredulously looking to Hopper like that's the dumbest shit he's ever heard.

Hopper looks just as unimpressed.

Although he supposes it shouldn't be shocking considering Richards works for Hawkin's Lab.

"We don't have time for this, you're not getting him so fuck off and we'll let you live." Hopper growls out.

The stubby man's expression just hardens as he glares at Hopper.

"Fine." He says as he drops one of his hands so he's only using one on the gun as he levels it at Billy.

Hopper shoots.

Once.

Twice.
Billy also thinks he hears a third shot and Hopper grabs him by his arm to lead him away.

Things get muddled after that and Billy doesn't know why at first until he's suddenly in the back of the van and there are people he's never seen before looking down at him as they drive away from the compound.

Billy, you've been shot.

He hears a voice say and he's confused at first until he realizes, oh.

It's Steve.

When he looks down he sees what Steve is talking about as he feels his hand move so he's holding it against the side of his stomach, blood pouring out between his fingers and Hopper maneuvers him so he's laying down flat on his back as he applies pressure to the wound.

"New plan, we get him to a hospital." He hears Hopper say.

"Yeah no shit, we're real close to one so it shouldn't be too long but if the cops follow us we're fucked." He hears another male voice say from the passenger's seat.

"I'll stop them if they do. Jim you said you weren't coming." He hears a female voice say with an accent he doesn't recognize and it sounds strange, like she's young or something.

She sounds like a kid.

"Yeah well, I changed my mind." Hopper grunts out.

Suddenly there's actually a little girl looking down over him cupping his face with both hands.

She's dark skinned with dark brown hair and he thinks he can see some purple streaks in it too, she looks to be a couple years older than Eleven and he really has no idea what the fuck is going on.

"Billy, I'm going to help with the pain." She says and suddenly it's like he's having an out of body experience.

His own body can't feel the pain but he can still feel it like it's coming at him from far away.

It's Steve.

Steve can still feel his pain.

The little girl tilts her head to the side in confusion as they lock eyes and it looks like she's seeing right through him.

Looking into him, inside of him.

Like she's not seeing Billy anymore, not even looking at him.

"There's someone else in there as well." She says, tone fascinated as if she's never seen anything like it.

"It's alright, I'll help you both." She says and in the next moment she brings her fingers up in front of his face, snapping them once.

Billy passes out.
Wow this chapter was intense to write, tapping into this side of Billy is actually one of my favorite things to do.

He's so fucking crazy I love it when I get to write this side of him.
The only thing Steve can do is stare.

His mind is racing, trying to comprehend everything that just happened as Billy fades away.

"What the hell just happened?!" He hears Dustin say, mirroring his own thoughts pretty damn well.

Steve doesn't say anything, just kneels on the hard wooden floor of the kitchen, staring off into space.

Joyce comes into view as she leans down so they're face to face, grabbing his shoulders and rubbing them gently with a concerned look.

She says nothing, probably waiting for him to speak, giving him a moment to collect himself.

"Bad man." He hears Eleven say from behind him because apparently the kids were getting no response from Steve so they had started grilling her instead.

"He's dead." Steve finally says and he belatedly realizes how ominous that sounds.

"Kirkman I mean, he's dead. Billy's out of his bindings." He clarifies mostly for himself and suddenly he's not worried anymore.

All he feels is sick to his stomach.

Billy's going to lose it.

Steve has no doubts about this, had felt the emotions for himself as if they were his own and for a moment they were.

He'd seen firsthand what Billy was like when lost to his anger, his rage and that was before they'd ever been bonded.

This was like taking a kid to a playground and saying go crazy, do whatever you want.

He was going to kill anyone that stood in his way.

The logical part of his brain understands that Billy is just protecting himself but he knows better, it's
not *just* that.

That's the excuse he's going to use and tell himself to justify letting his anger control him.

A large part of Steve fears for his mental state because every time Billy gives into that temptation to cause harm it was just going to make that ocean of untamed anger grow even larger.

Eventually, if they weren't careful it was going to drown them both because this wasn't just Billy's problem anymore.

It was *their* problem now.

Steve isn't sure how to approach it, has no idea what to do so he goes off of instinct instead.

He closes his eyes to focus, tries to find the pathway leading to Billy as he pulls himself toward it.

There's a pathway in front of him when he opens his eyes leading into what he knows is Billy's side of the bond.

He didn't know he would be able to tangibly see the path, wasn't aware that was even possible.

Perhaps that meant the bond was getting stronger.

It's the old train tracks, the one's he's walked down with Dustin when they had tried to lure Dart to them.

He'd been here multiple times before as a kid too, it was a familiar spot for him.

It had always been one of those places he'd come to with his friends, balancing himself on the metal beam while walking as they would all just do dumb shit that kids do, enjoying life.

He's always loved this place.

After a while he stops walking, hadn't even noticed he'd been walking until now.

There's dark, murky water slowly seeping through from Billy's side of the bond, weaving through the trees like a disease coming toward him.

It's covering everything, making its way into his side of the bond and it's a lot like watching the beginning of a flood.

The calm before the storm.

He looks down as it starts pooling around his feet as panic starts to set in.

It's getting worse.

There was no way Steve was going in there because he had no idea what he'd find and it had already been too much seeing where Billy was in the first place, feeling his pain.

He thinks he can see the beach in the distance.

He should probably turn around, go back.

It isn't exactly shocking that Billy was pulling on that darkness inside of him right now and it was seeping into his side of the bond.
He'd felt it for himself, how all consuming it could be.

More importantly Steve is afraid that if he tries to intervene, tries to help Billy come back to himself it might get him killed or hurt.

It would just be a distraction.

Billy didn't need Steve to sit there and tell him how to control himself.

Steve knows when to push and pull and this was not one of those times, he needed him back alive.

Whatever Billy was doing or whatever it was he had to do to survive Steve finds himself wanting no part in it.

He knows the things Billy is capable of, has seen it first hand and he finds himself feeling bad for anyone that crosses his path as the water continues to rise around him.

It's up to his ankles.

All of a sudden he sees a large shadow over him and he's not sure what he'd been expecting but when he tilts his head up he sees a vicious, angry wave coming straight for him.

It begins to destroy everything in its path, trees toppling over as it grows stronger and stronger, rising higher and it's a punch to the gut because it hasn't even overaken him yet but he still feels what's coming at him.

Unbridled fury.

Steve isn't sure what to do, doesn't know what he can do as it crashes into him.

It's like he's drowning, held down by the weight of Billy's emotion, caught in an undercurrent of hate, rage and anger that won't let him above water.

The only thing Steve can do is ride it out as he gets lost inside of Billy, water filling his lungs with guilt, sadness, despair until all he's breathing are emotions that aren't his own.

It shifts and changes but he doesn't know how to fight it, doesn't know how long he's there in limbo, slowly losing himself, being pulled apart by the ferocity of it.

He doesn't know who he is anymore as the water keeps him pinned, helpless.

He sinks deeper inside, falling further down, down.

Down.

It feels like he's being torn apart from the inside out, pulled apart into broken pieces.

Pieces of himself that are being spread thin in every direction but he doesn't know how to fully put himself back together again.

Suddenly, Billy is thinking of him.

He's thinking about the upside down, about Steve, about how he'd clung to him like a lifeline while they had tried to survive that place and he remembers.

Steve clings to it, that semblance of himself, pulling on it, holding fast to it like rope as he tries to
separate himself from Billy's torrential emotions, reigning himself back in, reaching out, *fighting* it.

*We'll figure it out.*

His head breaks above the surface of the waves as he *breathes.*

Breathes like he's found part of himself again but he knows there are still pieces missing and all he needs to do is *find* them but it's so hard to focus, there's *too much* going on at once.

When he opens his eyes he's staring down at a cherrywood desk, papers haphazardly strewn about in every direction.

A tingling sensation starts at the back of his neck as he brings his hand up to rub at it.

Today's newspaper is laying on the desk and when he goes to pick it up with his free hand his eyes catch sight of the date at the top and his eyes widen.

*August 30th, 1992*

"Steve."

When he looks up a woman he's never seen before, with a melodic tinge of raspiness to her voice is staring at him with big blue eyes, dirty blonde hair and a dusting of freckles on her face.

*Remember.*

"Huh?" He says out loud.

"Are you even listening to me?" She asks back in confusion.

The sound of a door opening takes their attention as they both turn their heads.

The tingling sensation at the back of his neck grows stronger.

*Six inch blade, black hilt, initials g.t. carved into it, straight through his heart.*

Before he can catch sight of who comes through the door everything fades away as the scene changes in front of him, fading into nothing.

He's in a house now, one he doesn't recognize that reminds him of the kinds of mansions you'd see in older movies and he's standing in a long hallway lit only by moonlight shining in through the stained glass windows.

It's a little bit weird that there's stained glass everywhere but Steve can appreciate a good piece of architecture when he sees one.

It takes him far too long to realize that the moonlight coming in through the glass however, is shining red.

He breaks out into a cold sweat, hands going clammy as he turns to walk down the hall.

A sense of dread washes over him as he gets closer and closer to two doors that look like they're leading to a balcony.

Shaking hands grasp their handles, the metal freezing cold to the touch as he yanks them open.
It feels like his heart is going to beat out of his chest as he gazes up.

His mind attempts to make sense of the fact that the sky has been nearly swallowed whole by a blood red moon.

There's a garden below him on the balcony as he realizes what he's looking at.

It's the upside down.

But it's not.

It's almost as if both dimensions have somehow melded together into one.

Something from within surges deep beneath his skin, something that's trying to get free.

*Remember.*

A haze washes over his mind, making him feel...confused, dazed, uncertain.

He feels like he was *just* dreaming but he can't...remember what it was *about.*

He forgets.

Steve squeezes his eyes shut, putting his hands over his ears and when he opens them again he's inside the back of a fast moving van booking it at well over the speed limit.

He may or may not scream a little bit as he grabs onto the door handle above him for dear life.

"Ohhhhh my goooood, what the fuck!" He yells out because he feels like he's having the *worst* kind of acid trip right now.

Not to mention everything feels foggy, incomplete.

It feels like he's not really...here.

There are people he's never met before around him too and he has no idea where the fuck he is.

He turns his head and sees Hopper beside him and gets the most *confused* look on his face.

He doesn't get to ponder why he's in the back of a van with Hopper and a group of what looks like a punk rock band as searing pain erupts in the side of his stomach.

Steve doubles over, groaning in pain and when he lifts his head he can see past Hopper's body.

*Billy.*

Steve gasps for air and moves toward him but he seems out of it and something isn't right.

*Feels strange.*

Steve looks down at himself and back at Billy and sees the blood at his side.

*Oh no.*

Steve is starting to piece together the situation and he can *feel* what's wrong, is trying to muddle through Billy's shock and confusion that was influencing him, making him act a little bit slower.
Keeping track of both of themselves at the same time was proving to be a very strenuous task.

Eventually his mind starts to catch up with current events.

Billy's been shot, someone shot him.

He moves over to Billy's body and touches his own hand over the wound and that's when he realizes he's actually not really there.

It's like he's a fucking ghost or something.

Instead he tries to get Billy to move his own hand to the wound since Steve apparently has no tangible sentience for some fucking reason.

What the fuck.

"Billy, you've been shot." He says in hopes of being heard.

He wills Billy to put pressure on the wound, feeling triumphant upon seeing the confused look on his face as he looks right at Steve and obliges.

He doesn't look through him, he looks directly at him as if he can see him.

At least someone can see him.

He watches Billy gaze down at the blood that had started to pool around his own fingers as Hopper moves into action, covering them with his own to apply pressure and lay him down flat on his back.

"New plan, we get him to a hospital." Hopper says and yes, good plan.

Steve liked that plan very much.

"Yeah no shit, we're real close to one so it shouldn't be too long but if the cops follow us we're fucked." Some guy with a freaky looking mohawk says from the passenger's seat.

"I'll stop them if they do. Jim you said you weren't coming." A dark skinned little girl says.

"Yeah well, I changed my mind." Hopper grunts out.

The little girl just gives Hopper a look and leans down over Billy, cupping his face with both of her hands.

"Billy, I'm going to help with the pain." She says.

Steve isn't sure if she does anything because he can still feel it just fine.

He could have gone his whole life without ever knowing what it feels like to be shot because it hurts like a bitch.

The little girl tilts her head to the side in confusion and it feels like invisible hands are reaching out, poking at him, looking into him, inside of him, grabbing at him curiously.

"There's someone else in there as well." Steve hears her say.

"It's alright, I'll help you both." She goes on to say, snapping her fingers in Billy's face.

When his eyes close Steve is submerged under water again.
Will watches from the doorway, looking at Steve while his mother tries to comfort him.

He hears the others talking to El but he's more worried about him.

It had been terrifying, turning around on the couch to see him convulsing on the floor.

Will thinks he understands a little bit better now what it must have felt like for everyone else when these things would happen to him.

He'd always hated how much everyone babies him, treats him like he's fragile.

All he wants is to just wants to be normal but seeing Steve, seeing what it looks like from the other side.

He knows now how awful it must feel for his friends, for Jonathan, for his mother.

It gets worse before it gets better as Steve suddenly speaks.

"He's dead."

Will feels his heart clench and he thinks for a moment that Steve means Billy until he speaks again. "Kirkman I mean, he's dead, Billy's out of his bindings." Steve clarifies, shaking his head.

The relief Will feels is immense as he places a hand to his chest.

So, that's what El must have done, she must have been able to see what had happened and intervened.

The relief is short lived as mom starts panicking, grabbing Steve's face and yelling into it. "Steve, sweetie. What's going on, are you ok?!" She says a little desperately, running her hands through his hair.

It's a familiar gesture to Will, he's experienced her scared eyes looking at him like that before too.

Returning from the upside down, getting free of the mind flayer.

He wishes he didn't know what it looks like, her helpless fear.

Will starts moving closer slowly, wondering what she's seeing.

Steve falls to the side, passing out completely as Jonathan moves quickly, helping mom set him gently onto his side on floor.

As he gets closer he can see Steve's eyes are moving behind closed eyelids rapidly.

"We should get him into a bed." Nancy says and mom nods as Jonathan goes to carry him bridal style.

Everyone rushes upstairs as Jonathan lays him down.

Mom tries speaking to him again but nothing is working.

"Mom, he's really pale." Jonathan says and Nancy reaches between them to put her hand against his forehead.
"His temperature is normal." She says but it doesn't alleviate any of them.

Dustin is sitting in a chair in the corner of the room with his arms around his chest with a worried look on his face.

It's the first time Will has seen all of them like this firsthand without being the one everyone was worrying about.

He hates it, 

Dustin is sitting in a chair in the corner of the room with his arms around his chest with a worried look on his face.

It's the first time Will has seen all of them like this firsthand without being the one everyone was worrying about.

He hates it, 

Max has her face buried in Lucas's chest and Lucas just has a hardened expression on his face as he grips her tightly.

El and Mike are holding hands.

Will doesn't know what to do with himself.

Mike turns to look at him and Will looks back as Mike holds out his hand to him, gesturing for him to take it.

Will slowly reaches his own hand out, unsure until Mike gets impatient and takes it into his, giving him a reassuring smile.

Soon after, mom puts her foot down and says they need to take him to a hospital, just in case.

She says they could try to tell them he's having a psychotic episode or something as a cover story which might not be too far from the truth.

None of them know how to help Steve or if he's in any actual pain.

They have nothing to go off of.

"Maybe they'll be able to give him something to keep him under, keep him from feeling." Jonathan says and at first most everyone in the room is against that idea but the more they look at Steve as he breaks out into a cold sweat, eyes still moving rapidly back and forth the more they start to agree that they're out of their depth.

They have no idea how to help him.

"Our cars are around the back of the house, I'll take him in my car. Nancy you come with me, and mom...you stay here with the other kids in case Hopper calls over the radio." Jonathan says and he's already picking Steve up off the bed as Nancy helps him, grabbing his keys for him as they walk through the door to make their way downstairs.

Will watches as El whispers something to Mike and Will tightens his grip onto Mike's hand, holding him back.

Mike turns to him as El starts to leave the room and starts pulling him along, "we're going with Jonathan, let's go," he says and Will doesn't see any reason to disagree.

When they load into the car it's a tight fit and he can tell Jonathan wants to protest but they may not have time as all three of them get inside and Jonathan lays Steve out on top of them so they can prop him up and hold him still.

Dustin is yelling and screaming, saying he needs to go with them and Will suddenly feels bad.
He knows how close Dustin has gotten to Steve but they were all worried.

*Maybe I should just get out.*

He thinks to himself and suddenly Dustin is grabbing him by the arm.

"Will, you gotta be my eyes and ears ok? Don't let *anything* bad happen to him man, I'm trusting you with this!" Dustin says and Will gapes at him before nodding.

*I can do that.*

During the ride there Steve starts to convulse violently.

Through everyone's panic he hears Nancy make a mention of the fact that she's worried he might be having a series of seizures.

She instructs them to keep him on his side if it looks like he's going to start choking on his own spit or tongue.

It's all incredibly uncomfortable with Steve's weight on top of them but Will imagines it's even worse for him right now.

"El, is there anything you can do?" Mike asks.

She shakes her head and lays the back of her hand on Steve's forehead with a frown.

"He's inside." Will furrows his brow and he sees Jonathan glance into the rear view mirror with a look of confusion on his face, "what do you mean?" Will asks because he doesn't know what that means.

None of them do.

"The bond, she means the bond, Steve's inside of it right?" Mike asks looking from El to Steve as she nods.

"You can't reach him or anything, you can't find him?" Mike asks this time which was honestly Will's next question too.

He'd seen the things she was capable of, maybe she could pull him out, help him with the pain or something.

"I would need Billy." She tells them and that isn't very helpful because currently they had no way of getting to him and they definitely didn't know where he was.

They didn't even have a way of talking to Hopper anymore.

Before they'd left he'd seen his mom walk up to Jonathan though and hand him a piece of paper.

He wonders if maybe it had been a number they could use to contact Hopper and he hopes more than anything that things will be ok.

They *have* to be.

When they get Steve into the hospital which thankfully isn't very far from the cabin they don't let anyone inside of his room at first.
None of them are family and it's the worst feeling in the world to just wait. There's nothing they can do.

Will goes to sit down next to Mike and he isn't really sure what to say, can't imagine how worried everyone else must feel.

"He's alright." Mike says out of the blue.

He can't do anything other than turn and stare at him.

"They're both fine, they've been through worse than this." He clarifies as everyone in the waiting room turns to look at him.

"Yeah." Will says quietly, willing it into existence.

"Mike's right, this is nothing compared to what they probably had to go through in the upside down." Nancy says and it almost feels like she's trying to convince herself.

"You heard him the other night though, what if this whole thing was a mistake all along, just like Steve said?" Will says quietly with a frown.

"I just...I feel like they'll be ok." Mike says with a shrug of his shoulders.

It's certainly hopeful and there's really no reason to assume the worst otherwise.

"They have no idea what's happening to them." Jonathan says with a sigh.

"Nobody knows what's happening to them." Nancy says with a frown.

"You saw the lights flicker, everyone saw the lights flicker, right?" Mike says, looking at all of them, eyes stopping on El.

"Yes." She says with a nod.

"What does that mean?"

"I don't know."

Nobody really knows what to say.

"The only reason they'd be keeping us out of his room is if something's wrong." Jonathan says, changing the subject as he starts pacing the floor.

Will is a little bit surprised because he knows his older brother had never been good friends with Steve but it seemed like Jonathan was more worried than Nancy.

Nancy still looked just as worried but maybe she was just used to it at this point and his brother had always been a little overly dramatic at times.

He knew Nancy was the calm and collected one at the end of the day.

"Is it safe to have El here?" Nancy whispers to all of them suddenly and they don't really know the answer to that.

Hopper would kill them for having her so out in the open like this.
"It's fine, Hopper will understand and besides she's probably the only one that might be able to help." Jonathan says and Will doesn't really disagree.

If anything it was better that there were more people around her, nobody would take notice with her surrounded by others and not many people seemed to be in the waiting room of the hospital anyway.

They wait for about an hour more before the doctor finally comes out, Jonathan and Nancy go talk to him and Will can just barely hear what they're saying.

"When we hooked him up to everything, about fifteen minutes after that, his heart rate skyrocketed. He started to exhibit strange behavior as if he was in some sort of excruciating pain but we couldn't find where it was coming from. We sedated him, he didn't react to it at first but suddenly it hit him pretty fast and we've got him stabilized at this point." The doctor tells them.

Nancy grabs onto Jonathan's arm like a lifeline and Will can see her fingers digging in and he knows it must be painful but Jonathan doesn't even flinch.

The doctor goes on and on, trying to find out what kinds of drugs Steve has been taking. He starts going down the route of explaining that he'd been exhibiting the signs of an OD patient.

Will was even more worried because they weren't going to be able to find any drugs in his system.

They'd have to go with the manic depressive episode idea his mom had come up with.

The doctor pulls them further away and he can't hear what they're saying anymore.

He shares a look with Mike and El.

The doctor finally leaves a few minutes later and Jonathan sits down, putting his face in his hands as Nancy starts rubbing his back gently.

"We can see him soon but he's sedated." Jonathan says after rubbing at his eyes.

Nancy sighs while Mike and El start holding hands again.

"Should we call Hopper?" Will asks, because doing nothing didn't feel right.

"Mom gave me the number to the cabin and a number I can contact Hopper by but we don't even know if he's by whatever phone this connects to." Jonathan says, pulling the paper out of his pocket.

"Maybe they got through to Hopper by now over the radio?" Mike says, looking to Will who nods at him in agreement.

"There's no harm in trying." Nancy says and Jonathan just stares at the paper for a bit longer before running a hand through his hair and nodding.

"Alright, I'll try." He says.

"Jonathan, is Steve alright?!" His mom starts saying hysterically over the phone and it takes him a while to calm her down.

"Mom, he's being taken care of I need to know if you've been talked to yet." He says trying to be as subtle as possible in case they were being listened in on.

"Yes, he just got done talking to us, I have a number to give to you to contact him by but sweetie
there's something I need to tell you first.” She says and he can hear her rummaging around, most likely so she can find whatever paper she'd written the number down on.

He hears Dustin say something to her he can't make out as she mumbles a low 'thank you'.

"What is it?" Jonathan asks impatiently.

"They had to take Billy to a hospital, he got shot." She tells him.

Jonathan takes a deep breath and pinches the bridge of his nose.

*Holy fuck.*

This was just becoming absolutely insane.

"He's fine though, they stabilized him. The number Hopper gave me, to give to you is for the hospital they're at and he's at a different one, before you ask. They're about thirty five miles from you." She tells him and Jonathan wonders how everything had suddenly taken a turn like this.

"Ok thank you, I'll keep you updated." Jonathan says and before he can hang up she asks to speak with Will.

He puts the phone down to go into the other room to grab him.

They talk on the phone for a while and Jonathan can't help that feeling of restlessness as he starts tapping his foot impatiently.

He doesn't know what to do with himself.

Billy's been shot which meant that the pain the doctor's had been describing in regards to Steve was probably *because* of that.

He'd probably started to feel Billy's pain.

He grimaces at the thought.

It all sounds awful. To be so intimately connected to another person, to have absolutely no privacy to yourself, to feel their pain like it's your own and have it be so debilitating that you get put in the hospital because of it.

He doesn't envy it one bit and the fact that Steve is stuck with Billy of all people was just the *worst.*

Sure, he'd started warming up to the guy and Billy hadn't been as much of an asshole to him mostly because they avoided eachother but Steve could do *so much better* than that psycho.

Nancy *likes* Billy though.

Jonathan doesn't understand it one bit, it makes absolutely no sense to him.

He'd also disagreed with this whole thing from the very beginning just like Steve because it was just flat out *stupid* and *unnecessary.*

Saying no to Hopper was difficult though and he was still thankful that Billy had been the one to bear the brunt of all of this because it still could have been Will, but that didn't change anything.

He still just could not bring himself to like the guy.
He feels guilty, to be having these thoughts after just finding out he’s been shot but Steve is the one that has to suffer for it.

It would be different if Billy was just being self sacrificial and it was only affecting him but his actions reflected back on Steve too.

Billy couldn’t just go around guns blazing, acting like an idiot and being bait whenever he wanted because ultimately it would just end up hurting Steve too.

That's what pissed Jonathan off the most about all of this.

The carelessness, the detachment Hopper had been about the whole situation, the fact that Hopper was *clearly* hiding something from all of them.

That was something Nancy agreed with him on.

There was something fishy happening, something more that wasn't settling well with either one of them and they hadn't been able to look into it because things had gotten so intense lately.

Will hangs up the phone and smiles, nodding at him before going back into the other room.

Jonathan sighs deeply, picking up the phone to dial the number for Hopper.

It takes a while but eventually he gets connected through.

"We can't talk for too long, they're probably listening as we speak but I'll get him out of here as soon as possible and back to all of you." Hopper says quickly.

"Hopper, Steve's in the hospital, that's where some of us are right now...a lot has happened." Jonathan says.

There's a long pause over the phone and he can hear low cursing and a faint beeping noisuntil Hopper speaks again. "I know, Joyce told me. Stay with him, if they're listening they'll try to find us, they already know enough. Do not leave him alone do you understand me?" He says, tone serious.

"Yeah alright, we'll meet back at the place, worst case scenario, right?" Jonathan asks, trying to be more careful.

"Yeah, I'll keep in touch, don't tell *anyone* where you are." Hopper says and the phone line goes dead.

Jonathan sighs, putting the phone back on the receiver.

When he gets back out into the waiting room everyone has grim looks on their faces.

"What?"

Mike and Eleven look at eachother, Nancy just starts staring off into space and Will looks around at everyone before sighing.

"They came to talk to us while you were gone." He says since nobody seemed very willing to speak.

"And?"

"Steve fell into a coma." Nancy says gently, softly like she's seconds away from crying and he moves forward fast, pulling her into his arms.
"Billy got shot, they have him stabilized though. He'll be fine." Jonathan tells her since there's no reason not to tell the truth.

"What?!"

"That's...that's probably why...Steve could probably feel it, or something." He says with a grimace.

"This is awful..." Nancy says as she pulls him closer.

"Yeah, I know..."

When Billy wakes up it's a fight to open his eyes, he's so drugged up it reminds him of the binges he'd go on back when he lived in California.

He feels slow and lethargic, his body weaker than it's ever been.

It's a miracle he even manages to open his eyes in the first place.

After some time, when he finally does there's that little girl from before sitting in a chair across the room.

She's reading some book he can't see the title of.

He turns his head to the side.

There he is.

Relief washes over him immediately at the sight of him sitting right next to his bedside in a chair, all nice and pretty as usual.

Unharmed, safe.

Except he looks pissed off which is weird to Billy's drug addled mind.

Shouldn't he be happy to see me?

"Hello, sweetcheeks." He says, trying to alleviate the mood a little as Steve just glowers at him in return.

"Billy?" The little girl from across the room says as she puts her book down, walking over to the empty side of his bed.

"Who the fuck are you?" He asks, turning his head from Steve to her because right now he was confused as shit.

"My name is Kali, Jim asked us to help you escape the compound. We hunt men like the ones that took you." She states plainly.

"Where's Hopper?" He asks, furrowing his brow.

"Making a phone call, he'll be back soon."

Billy turns his head and looks back at Steve.

Wait.
How could Steve even be here right now?

_How long have I been out?_

Wait.

_I saw Steve in the van._

He swears he saw him.

_How could he have been in the van?_

Billy had seen him at some sort of cabin though.

_Is the cabin close?_

Steve just continues to stare at him like he's letting Billy piece things together, gather his bearings and figure it out.

"How are you here?" Billy finally asks him instead of internalizing everything while staring off like a crazy person.

"Huh?" The little girl says, tilting her head to the side and interrupting him.

"M' not talkin' to you." He says with a weak wave of his hand in her general direction.

"Billy, there's no one else here."

"I'm not really here, Billy."

They say at the same time and now he was even more confused.

He starts to panic; attempting to prop himself up, reaching out to touch Steve as he moves closer.

"Stop." Steve says, placing his hands on the bed but he's still not fully within reach and he doesn't **feel** like listening.

He needs to-

"Billy, wait." The girl says, putting a hand on his chest to keep him down.

He goes back down a bit but grabs Steve's wrist, looking up at him.

It feels **weird.**

He sees himself touching Steve, he's looking right at him but it's **wrong.**

It feels like a distant memory, like his mind is filling in the gaps for him.

It's the feeling of knowing what it's like to **touch** him, but he's not really **there.**

He actually starts to freak out now, his heart rate monitor starts beeping like crazy, filling the room with sound other than the blood pounding in his ears.

There's **too much** going on, too many drugs in his system, it feels like he's officially lost his **fucking** mind.
But wait, there's more!

Somehow Steve had turned himself into a fucking ghost.

Add into it the fact that he hates hospitals and it's only a matter of time before he falls into a full blown panic attack as he clutches his face with his hands, squeezing his eyes shut.

Hopper comes into the room right at that moment, his face going from annoyed and frustration to worried and concerned.

"Whoa- hey…what the fuck happened?!" He says, voice gruff and Billy can hear him sprint across the room to his side.

When he opens his eyes again Steve is standing at the foot of his hospital bed now, arms over his chest looking down at Billy like he's being an idiot.

"You need to calm down." Steve says, tone annoyed.

"Fuck you, what the fuck is going on?!!" Billy yells out at him.

"You're being overly dramatic for no reason." Steve says, rolling his eyes and wow, all the shit he's been through and Harrington wants to give him attitude right now?

"Yeah well, you try getting shot!" He screams out at Steve as Hopper holds him down with Kali's help.

Jim turns some sort of knob up on one of the side panels that he probably shouldn't be touching, a nurse bursts into the room to catch him doing it red handed and starts yelling in Hopper's face about it.

"You dipshit, I felt it too!" Steve says, throwing his arms up in exasperation.

Billy hears more yelling and screaming as Hopper starts talking back at the nurse but he can't make out what anyone is saying.

His vision starts to go dark.

He passes out again.

The second time Billy comes back to consciousness he feels a bit more under control.

Probably because he knows what's going on a little bit and everything isn't as confusing.

Steve is still there, sitting across the room, reading some sort of magazine.

Hopper is by his bedside but the little girl, Kali is gone.

"Feeling better?" Hopper asks him as he folds his hands into his lap and looks at Billy pointedly.

"Just peachy." Billy grumbles out and Steve is suddenly standing on the other side of him now, staring at Hopper.

"What do you remember?" Hopper asks him and Billy shrugs.

"Everything, why?"
Hopper furrows his brow and takes a moment to answer like he's trying to find the right words to say.

"You were talking to yourself before we had to put you under again." Hopper replies, gauging his reaction.

"I was talking to Steve." He says honestly because he doesn't see any reason to lie.

Hopper just gets a concerned look as he eventually rubs a hand over his face before looking back at Billy.

"Steve's in a coma at another hospital right now, do you still see him right now?"

"What?" Billy says in disbelief, blinking rapidly.

"Coma?!" Steve yells out like this is new information to him.

Billy shakes his head and looks up at Steve, "Why are you in a coma?"

"Oh I don't know, probably because I'm trapped inside of your head Billy!" He says, glaring at him like it's his fault.

Is it his fault?

"I don't understand." Billy says because he isn't sure what else there is to say.

"I think it's my fault, I reached inside of the bond and well...long story short it was pretty bad timing." Steve says scratching the back of his head with a guilty look on his face.

"What the fuck have I told you about going into my head?!" Billy yells out and Steve has the audacity to put up his hands and look sheepish.

"I had just seen you tied down to a chair being tortured Billy, I didn't think about it!" He says and now he's yelling too but trying to placate him.

As if that's a good enough excuse.

Except it kind of is.

He can't talk, if he'd been on the other side of this he'd have probably done much worse.

Billy just looks at Steve like he can't believe what he's hearing right now and groans, hitting his head back against the pillow to turn and look at Hopper who he realizes could only hear his side of the conversation and not Steve's.

"Uh yeah, he says he fucked up." Billy tells Hopper, shortening it down a bit.

"Billy!" Steve says in annoyance and it causes him to smirk a bit.

Hopper just takes a deep breath and sighs, looking more exhausted than Billy has ever seen him.

"We need Steve to wake up, it's too dangerous for him being out in the open like this, same with you." Hopper tells him and Billy suddenly remembers Kirkman's words.

"Chief, they didn't plant the weapons in Steve's car, it wasn't them." He says quickly.
"Wait what?" Steve says.

Hopper's jaw clenches and he looks out the window of the room and then back again at Billy.

"What do you mean?" He asks and Billy shakes his head.

"Kirkman told me someone was following Steve for a few days, it must have been whoever that was." Billy says filling in the blanks he couldn't fill in before because he'd been too busy.

"Was that before or after you killed Reece?" Hopper asks darkly and Billy just raises his brow in confusion.

"The cop, the one you brutally murdered." He clarifies and Billy's expression hardens.

He's not sure why he does it but his head automatically turns as he looks over at Steve who's avoiding his gaze.

He doesn't really know what to say because Steve has this haunted look on his face like he somehow knows what Hopper is talking about.

The first time Billy passes out in the van and Steve is submerged under water again he tries to grapple onto something, anything to pull him back up to find the other pieces of himself.

Finally, he manages to find something and when he opens his eyes he's standing in a corridor.

This time it feels different, it doesn't feel like he's seeing through Billy's eyes, seeing what's happening to him.

No, nothing like that.

It feels like he's watching one of Billy's memories.

A man walks through him like he doesn't even exist and it startles him at first as he feels himself up.

He feels solid, but apparently he's not?

He shakes it off quickly, following to see where the man goes and he's rather large, built a lot like a footballer.

When Steve follows him into the room, looking inside, it's the white room.

The one they'd been holding Billy in.

He sees Kirkman's body on the floor and Billy is beating the shit out of the larger man.

Steve grabs hold of the frame of the door with a white knuckled grip as he stands there transfixed, unable to look away.

Billy grabs the metal wiring they'd used to bind him, wrapping it gingerly around his knuckles.

He lands an incredibly painful punch into the man's face.

Steve winces and Billy howls like he's enjoying himself.

His knuckles must hurt like hell because the impact had to be digging into Billy's skin and Steve can't help but be horrified.
Immediately he feels like he's back in the upside down.

Billy wails on him a few more times until the bigger man pushes himself away only to lunge back at him, getting easily sidestepped and crashing into a wall.

*God,* it's almost embarrassing to *watch.*

You'd think the man would have put up a bigger fight yet here he was getting taunted.

Unfortunately, Steve knows exactly what it feels like to be on the receiving end of that taunting and it's annoying as fuck.

In all honesty, he understands why some people might want to see Billy get punched in the face.

He has a very punchable face on bad days or...days in general.

It's unfortunate that he doesn't let anyone past those *titanium* walls he's built up.

Although, this probably wasn't the most opportune of times to consider something like that as he watches Billy literally *murder* a man.

Semantics and yeah, maybe that is the fact that he's seen inside of his soul, knows the depth of the kind of person he really is and wants to be.

There is a good side to him, you just have to dig really, really, *really* deep. Steve just happened to be the guy lucky enough to have gotten soulbound to him and it's...

*Huh...*

If the bond wasn't there...would they have ever been able to find common ground?

It's...depressing to think about, he's pretty fucking certain Billy only feels anything for him because of the bond.

Even now he's afraid, he's certain Billy will get tired of him. Yeah it probably feels great right now but it wasn't going to last.

He was eventually going to realize Steve is actually fucking worthless.

Billy seems to think he's some sort of capable person when in reality he feels like he has *no idea* how he's supposed to *graduate* sometimes.

A new kind of guilt that he's ultimately just going to hold him back settles deep inside his gut and he has no idea what to do, how to proceed.

He snaps out of it, watches as Billy goes for a syringe on the floor.

It must be the one that had caused them both pain and he knows what's going to happen next.

There's a part of Steve that should probably feel *bad* for the guy but he'd felt it all for himself what they'd done to Billy, to *him*.

*Us.*

He'd felt Billy's pain like it was his own and it fucking *hurt.*
He does feel bad for the man he decides, but only because he'd been stupid enough to face the monster that had been waiting inside this room for him.

"Hurts doesn't it? You fucking cunt." He hears Billy say.

All of that anger and malice was being unleashed on this poor unsuspecting guy.

It's easy to forget for some reason, this side of Billy.

He taunts him some more and it's when Billy starts stepping on his throat that Steve wishes he would stop, would just end it, this isn't necessary.

The sad part is he knows this is just the way Billy is, he's never been taught differently.

He has lived his life under constant state of threat, of his own father, wondering if the man was finally going to get it over with and kill him one day.

The memory of a trembling Billy clinging to him for dear life ignites his own anger because it had been a slap to the face, an immediate revelation.

Billy is afraid.

It would all make anyone go a little bit insane.

To constantly feel afraid at all times, even of the people who should love him, care for and nurture him.

It's fucked up.

He knows there's that beast inside of Billy created as a result of self-preservation that sometimes can't be controlled, he's not entirely stupid.

It definitely scares the shit out of him as he sits there staring it in the face for the first time in a long while.

The man grabs Billy's ankle at one point and he falls to the ground laughing hysterically.

Steve grimaces but can't look away, it's like an awful train wreck.

Get up, get up, stop being stupid.

"Told them- first." The guy suddenly chokes out.

"You say something?" Billy asks him, his laughter suddenly gone like he'd never done it in the first place and it was frightening to watch him go from one emotion to another so seamlessly.

It was almost robotic in nature, far detached from his humanity.

"That boy- of yours, I told them- get him first- woulda been nice." He hisses out.

Oh no, oh no, no, no.

Steve feels the breath get knocked out of him and it feels like that wave crashes right back into him all over again.

He closes his eyes, puts his hands over his ears, leaves the room; back slamming against the wall as
he slides down onto the floor because he doesn't want to see this, doesn't need to hear it.

"Please stop, please, please, please." He pleads, whispering under his breath but he's not sure who he's pleading to.

Only that he wants this to end, wants to wake up from whatever nightmare he was in right now.

He'd already felt it for himself that fury when it had crashed into him that first time, taken him apart.

This is the moment when Billy lost full control of himself.

When he opens his eyes again he's in the hospital room.

As he'd appeared in the hospital room the first time with Billy, he'd been more annoyed than anything after recovering from the initial shock of seeing such an awful memory.

When Billy had woken up he couldn't help but glare at the guy, the only reason Steve was here right now was because he couldn't control his anger.

Logically Steve knows it's his own fault for pulling himself inside of the bond but still.

It's easier to blame Billy.

He'd allowed that wave to crash right into him, locking him inside, traversing a maze of Billy's design.

He'd tried finding the right pathway but it was no use, there were so many scattered parts of himself strewn about everywhere it was making it hard to focus on one single thing.

There were so many things pulling at him at once and he kept flickering to and from them uncontrollably.

His instincts are all he has and all he knew at this point was to follow the natural pull toward the pieces of himself calling out to him like he's been trapped inside of one huge dream.

All he could do was let it happen, ride it out.

To make matters worse, Billy had started tripping out, falling into a panic attack and...okay, maybe Steve should have been a bit more understanding but he wasn't feeling particularly sensitive toward him as he watched him get even more sedated soon afterwards, passing out yet again.

The second time Billy passes out and Steve is pulled into another memory he appears inside of a rather large looking house.

A small child runs past him into a dining room and he starts walking in that same direction.

When he gets a better look at the kid he realizes it's Billy.

A younger Billy who has to be at least a couple years older than the shithheads he knew.

Smaller Billy runs into what looks like a kitchen.

He can hear a woman humming some Donna Summer song he doesn't remember the name of.

As he turns the corner into the kitchen he sees a man in the living room lounging in a chair watching TV and it takes him a while to realize it's Neil.
Billy's father, looking happy.

Different, relaxed, younger, so much unlike the man Steve had met.

Which means the woman-

Billy's mother.

When he walks into the kitchen she's bumping and swaying, getting different things out of the fridge and singing while Billy laughs at her.

She's just as beautiful as before if not more so fluttering about vibrantly with her long flowing, curly blonde hair except this time it's up in a messy ponytail.

She laughs and it sounds melodic as she pulls in a reluctant Billy to dance with her.

It makes something stir inside of Steve's chest as he feels his eyes involuntarily begin to water.

It's the same laugh Billy gets when he's genuinely happy, the same laugh Steve had gotten to hear at their movie date and he wipes at his eyes.

Get it together, Harrington.

"Alright, it's your choice tonight hot stuff, what are we having for dinner?" He hears her say as she lets him go.

Steve snorts, so this is where Billy got all that pet name calling from.

Also, he now remembers the name of that song she was humming earlier.

"Anything you make is good, mom...come on." He whines out as she just rolls her eyes at him.

"Let's take some initiative baby, you always help me cook every night, you should get to choose too." She says with a wink.

God, they were just spitting images of each other it was making Steve want to cry even harder and it was making him wish he'd been able to meet her.

"Ok, spaghetti!" Small Billy says excitedly.

"I should have known, good choice. Wanna get me the meat from the fridge in the garage, love?" She asks as she turns to open a cupboard to grab a large pot, filling it with water from the sink.

"Yeah, okay."

Steve watches as Billy helps her prepare the meal fondly. They both take turns singing different songs at the top of their lungs, like it's the only thing Billy wants to be doing right now and Steve tries to keep himself together at the thought that this somehow mundane task from years ago is so highly treasured in Billy's memories.

At one point she kneels down and starts to sing quietly to him like they're the only two people in the world, a moment just for them as she brushes a lock of hair out of his face, causing him to giggle.

Her voice is soft and melodic with a bit of rasp to it, she sounds beautiful as Steve realizes she's singing 'All You Need Is Love' and he can't help the smile that he gets on his face as Billy just sits there listening to her, completely enraptured.
"I ever tell you the story about this song baby?" She asks him when she's done as he shakes his head in response.

"When you were born and we were bringing you home, your dad was just completely terrified goin' only ten miles an hour. I thought we'd get pulled over for sure." She whispers to him and they both laugh looking in the direction of Neil.

"I was just yellin' at him the whole time, I don't even know what about, I was just as stressed out as he was and all of a sudden that song comes on the radio right as I'm looking down at you." She goes on to say as she makes a cradling gesture with her arms.

"I looked down at you sleepin', it's the moment I got so scared because I realized I was a mom now and then you just opened your beautiful big blue eyes and looked right at me. I knew in that moment I'd never let anything bad happen to you. I would fight the whole dang world for you if I had to." She says, welling up in her eyes as she gently cups his chin.

Billy has tears in his eyes as well and Steve can't help the ones that fall down his own face at her words, trying to keep himself from sobbing like a child as he squeezes his eyes shut and looks down with his fists clenched at his sides.

When he looks back up again he's back in the hospital.

"His name was Reece." Hopper tells Billy.

Billy turns back to look at him, frowning.

"Look, I did what I had to do to survive, sue me."

"That looked pretty one sided to me, Billy." Hopper says.

"Yeah, well this shit was your idea in the first place." He bites back at him.

Hopper gets a look on his face that looks a lot like heartbreak and Billy looks away, can't stand that look on a person's face when it's directed at him.

Hopper sighs, "you're right, and I have to live with that," he says quietly, getting up to leave.

Before he does, he turns back around to stare at him, "I'll update the others, get some rest."

"That went well." He says to Steve when the door closes.

There's no response so he turns his head to look at him, wondering if he was about to do another vanishing act.

Still there, except now he had a look on his face like someone went and killed his puppy.

"Here I was thinking you'd have missed me, pretty boy." He says, attempting to lighten the mood yet again.

Steve turns to look at him, sighing as he sits down on the bed.

There's a different look to him now and he's not sure why.

"Of course I missed you Billy. I still do, I just don't know how to get back to...my side of the bond, that's all." He says and Billy can't help but feel bad.
"It's my fault isn't it?" He asks quietly.

Steve just looks at him with wide eyes and shrugs.

"We're both at fault, I poked around and you lost control." He says, like it's not a big deal.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Billy asks.

"When you killed Reece you lost control, I got swept up in it and now here I am trying to find my way back." Steve says with a tone that sounds reluctantly accepting.

Billy gets the feeling there's more to it than that.

"I-" Billy doesn't even know what to say, doesn't know how to help, doesn't understand what he truly did.

He's not really sure what was even happening right now.

"I know why you lost it, it's because of what he said about me." Steve says and Billy's blood runs cold as he grimaces.

_He saw._

"I don't know how to help you." He whispers, staring off into space like he's at a loss.

That gnawing feeling in the pit of his stomach claws at him from the inside.

_He did this, he caused this._

His piece of shit self had trapped Steve inside of his mind somehow, and he couldn't even fix it.

Even worse is that he can tell that Steve sees him as a monster, can see the fear in his eyes.

_He hates me, hates this. He'll never want this bond, I'm trapping him here._

"This whole wallowing in your own self-pity thing you're doing right now is seriously not helpful." Steve says, like he can read his mind.

It doesn't get any less creepy.

Billy turns his head away, can't look at him in fear of breaking down and crying like a little bitch and he hears Steve sigh deeply.

"Not to sound redundant, but we'll figure it out."

Billy snorts, looking back at him as he shakes his head.

"You're awfully calm for someone who's turned into Casper the friendly ghost."

"Oh fuck off, you're the one that got yourself shot." Steve says with a roll of his eyes as he props his leg up on the chair.

"You know, that whole thing was going so smooth too, I'm surprised it all went as well as it did." Billy says, scratching at an absent itch near his IV.

"Honestly, you have an actual fucking point...things could be much worse." Steve says as he puts his face in his hands for a moment, rubbing at his temples.
"That's for fuckin' sure."

"Eleven saved our asses again." Steve says, looking back up.

"As usual. We ever gonna stop being her damsels in distress?" Billy says with a smirk on his face.

"Probably not."

"We'll be in our fuckin' fourties and she'll still be getting us outta trouble." He says as he reaches out to gingerly touch Steve, grabbing his hand and interlocking their fingers.

It's so worth seeing the flush on his face but it's still the weirdest sensation ever.

"If we live that long." Steve says, looking down at their hands, rubbing a thumb gently against his bandaged knuckles.

Yikes, could he be any more ominous?

"Our track records combined look pretty damn good so far, death keeps kickin' on our door but we just don't go down." He retorts and he understands why Steve might be a bit...moody right now.

"Please don't fucking jinx it, for the love of god." Steve says in exasperation and Billy can't help but chuckle.

They both fall into a comfortable silence, the drugs are making him want to fall asleep.

"I...I am sorry that you had to feel it and deal with...whatever the fuck is happening." He mumbles when he's halfway there, eyes dropping closed as he listens to Steve's breathing.

"Billy, you didn't want to get shot. It just happens sometimes."

"You realize...it doesn't, right?" He says, opening one eye to look at him.

"What?"

"People don't just like...get shot on a normal basis." Billy clarifies.

"You know what I mean, asshole." Steve says with a snort and Billy smiles, feeling the exhaustion hit him full force.

He falls asleep shortly after, still clinging to Steve's hand.

Chapter End Notes

I chose 'All You Need Is Love' literally because it was released the year Billy was born. 1967 <3

So here we are.

Now you all know why I named this fic Broken Pieces.

I don't think I've ever been more nervous about posting a chapter than this one if we're being honest because I've had this idea floating in my head for a while and building up
to it I'm just like "Oh man I hope they like it" but at the same time I'm also like "Well this is what I wanted anyway so I just gotta keep going with my vision"

That's why I started this fic because I just knew I needed to explore these two beautiful dum bois and I've still got a lot of ground to cover. :)
This chapter is a huge warning to those of you who have ever dealt with domestic abuse of any kind.

Seriously, if you struggle with handling those emotions and it is hard for you to separate fact from fiction I highly recommend you just don't read this chapter.

My sincere apologies to anyone who may get awful memories dug up from this because I know that's what it did for me.

This chapter was far more therapeutic for myself than I had expected it to be.

So yeah, proceed with caution please.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes about two weeks until Billy can finally get up and move around, two weeks before they start considering his release and it has been the absolute fucking worst two weeks of his life.

It's not all bad of course, Steve has been here with him but that also meant he was still in a coma and Hopper was starting to get impatient.

He kept telling the guy that Steve was trying, that it isn't just some sort of light switch you can flip on and off.

Neither one of them knew what they were doing.

The last thing anyone had been expecting was something like this to occur.

Steve would sometimes disappear randomly into one of his memories and to hear something like that has taken some adjusting.

It's one thing for you to be able to tell a story but it's another thing entirely to be there for it, see the memory in full focus as if you get to kick back, eat some popcorn and get front row seats to the spectacle.

It makes him feel vulnerable in a way he isn't used to, there are certain things he doesn't want Steve to see, but...it's Steve.

There's a scary depth of trust he feels toward his newly proclaimed soulmate.

His past is dark but he knows that no matter what Steve sees it won't matter because Harrington is the kinda guy that takes in information as it is, formulates a game plan and enacts it.

In Steve's mind it's just another potential obstacle that needs to be overcome.

It's sad that he doesn't give himself enough credit, he's a lot smarter than he looks.

Most of what he sees was probably going to be things Billy would have told him one day anyway.
If anything it was a small relief, he didn't have to tell him certain things now, wouldn't have to dig the memories up himself and go through the emotions, wouldn't be forced to find the right words.

Steve would just know.

He could always tell what kind of memory Steve would come back from seeing depending on how he would act afterwards.

It's easy to tell if it was a good memory or a bad one.

Sometimes Steve comes back with a look of fondness on his face.

It does things to Billy.

The longing is nearly unbearable so he finds himself needing to look away most of the time, these new looks he'd get on his face were a little too much.

He's never been looked at the way Steve looks at him, not since his mother.

She's the only person on this planet that had ever given a single fuck about him.

It was a bit of an adjustment realizing he now has someone in his life that actually cares on more than just a surface level.

It's not all roses, however.

Other times he'll come back angry or upset, get brash and rude, start yelling at Billy and start a fight over absolutely nothing.

He just lets him because he knows he's done some fucked up shit in his life and knows he deserves to be punished for it.

They don't talk about what Steve sees, not in detail, it's just something they've accepted at this point.

Maybe later, when shit has stopped hitting the fan.

Billy doesn't really want to know though and Steve doesn't push it.

One night, however, they do talk about it.

Billy opens his eyes, waking up to the room being dark yet there's moonlight coming in through the windows, casting everything in a dark blue hue.

At first he doesn't know why he's awake but when he's a bit more aware he can hear quiet sobbing coming from somewhere nearby.

Steve is across the room, curled up on a chair, holding his knees to his chest, crying softly.

His breathing picks up and his heart does something in his chest and the only thing he wants to do in that moment is pull Steve to him, kiss his face, anywhere he can get to if it means he'll stop crying.

He hates seeing him cry, fucking hates it.

He clutches involuntarily at the scratchy blanket the hospital had supplied for him on colder nights, trying to find his voice.
"Hey." Billy finally says quietly and Steve's head shoots up.

"H- Hey." Steve says soon after getting his crying under control, sniffling a bit.

"Wanna talk about it?" He asks in an attempt to be courteous.

"I dunno, do you?" He whispers, laying his cheek on his knee and looking out the window of the room.

It takes Billy's breath away for a moment.

He's beautiful like this, moonlight casting shadows on his face at perfect angles like some sort of painting come to life, sad earthy eyes glancing out a window.

Time starts moving again as it all catches back up with him and it's a decent question. Does he really wanna know what it is?

Kind of.

Only because he doesn't like being the possible reason that he looks so gutted in the first place.

"Sure, why not." Billy says flippantly.

Steve sniffles a bit more, eventually nodding and getting up out of the chair to walk over to sit on the bed next to him.

"I saw Neil, the night he-" Steve stops, letting out a shaky breath like he can't even talk about it and Billy turns his head away.

Oh.

The night his dad put him in the hospital, back in California and Billy turns back to him, putting his hand over Steve's.

It's not the same.

It still feels weird and it just makes him want Steve to actually be here even more.

Maybe it helps though, even a little bit. He's not sure but Steve turns to look at him, turning his hand over so their fingers can intertwine.

That guilt comes back and fills Billy to the brim, threatening to bubble over and a few seconds later, it does.

"I'm sorry you're stuck with me." Billy tells him apologetically and Steve startles with a frown on his face.

"What?"

"I'm probably the last person you ever wanted to get your soul stuck to."

He feels eyes on him but doesn't dare look up into them until Steve cups his chin and he has no choice.

"Billy, if whatever happened is the reason we're alive, it's well fucking worth it." He says pointedly, with a lot of fuckin' resolve.
For a moment, Billy believes him.

"True as that may be, I know this is less than ideal for a rich boy like you." He retorts, yanking his head out of his grasp.

"I love how you treat me as if I'm hot shit, like I know what the fuck I'm doing and I'm just this rich guy you've caught in your web." Steve says and he catches the tail-end of an eyeroll being directed at him.

"It's a pretty steamy narrative." Billy tells him with a wink, eternally grateful that they weren't going to spend their time stressing over something that happened a long time ago.

Part of him is glad his dad beat the shit out of him, he'd been starting to go down a pretty dark road.

It's a huge part of why they'd moved to a small town in Indiana.

Harder to get away with shit.

"Kind of overdone." Steve replies, voice pitching up a bit when he says it.

"Don't act like you don't want this." Billy says, gesturing his hand up and down his body that was currently only holding up due to the drugs.

Hallelujah for doctors.

Steve chuckles lightly, squeezing their still intertwined hands together.

They fall into a comfortable sort of silence after that, simply listening to the thrum of the machine he's started to become very intimate with that was tracking his vitals.

"I'm sorry you had to see it like that." Billy says, breaking that silence because that's the downside to not being able to tell Steve things himself.

He would have to see it intimately without the bias of hearing it through word of mouth.

Billy can't imagine what that must be like for him, doesn't want to imagine what it's like.

"You're the one that had to go through it, Billy." He says with a sigh.

"It was a long time ago, doesn't really matter anymore." Billy says with a shrug and Steve just frowns.

"It does matter though, he can't do that to you. It's not right." Steve says, his voice becoming laced with anger.

"It's alright, I deserved some of it anyway." Billy says with a snort and Steve looks at him, utterly horrified.

"You didn't deserve any of it Billy, nobody deserves that, I don't want to hear you say that shit." Steve says, whispering loudly at him now like he's trying to be quiet.

He isn't sure why, when nobody else can actually see him.

"Have you seen my mom yet?" Billy asks him quietly, changing the subject. Forcing himself to say the words.
For the most part Steve has been flawless, hasn't pushed the topic and given him space but it seemed that life had other plans, he was gonna have to lay all of his cards out on the table without a choice.

This bond of theirs seemed rather determined to lead Steve right into the darkest parts of him.

"She really is beautiful, Billy," is all he says and his heart *aches.*

"She was." He chokes out.

Steve looks ready to cry again and he isn't sure if he can handle that right now so he turns away, pulling the blankets back over himself.

A large part of him doesn't really feel like talking about it anymore, doesn't *want* to until he absolutely needs to.

Steve's eyes haven't changed enough and Billy knows he hasn't seen it yet.

Best to wait until he does.

He's grateful that Steve picks up the cue, knows to shut up when it comes to things like this because all he does in response is silently lay down next to Billy.

Not touching, just being there with him.

He wonders if maybe Steve is just as frustrated as he is about the fact that they can't *really* touch.

It isn't the same, doesn't feel the same.

Either way, it makes him feel a little bit better knowing that Steve is here with him but the guilt still sits deep inside of him like an angry companion.

Hopper ends up needing to change a bunch of cover stories and was running himself ragged.

Needless to say, nobody saw this outcome coming.

Billy will be released in a couple of days and it's a long time coming.

*Too long.*

Everyone eventually had to leave the cabin, go back to their normal lives and far too much time had passed.

Billy gets reported missing, Steve ends up having to be reported missing as well because of the entire ordeal.

At first that is, until the hospitals realized they have them which is when the whole thing had officially turned into a shitstorm.

They're treated as separate kidnapping incidents and Hopper says it just makes things easier to iron that out with them being at two separate hospitals.

It goes well for the most part, Billy didn't really pay attention to the semantics amd just left all of the hard work to Hopper.

Hopper warns them that people will still question the fact that they had both disappeared around the
same time but ultimately he just seems grateful that both hospitals are still just right inside of Hawkin's jurisdiction.

Apparently it made it easier to manipulate all of the information that was getting released.

The compound however was just outside of Hawkin's meaning it was being investigated by a different team entirely and that had pissed Hopper off to no end.

He'd made it very clear to Billy how annoying the whole thing had become.

"This would have been easier to cover up if you hadn't brutally murdered two men." Hopper tells him, tone stern as he sighs deeply.

"Hey, the second guy wasn't brutally murdered!" Billy cries out, looking to Steve for some help while he just looks at him like he's insane.

Ok so maybe he is insane, but still.

"Billy, there was a knife in someone's skull." Hopper says, completely deadpan.

"Yeah, and that's all I did. Quick and easy." Billy says with a scoff.

Hopper just stares at him like he has no idea what to say to that and Billy can't find it within himself to really care.

"You threw your partially eaten sandwich on top of him, the whole crime scene looked like a psychotic nightmare." Hopper grumbles out.

"Sandwich?" Steve asks, raising his brow.

"I was hungry ok? I knew you were coming for me so I had some time to kill." Billy says, snorting at his own pun.

He doesn't look at either of them because he knows they clearly can't appreciate a good joke.

"You- you made yourself a sandwich after killing...Billy are you-" Steve begins to say, putting his hand over his face and Billy frowns at him.

Hopper just shakes his head.

"What's done is done, it's being handled and your families have been notified, everyone else is going back to their normal lives to help the cover stories stick." Jim informs them.

Steve sighs and Billy can't help but feel dread, that means his dad was going to come here, to see him.

Billy wishes he was still kidnapped all of a sudden.

"Richards spooked, he's nowhere to be found and Owens is back at the lab. So far we haven't had anyone come after either one of you which I feel is pure luck." Hopper says and Billy groans.

"Seriously, that guy? I should have fucking killed that little roach when I had the chance." He hisses out loud, without thinking.

"Billy!"
"God damn it Billy!"

They both say at the same time and he winces, putting his hands up in apology.

"Sorry, sorry, jeez you're both so fucking sensitive. " He says with a roll of his eyes as Hopper just shakes his head again and Steve continues to glare a hole into him.

"Regardless, the keys you found on Kirkman were useful, I was able to get in and out of the compound with them, it helped so I could adjust the crime scene to help cover things up." Hopper admits and Billy had totally forgotten he'd even pocketed them in the first place.

"Also, I'm not taking any chances. Kali and a couple of her people are still here to watch over you Billy. The rest of them are on Steve, nobody is going to harm or take either one of you. You're both fully protected." Hopper reassures them.

"Does anyone other than Kali have weird special powers?" Billy asks and he still wasn't even sure what that girl could do, hadn't really talked to her very much but he doesn't have to wonder for long as the door suddenly opens and she walks right in like she knows she's being talked about.

She raises her brow like she heard Billy's question.

"It's just me, I can create illusions, I can make people see whatever I want them to see." She says, coming up to stand at the foot of Billy's bed.

"If I get Projectra over here, I want Eleven on Steve." Billy demands, pointing his thumb at the girl and Hopper snorts while Steve stays silent for once in his life.

"You're not calling the shots kid, I can't have El out in the open like that, I've already ripped into Jonathan for bringing her to the other hospital in the first place." He says and Billy can hear the frustration in his voice.

"You think I care? Steve is the one being followed and he's currently in a coma. He needs more protection than I do." Billy says, glaring at him.

"We won't have to worry for long either way. El says she might be able to help get Steve back into his own mind. I'm having Jonathan bring her here." Hopper says with a shrug.

"Even more reason for Steve to have more protection, he's a sitting duck." Billy huffs out.

"Jane isn't going to want to see me, are you sure that's wise?" Kali asks and Billy gets a confused look on his face, turning his head to Steve who looks just as confused.

"Maybe it's time for the two of you to talk." Hopper says and Kali just gives him a resigned look.

"Who the fuck is Jane?" Billy asks.

They both ignore him as they start talking about the specifics of random shit that Billy doesn't fucking care about and his patience starts wearing completely thin.

"Explain to me how we're going to protect Steve when every powerhouse we have is going to be over here with their thumbs up their ass?" Billy asks, interrupting them because patience was completely out the window at this point.

"Billy, don't be an ass." Steve says and Billy just glares at him.

"Don't worry, Axel and Funshine are the ones with Steve, no harm will come to him." The little girl
assures him and that still doesn't make him feel any better.

"The plan doesn't change, El is on her way as we speak. Steve is going to be fine, Billy." Hopper says and Billy just continues to glare at him.

He hates being in this fucking bed, he hates that he got shot, he hates that he trapped Steve inside of his mind.

He hates this feeling of dread, worry, concern, of knowing it won't go away until he can see Steve again.

"Billy." Steve says in warning, probably fully aware of what was about to happen and Billy can't bring himself to give a fuck.

He gets impossibly angry all of a sudden just hearing Hopper and this little girl yap on and on about stupid shit.

Why won't they just shut the fuck up?!

He grabs the glass of water Jim brought him earlier, right by the side of his bed, throwing it against the wall on the far side of the room and it makes Kali and Hopper startle.

Steve just pinches the bridge of his nose.

"Will you both just get the fuck out?!" He yells, looking at both of them, ready to throw things at them if he needed to.

"You need to behave yourself-" Hopper goes to say, moving toward his bed while Kali puts her arm up to stop him.

"Are you deaf?! GET OUT!" He screams.

He just wants it to be silent, wants them to just go away because he's losing his damn mind in this cancerous place like it was starting to eat him alive from the inside out.

"Jim, come on, he's been through a lot." Kali says as she goes to grab him by his arm and at least someone can see some sense.

Hopper wants to protest but ultimately goes to leave with her but only after looking at Billy like he's just one big huge disappointment.

Yeah well, you're not the only one that feels that way.

Before he closes the door he looks at Billy, "you need to have better control of yourself," is all he says and before he can even respond the door is clicking shut.

Billy clenches his fists at his side.

How dare he, how fucking dare he try to fucking tell him what to do.

Who the fuck does Jim think he is?

"You done?" Steve suddenly says, arms crossed over his chest, looking at him like he's a child.

Billy just sighs and turns his head away.
"He's right, you know." Steve says and Billy really doesn't want to hear this shit right now because yeah, of course he's right. Otherwise Steve wouldn't be in a fucking coma right now.

"I know you're not looking forward to seeing Neil but that doesn't mean you can take it out on everyone else," Steve goes on to say and Billy whips his head back, making an affronted noise in the back of his throat.

_How does he-

Of course Steve knows, why wouldn't he?

Billy deflates, knowing how pathetic he must look.

"Is it because he hasn't seen you until now? He's waiting until your release, is that what really bothers you?" Steve asks and yeah, maybe that's part of it.

It's what's expected though, of course his dad would put it off for as long as possible.

They had talked on the phone briefly, his dad had said he's glad he's alive and told him he'd be coming to grab him upon release.

They both have bad memories of hospitals not just together but separately.

If Billy hates them than his dad can barely step foot in one.

He'd been sorry about putting Billy in the hospital back in Cali and after everything transpired, it had never happened again.

Yet.

Doesn't really change what happened though. Not that Billy really blames him at the end of the day.

"I wish I knew how to help you Billy." Steve says as he smiles up at him apologetically.

"I know."

When Jonathan steps foot into Billy's hospital room he immediately feels eyes on him like a predator seeking prey.

El is talking with Hopper just outside the door and apparently he's trying to convince her to talk to someone Hopper keeps referring to as her sister.

Jonathan didn't even know Eleven had a sister.

He'd told Jonathan to go wait inside and he was already regretting it.

"Billy." He says as he enters, sitting on the chair against the wall, picking up a magazine.

"Byers, how wonderful that I have to suffer through your shit company before I get out of this place." He says and Jonathan just scowls at him.

He wonders if Steve is here right now, watching them.

"Is Steve here?" He asks out loud, ignoring the jab.

Billy just snorts and rolls his eyes, "What makes you think I'd honestly tell you either way?"
"Seriously, what the fuck is your problem?" Jonathan asks because he feels like the animosity is unwarranted.

Billy just shrugs, looking away from him.

Fine.

He ignores him too and goes back to reading the boring magazine except he keeps casting glances at Billy because he can't help himself, it's like being in a room with a wild animal, he's too hyper aware, ready for Billy to strike at any moment.

"If you have something to say Byers, then say it instead of staring at me like some fucking creep from across the room." Billy hisses out, glaring right at him and Jonathan frowns.

This was what he'd been talking about, had been trying to tell Nancy.

His absolute disregard for anyone else other than himself. He thinks he can say and do whatever he wants without consequence and Jonathan fucking hates it.

Everything, the stress, having to watch Steve pass out, carry his unconscious body around, sitting by his bedside, all of it, maybe that's what makes him open his mouth.

Maybe that's why he does the stupid thing and confronts Billy like he knows he shouldn't.

"Steve deserves better." He says and he knows it's the wrong thing to say, knows Billy won't take it the right way but he says it anyway and now he has to stick by it.

Billy face contorts in a multitude of different ways, making him look totally insane before he just smirks and stares, making Jonathan more uncomfortable than he already was.

"Oh this should be good, please go on." Billy says holding his hand out, gesturing at him to continue.

Jonathan's jaw clenches and he's already gotten this far.

No going back now.

"You do all of this, go along with Hopper's stupid plans, offer yourself as bait and Steve is the one that has to pay for it." Jonathan says, waving his hand around aggressively.

Just thinking about it, the anger that comes along with it makes him feel braver or maybe the anger is hiding his unease.

"You get yourself shot." He goes on to say, waving his other hand in the air.

"Steve had to feel that you know, the doctors had to sedate him." He informs Billy because he feels like that needs to be said, needs to be made clear.

"You somehow get him stuck inside of your head, you put him in a coma and now this is where we're all at. You in a hospital bed happy as can be while Steve has to suffer for your mistakes." He hisses out, pointing a finger at him.

"You don't care about anyone other than yourself, no one, not a single other person on this planet!" He eventually finishes it off by saying and now he's yelling but he doesn't really even care at this point.
Billy's expression doesn't change at all through his tangent, his face just hardens and he looks utterly expressionless.

Jonathan doesn't really know what to do as they just stare each other down.

Suddenly Billy breaks first which Jonathan hadn't been expecting and looks over to his right like he's staring up at someone, before turning back to glance at Jonathan only to look away out the window.

He grumbles something under his breath that he can barely make out.

"Nothing." He hears Billy say and Jonathan puts two and two together.

Steve hadn't been here, he must have just now shown up, he'd missed Jonathan's whole spiel.

He had probably been stuck inside another one of Billy's memories.

Jonathan deflates, sitting back down and they don't say anything more to each other as Billy just continues to look out the window, totally emotionless.

Steve isn't sure what just transpired because one second he's inside of a rather pleasant memory involving Billy and his father and in the next there's a showdown between the grumpy asshole he knows and adores, and the guy who his grumpy faced boyfriend is strangely jealous of.

It truly is a marvel of modern day mystery, he literally has no fucking clue why Billy feels so unnecessarily threatened by him.

Can he even call Billy his boyfriend, now that he thinks about it?

It just felt too...simple.

Steve's eyes widen as he looks between them both, he has no idea what must have been said but it worries the shit out of him because Jonathan looks super pissed and Billy has a terrifying poker face on and they're just staring, neither one wanting to give in to the other.

"What just happened?" He asks and Billy looks up at him in surprise for a moment but doesn't answer, just stares at him and Steve raises his brow.

"What did you just say to him?" He asks this time because he knows Billy probably provoked Jonathan in some way like the asshole he is.

"Nothing." is all Billy says as he turns to look away and out the window and the whole mood in the room is uncomfortably stifling.

He sees Jonathan deflate as he looks over to where Steve is standing and maybe he puts it together, maybe he knows that suddenly he's is in the room because Jonathan says nothing either, like somehow they'd both suddenly silently decided to keep it a secret between the two of them.

He watches Jonathan sit down and pick up a magazine.

Steve is about to rip into Billy some more when he feels a violent pull, falling into another memory.

It feels strange at first, usually the time in between memories is pretty substantial.

He hasn't been pulled into memories that were minutes apart before and this one feels flat out different.
He smells it all before he sees it and it's like time has slowed.

The crisp ozone in the air, the heat of the sun beating down on his skin, the smell of the salt, the slight taste of it on his tongue, the humidity of the water blanketing over him comfortably from the slight breeze of the wind carrying it all over to him.

He opens his eyes and he sees it.

The beach.

His heart drops into his stomach.

He frantically looks around and sees **him**.

Young Billy, he looks about the same age as he was in the first memory he'd seen with his mother.

It's just Billy and his mother lounging out in the sun on a bright orange towel with white stripes.

Steve walks over to them and sits down beside Billy, waiting, knowing something awful is going to happen.

"Baby, let's get in the water." His mother says and Billy scowls at her as he builds a small sand castle.

"No way, it's too cold." He says, patting down one of the crooked towers, trying to make it straight but failing horribly at it.

"Oh my gosh, you are being such a little brat today, you know that?" She says, teasing him as she tries to tickle him in his side with her foot as he giggles, batting it away.

"I just don't like it mom." He says petulantly.

"Fine, I guess I'll just go all by myself then." She says like guilt tripping a child might work.

It usually doesn't and Steve can't help but snort.

She stands up and looks down at him to see if he might suddenly change his mind and when he doesn't even look up at her she just shakes her head and smiles down at him.

Steve thinks he knows where this is going and looks back and forth from her to Billy, pulling his legs to his chest.

His grip tightens on his legs as he braces for what he thinks is coming.

She gets inside the water laughing happily before turning to face Billy to cup her hands up to her mouth to shout at him.

"It feels great!" She yells out.

Smaller Billy just rolls his eyes and looks up at her before finally giving in and getting up.

He walks up to the water slowly, getting timid as he starts wringing his hands together nervously, standing there while the small waves kick up around his ankles, making him shiver.

"It's cold, mom!" He yells out to her as she just laughs at him.
"Come on in baby, I've got you!" She yells back as she holds her arms out to him.

He looks down at his feet, doesn't see it, misses it happening but Steve doesn't miss it.

He sees it.

The moment she gets caught in an undercurrent and pulled under the water, a look of panic on her face right before she gets pulled beneath and Steve digs his fingers into his legs, tears streaming down his face.

_No, please, god no._

He looks back up and she still hasn't come back up, all he sees is that his mother has suddenly disappeared.

"Mom?" He hears Billy yell, unsure at first.

As more time goes by and she doesn't resurface Steve knows it's too late.

"Mom!" Billy says in a panic as he starts to piece together what may have happened.

He runs into the water shouting and screaming for her and Steve puts his hands over his ears.

_No I don't want to, I don't want to see this. I'm done, make it stop, please make it stop._

When he opens his eyes again he's still in the memory, it won't go away and he sees Billy still struggling to find her.

All it takes is a mere second as he sees Billy suddenly get pulled under and Steve's eyes widen as he gasps.

Logically he knows Billy is going to live, knows whatever happened on this day, he survived it but seeing him go under still makes Steve lose all rational thought as he gets up and runs toward the water.

The water licks at his legs, splashing up into his face.

A few other people on the beach see Billy go under and rush toward him, trying to get to him, to get him out.

Steve stops running.

It's useless, there's nothing he can do.

This already happened and it takes what feels like an eternity to pull Billy out except when they do he's not breathing.

A man is holding his unconscious body, running it out and back on to shore as he lays his tiny body on the wet sand.

Another man that had been helping immediately begins performing CPR, pumping at his chest while other people are watching with concern.

"No, please, I can't do this." Steve sobs out as he falls to his knees, watching them try to get his little heart beating again.
So much time goes by but eventually it does start beating and Billy chokes out the water, gasping for air as he immediately starts to panic.

"Mom, my mom, she's in there, my mom is in there!" He screams frantically at the top of his lungs trying to get back up and crawl back toward the water.

Steve lets out a broken sob, bunching his fists into the cold wet sand.

The men that helped get Billy out grab hold of him and he fights against them, screaming and yelling at them that he needs to find her, tries hitting them to get free as they try to calm him down.

Get me out, please, get me out.

When Steve squeezes his eyes shut and opens them again he's not on the beach anymore.

He's on the hard linoleum floor of a precinct, on his knees as people walk past him, around him, through him.

When he looks around he sees Neil who has his arm around small Billy's shoulder while they talk to a cop.

Steve gets up and stands, looking at Billy.

He looks different, the vibrant happiness he'd carried with him before completely gone.

A child broken by trauma, by losing his mother.

Innocence stolen too soon.

"We found the body about fifteen miles from where she originally was, I'll need you to identify the body." The cop tells them.

Neil just puts his hand into his face and cries while Billy stands there completely emotionless.

Steve puts his hands over his ears again, squeezing his eyes shut, willing himself to escape this, to leave.

Fresh tears begin to fall in streaks down his cheeks again and he wonders if this is what hell feels like.

When he gives it a few moments and opens his eyes it's to yet another memory and he screams.

"Stop, stop, just stop!" He says, beating his hands against his own head, pulling at his hair.

He hears a glass shatter and startles.

It's Billy's old house, the one he'd lived in with his mother.

The sound had come from the kitchen and as he goes to turn the corner he sees a visibly drunk Neil towering over a small terrified Billy that has backed himself into a corner with his hands over his face, crying loudly.

There's shattered glass everywhere and he sees blood coming down Billy's face from a cut that nicked him on his cheek.

Steve cries with him.
"It's your fault she's dead you fucking waste of space, it should have been you!" Neil shouts at him and Steve sees the burnt food on the stove with a small stool next to it.

Poor Billy had probably accidentally let it sit too long and Steve feels like he's going to drown in his own sorrow, in Billy's sorrow, feels it like it's his own.

How could someone do this to their own child?

Their own flesh and blood?

A small boy you've said you'll love and protect yet you sit here and terrorize him, abuse him, break him down.

"M' sorry." Billy whimpers out as he starts sliding down the wall and on to the floor still covering his face to protect himself.

"You are the man of the house while I am gone, you are the one that is meant to be responsible!" Neil screams at him and Billy just sobs louder, repeating how sorry he is over and over.

Steve backs up against the wall and slides down as well, putting his head between his legs as he cries uncontrollably.

He just wants it to stop, wants this to be over.

Suddenly, he feels a hand on his shoulder and sees Eleven standing next to him and gasps out a broken sob as he sees tears streaming down her face as well.

"Please, get me out of here." He begs her.

"Okay." She says, nodding to him as he feels himself get put back together again as if it had all been as simple as that.

Asking Eleven to save him as usual.

When Steve wakes up he's in his own hospital bed, in his own body and he feels the relief wash over him for only a moment before it all comes crashing back into him.

There's nobody around, it's just him with the low humming of the machine he's hooked up to.

He let's out a broken sound that comes from somewhere deep inside of him as he lays there, sobbing into the side of his pillow, clinging onto it for dear life.

Chapter End Notes

This was going to be longer but I wanted to separate it off by itself due to the content so that it's just not glaringly right there in your face in a long ass chapter.

So yeah, I actually sobbed writing this, I was not expecting it to hit me this hard but I guess I shouldn't be surprised, I dealt with my own share of abuse as a child so unfortunately I can relate to this on a very personal level but it's all good, I'm good.

There's just like an overwhelming pinnacle of sadness in this chapter but I do promise
things are finally going to get better!

I promise, I promise! XD
First Time For Everything

Chapter Notes

I wanted to get this one out for all of you as soon as I could so here you go <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Eleven digs into his mind and comes back out he *knows* something is wrong.

There had been complete silence in the room as she put her blindfold on, tiny fingers gripping his arm.

Jonathan had stayed in his chair, watching while Hopper stood next to El and Kali rested a comforting hand on her shoulder through the whole thing.

When Kali and El had first entered the room, they looked like they'd been in deep discussion.

Both had clearly been crying.

He's not sure how they know each other but Jonathan had mentioned at some point they were talking just outside the room as if they were working something out.

When had Eleven found the time to even *meet* Kali?

Whatever happened, they seem to have worked it out because they hugged soon after entering back into the room.

When they ask him if Steve is there he tells them honestly that he'd gotten pulled into another memory.

It seemed strange, usually Steve would go hours between being pulled into one but he'd been there one moment looking ready to chew his head off about Jonathan and gone the next.

When Eleven finished whatever she did in his head and Billy opened his eyes, he's immediately worried.

As she goes to take off her blindfold with shaky hands she starts to cry softly.

"El? Whoa, hey kid, are you alright?" Hopper asks, holding onto her shoulders.

She merely nods her head but the tears keep falling.

Kali kneels down and rubs her back while Hopper pulls her into a hug and Billy can *feel* himself start to panic.

"Did it work, is he back in his own mind?" He asks, feeling rude for ruining the moment but he needs to *know*, needs to *hear* that it worked.

Needs to know that he's *safe*.

El pulls away from Hopper and turns to him, averting her gaze before nodding.
"Yes, he's back." She says.

It doesn't sound very reassuring.

When everything calms down and Hopper gets a phone call and comes back in, they get confirmation.

"He's awake." Hopper says but there's something in his tone, something he's not saying.

"But?" Billy says, because he knows there's a but in there somewhere.

"I don't know, I talked to his mother and she said he was taking waking back up pretty hard. He hasn't spoken a word to either one of them yet." Hopper says as if he's not sure if he should be telling Billy any of this.

He takes a deep breath and his worry increases tenfold.

Had he broken Steve?

Was he upset?

Had he seen something he couldn't forgive Billy for?

The fact that Eleven had been crying must have meant something they'd seen had been...not good.

"Hey, don't worry about it okay? I'm sure he's fine, let's give it time and you just relax." Hopper says, putting a hand on his shoulder.

After that, Hopper lets him know he has one more day of being in this shit hole and his father will finally come get him.

He's not looking forward to it.

When Neil does come into the room the next day and Billy is up and walking around his dad looks like shit and he doesn't really know what to expect.

"Son." He says, hands in his pockets and Billy just nods at him.

"Sir." He replies, not wanting to start things off on the wrong foot.

Neil gets a look on his face Billy hasn't seen in years and it makes him uneasy, like he feels bad or some shit.

Hopper chooses that moment to come into the room as he turns to his dad, shaking his hand and walking him through the fake story.

Billy had gotten kidnapped and the compound was still the place in which he'd been taken but they leave out all of the other incriminating details.

They make it drug related and boom, they've got themselves set.

Hopper especially leaves out the details involving Billy murdering two people.

It isn't until they're in the car alone with each other that Neil finally speaks.
"I'm glad you're alive." Neil says and Billy almost whips his head to look at him but recovers quickly.

Yeah, right, that's rich coming from him.

Neil just looks over at him, Billy can see it in the reflection of the window and he hopes his dad will just drop it, wants things to just go back to normal.

"They told me there were no drugs in your system, how did you get involved in all of that?" Neil asks him and Billy almost groans.

"I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, a friend was buying and I happened to be there." Billy lies and Neil shakes his head.

"Fucking pieces of shit." He curses under his breath and for once Billy agrees.

Richards was still out there and they still haven't resolved the issue of finding out who's following Steve.

They sit there in silence again for a long while until Neil speaks again.

"I know that you and I haven't gotten along since-" he stops himself and rubs a hand over his face before continuing.

"But I want you to know I am sorry Billy, for everything." Neil says and Billy grimaces.

Now his dad chooses to get all sentimental on him?

Because it was someone else almost killing him and not him doing it?

This is what makes his dad finally feel some form of regret?

"How about we just don't do this." Billy replies, finally turning to look at him.

Neil furrows his brow and frowns in confusion.

"I'm serious, you keep your apologies to yourself and we move on with our lives. I've got one more year of being under your roof and then I can finally get out of your hair." Billy tells him because it has been the one thing that has kept him going for a long time.

The thought that he can one day be free of his father and never look back.

Neil gets a look on his face like somehow his heart is breaking and Billy scoffs at him.

"You can't be doing this right now." Billy mumbles in absolute disbelief.

"Billy you're my son, no matter what has happened between us, you are my son. I will always lo-" Neil goes to say and Billy slams his hand down hard against the dashboard.

"Don't you ever say that word to me." He hisses out, pointing a finger in Neil's face as he keeps his eyes on the road, casting quick glances at him periodically.

Neil's hands tighten on the steering wheel and Billy is aware that was probably not the best thing to say or do.

Whoops.
Getting shot certainly made him brave.

"I will forgive you for your outburst because you've been through a lot. However, if you ever try to talk like that to me again I will not be so forgiving the next time." He says, tone dark as Billy clenches his jaw.

"Yes, sir." He finally says after a long while, the way he knows will please his father and he goes back to looking out the window.

Steve feels dead inside.

His parents show up after he cries longer and harder than he ever has in his life and they hug him but he doesn't feel it.

He can't feel anything.

It's like someone has taken a knife and carved his emotions out.

His father even looked at him with something that may have been genuine concern before taking a phone call which is more than he's gotten out of him in years.

Still, nothing.

If he could feel he'd have been elated.

Steve has never been a depressed person but he thinks this must be what crippling depression feels like.

His mother and father try to get him to talk about it but he can't, he can barely hear them when they do, his mind is just completely blank.

Also, his dad is acting strange as fuck but he's too stuck in his own head to look too far into it.

It's not like he actually knows him that well anyway.

Colors are dull, he can't taste food, he's just a walking shell of a person.

A rational part of his brain tries to make sense of it, of why he's been so deeply damaged.

It took a lot out of him if he's being honest, the entire ordeal.

When they get him back home his parents have started to call around to therapists and Steve still hasn't said much to them.

It's not until everyone starts to visit him one by one that he starts to feel a little bit better.

Hopper arranges for El to see him one day when his parents are gone for a couple of hours and she just hugs him tight.

He hugs her back and she's the one that knows.

She had seen some of it, she knows why he feels this way.

He wonders if she's told Hopper anything but doesn't really find himself caring either way.

The other kids visit him next and they all doggy pile him into a hug and he finally laughs again as
they talk excitedly about everything and nothing.

It's nice and little by little he starts to feel again.

Will comes up to him at one point and gives him his own hug and Steve feels bad, hates that Will had to see him like this but in true fashion he just tells him if he needs anything he can come talk to him.

Steve informs him he's the older one and Will just rolls his eyes.

Dustin tries to keep it together and Steve can't help the smile he gets on his face as a couple of stray tears fall as he claims it's just his allergies.

Steve simply holds him while Dustin mumbles nonsense.

He'd really missed this kid.

Mike sits next to him and they talk about Eleven, it's somehow a new ritual of theirs but Mike doesn't bring up Billy like he can just somehow tell that Steve isn't ready to talk about it and he feels grateful.

Lucas brings him some baked goods that Mrs. Sinclair had made for him and Lucas tells him he knows it's stupid and Steve just pulls him into a hug, saying thank you.

The physical contact is nice, it grounds him.

Seeing Max is the hardest.

He knows Billy had only been a day behind him and that he was finally back home too, he knows the kids had already gotten to see him, that Max had gotten to see him.

He's not sure why they haven't seen each other yet.

A lot happened, there's a lot to address and maybe it's best they have a few days away to reacclimate to normal life again.

She stands there staring at him, wringing her hands together and it reminds him of Billy and his heart feels like it's going to break apart inside of his chest but he keeps himself together.

Steve gets up and pulls her into a hug and she just cries, telling him how sorry she is even though he has no idea why she's sorry.

Maybe she doesn't know either.

Nancy and Jonathan visit him last and Nancy holds onto him tight and he just lets her get it all out.

They all talk, he feels ready to talk a little bit with them and he tells them the bare minimum, leaves out what memories he saw and they don't push it.

"What did Billy say to you when you were in his hospital room?" Steve asks Jonathan at one point.

Jonathan's eyes widen and he averts his gaze.

"I- I was an asshole, I could have chosen my words better but I was so pissed off. I still am, I've thought about apologizing but there's just no talking to that guy." Jonathan says with a sigh and Steve understands where he's coming from as he just nods, dropping the topic.
Billy's animosity toward Jonathan was still a mystery to everyone other than him and he fully intends to keep it that way.

No point in entertaining his delusions.

When they leave and he's about to close the door behind them Jonathan turns around like he's going to say something to him but decides against it.

Instead he pulls Steve into a half hug.

"I'm sorry man, I really am." Jonathan says and Steve hugs him back as Nancy goes to the car, allowing them a moment.

"Nothing to be sorry about." He says shrugging.

"I should have backed you up, I hated that idea, the bait, all of it. I stayed silent and I didn't fight hard enough." Jonathan says and if anything Steve appreciates hearing that someone else had at least agreed with him.

"Well, what's done is done, we just gotta keep going now, yeah?" Steve tells him and Jonathan just sighs and nods, patting him on his arm before saying his goodbyes.

Then he's alone again.

It's the moments when he's alone that get to Steve, that emptiness inside of him, the feeling of being dead, it's just there like a disease eating away at him.

He has no idea what to say to Billy, when to see him, doesn't want Neil getting angry with him if he visits because he's been banned from the house.

He doesn't want Neil to hurt Billy.

A part of him entertains killing the guy and he squashes the thought the moment it starts to surface.

It's a little irrational, more Billy's style and he doesn't intend on becoming a cold-blooded murderer anytime soon if he can help it.

Neil existing certainly makes that difficult to keep in mind.

He just doesn't know what to do and it's killing him inside slowly.

There's a stalemate and all he can do is ride it out in hopes that things get better.

---

It's three days after he's back home.

He goes to take a shower, tries to get some life back into himself but it doesn't really help.

All he can see when he closes his eyes is the beach.

It keeps replaying in his head over and over again and he's all out of tears so he can't cry.

The crying seems to have passed and he kind of wishes he could have them back because at least that felt like a release.

This just feels like a whole lot of bullshit. It's just awful pain, that's all he feels now.
He keeps telling himself it will pass, it's not everyday your consciousness gets torn to shreds to be thrown to the wind, spreading out through someone else's consciousness.

So much had happened in his tiny little human brain that he can't properly wrap his head around it.

He feels like he's lost entire years of his life while simultaneously feeling like everything occurred within a few moments.

His mind feels like it's being pulled in different directions.

It's similar to how it felt being outside of time.

At the time everything made sense, it was simply instinct and trusting himself came easy.

Now that he's awake again his head is muddled.

His shit is *fucked* and if he didn't feel so dead inside he'd have the sense to feel frustration.

He gets some loose shorts on and a white shirt before running a hand through his damp hair, shaking away the thoughts and looking at himself in the mirror.

The eyes looking back at him are different now, there's definitely a dark aura surrounding him, much darker than before.

He's a pretty optimistic person in all honesty but it was getting harder to hold onto those parts of himself.

What's become of his fucking life?

When had he gotten so caught up in all of this *shit*?

He sighs heavily before opening the door when he goes stalk still, hand holding onto the knob for dear life in an attempt to keep himself grounded as he stares ahead at the sight in front of him.

Sitting on his bed.

Billy.

It's like every nerve ending comes to life inside of him as he realizes he'd been walking through a nightmare and suddenly he's awake, alert, *aware*.

Just seeing him here, physically *here* is overwhelming.

His heart feels like it's about to beat outside of his chest and there's no point in holding back.

He doesn't want to hold himself back anymore.

---

Billy isn't sure how long he sits on Steve's bed waiting for him to come out of the bathroom, it had been *stupidly* impulsive sneaking out and coming here but he *really* doesn't give a shit.

Nothing was keeping him from seeing Steve any longer, he had to. It was a soul deep *need*.

The days had been agonizing and he'd gotten everyone visiting him left and right.
Everyone but Steve.

Even Jonathan had come to see him at some point with Nancy but he'd stayed by the door, had let Nancy do the talking, didn't say a word, wouldn't even look at him.

It's far more than Billy had ever expected from the guy and he can't help but respect it at least a little bit.

He still fucking hates the guy though.

Seriously, fuck Jonathan.

Max had hugged him, said she was glad he's back and not dead.

It had actually been nice.

He knows he must look stupid because he's sitting at the edge of the bed, hands folded in his lap, wringing them together because he's nervous.

There are numerous outcomes outlined in his head, none of them are great and he doesn't know what to expect.

He's worried Steve will yell at him, hit him, tell him he wants this all to be over, that he's done, wants to find a way to get rid of the bond which is a terrifying thought, not one he enjoys entertaining.

Generally his mind doesn't give a fuck and sometimes he's kept up at night from the terrifying prospect of being unbonded from Steve.

As ridiculous as it sounds he's pretty sure he'd kill himself.

No, that's-

Okay, killing himself would be a bit extreme, he likes Harrington but it's not to the point of needing him.

There's a tiny voice in his head telling him otherwise that he purposefully stamps down.

He's fond of Steve, really fond but he's probably already lost him before this thing had even begun.

Most all of his baggage is just out in the open and the problem is that he has no idea what baggage Steve now has knowledge of.

It's probably a bad sign that he isn't able to fully pinpoint what might have been seen.

There's more than enough bad memories in his head to make Steve go running for the hills, he'd have every right to.

Go figure he'd somehow find a way to fuck this up for himself.

Self-sabotage at its best.

Billy takes in a shaky breath, preparing himself for the worst.

His soulmate hadn't even sought him out and he suddenly feels like the roles are reversed as he remembers when Steve had this exact worry.
The worry that Billy didn't want him and now he understands why because it's debilitating.

He feels like he's going to go out of his mind.

Needless to say, it's quite a surprise when he sees Steve open the door, laying eyes on him and there's a noticeable change for a moment.

For a split second Billy sees the strain.

In that second he looks...kind of awful.

His eyes are dull, their usual shine completely snuffed out and there's a look of utter defeat.

It's like the life has been sucked out of him.

The moment he sees Billy however is like a switch being flipped. His eyes come back to life and watering in an instant, shining a molten brown in the light.

His entire demeanor changes along with his posture as if just seeing Billy is all he'd needed and he suddenly can't remember what he was going to say.

His mind goes fucking blank.

It apparently doesn't matter because Steve is on him within seconds, knocking the air out of him and causing him to grunt as he catches him, holding him by his waist.

He's pretty healed up for the most part but he's still sore as hell.

Steve grabs at his hair with both hands, pulling him into a desperate series of kisses, like he can't control himself.

His hands are everywhere, touching anywhere he can get to until he finally settles on taking Billy's jacket off, throwing it to the side before moving on to his shirt like he's going to rip it off if it doesn't come off yesterday.

Steve is making noises, whimpers in the back of his throat like he's in pain, like he's going to come apart if he doesn't have Billy right here, right now.

Billy feels a little overwhelmed by it because this was not what he'd been expecting at all, this was so far out of his realm of possibility he's getting emotional whiplash because he'd been preparing himself for rejection, screaming, yelling, a fight.

Not absolute starved desperation.

He goes to pull away and Steve just starts going to town elsewhere until he holds him by his shoulders, forcing him to stop.

"Whoa, hey there hot stuff, I-" He goes to say only to get interrupted as Steve goes stock still in his arms, pulling back so they can look at eachother.

Steve gets this look on his face that makes his pulse skyrocket, blood pounding in his ears as drop dead gorgeous brown eyes stare back at him like he's something fragile, someone to be cared for and protected.

Oh no.
In that moment he realizes he might be a little bit in love with Steve Harrington.

The mushy romantic kind of love that makes him want to cook dinners together, get tickets to a concert and drive them both there, go on roadtrips, travel around, fight about leaving shaved hair in the sink, see something outside of this son of a bitch small town in Indiana.

It was making him want things he never really realized he wanted with another person.

He's always felt alone and on his own but with Steve he can't be bothered to feel lonely anymore.

That's been the easiest transition out of this whole thing.

They're connected, partners in crime although not actual crime. However the murdering he'd just recently done makes that pretty debatable but also, it was a self made decision.

"Billy." Steve says with reverence and he doesn't know what to do or say, doesn't want to break the spell when this is the best kind of dream he's ever had and he might be internally freaking out a little bit.

Twelve seconds ago he'd convinced himself Steve fucking hates him and now he has no idea what the fuck is going on.

The next thing he registers is Steve holding his face in his hands and kissing him gently.

Oh.

That's...new.

No one has ever kissed him like this before; so thoroughly and with such a sensual kind of passion behind it.

Sex for him has always been on a purely physical level, there isn't much of a connection to be felt beyond getting his dick wet.

Clearly Steve has other ideas because he's jumping right into this shit without a fucking care in the world and Billy is helpless against it, has no intention of denying him anything he wants.

He's fucking weak, completely incapable of truly saying no to him about anything.

The kiss deepens and Billy can't help the groan that comes out of him as he breathes it into Steve's mouth and it's the single most breathtaking kiss he's ever had as he holds him there in his arms.

You see, there's this thing that Steve does when he kisses and it's the surest way to figure out if he's happy or not.

He smiles into his kisses and it's...the cutest quirk Billy has ever observed in another human being.

If there's a way to describe what 'getting wooed' feels like he's pretty sure you can just ask Steve Harrington.

It's a killer move, he can't help but respect it because it's something so genuinely Steve that it makes him sick to his stomach.

A rational part of his brain tells him this is probably a bad sign though, people tend to act rash after something traumatic.
Billy knows all about that.

"You sure?" He asks, throwing it out there if he still needs time.

Steve responds by pressing up firmly against him and whispering a, "if you don't get with the program, I'm going to do this myself," and Billy really wants to get him out of that fucking shirt more than anything in the world right now.

"Holy fuck."

He ignores the rational part of his brain.

Eventually Billy does get with the program and he certainly isn't one to deny himself, healing gunshot wound or not he grips Steve's ass and flips them over, pinning him to the bed.

Steve is more than enthusiastic, breath hot against the shell of his ear, whispering some seriously filthy shit and Billy groans.

If he wasn't rock hard before-

When he takes it in, takes in Steve he notices that there's a slight tremble to some of his touches like he's trying to hide the fact that it's there and now that Billy's noticed it he becomes super hyper aware of every minute movement, gesture or facial expression.

The only problem is that he's a bit too busy to really look at his face with all of the kissing going on. It's almost like Steve's trying to distract himself.

*From what?*

It gives him a sense of pause as he stops responding, staring off into space when Steve finally pulls away to look at him.

"Why the fuck did you stop?"

It allows Billy to look at him, really look at him. Harrington is a shit fucking liar and it's easy to tell, his entire being gives him away.

The encounter with Henderson and that bike shit proved that very well.

So, he makes sure his eyes are laser focused when he says, "are you ok?" and for a split second it's there.

If he blinked he'd have missed it.

*Ah.*

He saw.

It's an assumption but his gut tells him he's right if what he's thinking is correct and he's not sure why he didn't put it together before.

El crying after getting out of his head, Steve's whole demeanor since waking from his coma.

*Well, that sucks.*
Billy can't really imagine what seeing something that has already happened looks like. It's a memory he had to live through so he'd never really thought about it until now.

Granted, normal people also aren't usually able to waltz into a memory like walking into a movie theater.

For Steve it was probably torture, being forced to watch and seeing the simplest of details from an outside perspective.

When Steve would sometimes describe what it was like, how things felt, what he was experiencing Billy would find a way to change the topic.

It's a little uncomfortable, he's still trying to get used to the fact that it even happened.

Was that just something they could do? It's kind of a scary prospect to consider.

"What?" Steve says and in that moment Billy makes a split second decision.

He can tell Steve he knows, or saying nothing about it.

Ultimately he decides it's best to do nothing because he can see in Steve's eyes. It's not something he can talk about right now without getting emotional.

It's understandable.

Personally Billy hadn't cried for the first year after her death, it hadn't felt real.

It wasn't until that moment with his dad when he was a kid and accidentally burnt dinner one night.

Fuckin' sucked but he'd learnt real damn quick what his father's triggers were after that.

Abject fear of his father triggered the tears, the realization that she was really gone and he was stuck in this hell without her is what made them stay.

There's a lot to unpack there and Steve got slapped in the fucking face with it, probably had to see every nitty gritty detail.

So, he pretends he doesn't know.

For his sake and partially his own.

"Why do I always have to repeat myself with you?" He asks to cover up his sudden realization.

"Don't be an ass, I'm fine." Steve says, flipping them over with a snort and a smile that doesn't reach his eyes and-

It makes him falter, second guess himself as he lays there staring up at him.

"Steve…"

"You're killing the mood, Hargrove." Steve says, interrupting him and he'd smile at the obvious joke if he didn't know it was just him putting on a brave front.

"Seriously Billy, everything is a fucking mess right now and I just...I need to- I feel like if I don't get my hands on you I'm going to crawl out of my fucking skin."
"Right...okay." Billy replies because if he's not gonna talk about it, who is he to force him to?

"Unless that's not what you wa-" Steve goes to say and he kinda panics because the last thing he wants is for Steve to think he's not totally fucking down for this.

"I do, I'm more than down but like...what about after?" He says a bit dumbly.

"After what?"

"After we have sex and you remember that I'm a total fucking piece of shit." He tries to remind him because he probably saw plenty of less than flattering memories.

"You thought I was going to get mad." Steve says and he can see the lightbulb go off in his head.

"Yes." Billy clarifies, in case he's still doubting himself

"You thought I've been angry this whole time."

"Bingo." He says, clicking his tongue.

"Oh my fucking god...you're so fucking stupid." Steve says as he sits back to run a hand over his face in exasperation which puts pressure right on Billy's groin which is more than a little bit distracting as he licks his lips and grabs his hips to keep him still.

"Wow, tell me how you really feel." Billy mumbles as he rolls his eyes but now all he can think about is how Steve would look riding him.

Fuck.

"Look, I don't want to talk about it right now. Can we just not talk about it and you just kiss me and fuck me instead, like you've been promising?"

Oh, right.

That's a thing.

Before everything had gone to hell in a handbasket he'd been showing Harrington the metaphorical ropes.

Sex related ropes.

Well...not actual ropes, still the metaphorical ones not that he's opposed to eventually involving real ropes if he's into it too but-

It's best to start small.

Once again he comes face to face with his mortal enemy.

Saying no to Harrington.

He just... can't.

It's going to be quick and fast, there's a desperation he feels at knowing Steve is on the same page right now because he didn't think he'd get to have this.

A large part of him wanted to be a bit more gentle and sensual about it but just from how Steve is
acting right now it's pretty clear that's the opposite of what he wants.

Here Billy was thinking he was the emotionally stunted one, not Harrington.

*Should have known.*

"Okay, alright. I've got you." He says, cupping his face to kiss him in return, touch him, taste him, turning him back over.

He wants to give him whatever he needs and at first he tries it, coaxes a gentle kiss from him and Steve sighs in relief as if he could have ever possibly said *no.*

*Idiot.*

He thinks fondly as he runs fingers down his arms gently, savoring every moment of contact because he'd spent far too long in a hospital bed being able to see and not actually touch.

This is definitely not something he ever wants to go through ever again, it fucking sucked.

Steve gets impatient like he expects, insistent, pulls at him with a certain flavor of desperation and not for the first time Billy starts to realize that whatever happened to him, whatever Steve must have experienced and seen, it clearly messed him up.

Billy gets it, he's had sex to keep his mind off of shit plenty of times and while it's not really the ideal headspace he wants Steve to be in he's also not going to just say *no.*

He'd just be risking him going elsewhere and that's not an option.

The idea of it makes something dark coil in his gut to the point that he has to actively wipe it from his brain just to keep from getting pissed off about a purely metaphorical scenario.

This is new though, he hasn't encountered a Steve that's undone, unable to fully put himself back together again, acting a little out of it.

It's even more of a punch to the gut that he's made it pretty fucking clear that Billy himself, the asshole that got him into this shit in the first place is the one he's turning to while in this state of vulnerability.

*I don't deserve this.*

Steve all but growls into his mouth in frustration, hooking a leg around him and turning them over and there's now a very angry looking, brown haired, tall glass of water glaring down at him and straddling his waist.

There are worse scenarios, this is definitely not one of them for him.

"Are you the one that needs to stop?" Steve asks with a raised brow.

"Absolutely not." He says resolutely.

"Kinda feels like you do."

It's definitely not that he wants to stop, it's more that his mind won't stop sabotaging itself as if he's trying to get Steve to be angry with him

*It's what I'd deserve.*
"No it's just...I'm sorry for trapping you in my head." He says quietly with a pained expression on his face.

If he doesn't bring it up, it'll continue bothering him.

"I highly doubt it was your intention and like I said, it's also my own fault. If anyone should be apologizing, it's me." Steve says with a shrug.

"I guess but-"

"Billy, I don't want to talk about it can we please just..." He says, that desperation back in his eyes again.

"Yeah alright, alright, I'm sorry." Billy says, holding his hands up in very willing surrender.

"Stop saying sorry and do-"

He interrupts by flipping them back over again, feeling triumphant when he hears a grunt underneath him and it makes him feel a little wild that things with Steve feel so...fun.

There's an ease he feels with him that he's never experienced with anyone else, they could sit here, talk and bicker for hours, shoot the shit and he'd still be just an enamored.

"Happy?" Billy says with a mischievous grin.

And ok, that look of defiance he gets in return that morphs into acceptance because Steve's finally getting what he wanted is a huge turn on and maybe a pushy Harrington is a total turn on as well.

It's easy to see which one of them has full control and clearly knows how to manipulate it to their advantage.

All he wants to do is pin Steve to the fucking bed and hear those pretty noises he makes and with that thought he leans down to kiss him senseless because he can and he's being given permission to tap into that part of himself that wants to consume Steve, keep him from even simply glancing somewhere else, at someone else.

Mine.

It's all for him, the way Steve looks when he's truly in the throes of passion and even the most mundane of things like the way his body silently asks for attention because he refuses to just come out and say it.

Oh, Billy has definitely noticed.

Especially back when Steve had been holding back and didn't want to get close but no matter how hard they both tried it never mattered.

They're addicted to eachother.

He knows this because in the hallways of school when they'd be talking Steve would grab his arm and squeeze gently before leaving, find excuses to touch him.

During that basketball practice when they'd been in total sync and Steve was obviously trying to prove a point.

Billy had told him they barely know eachother but that didn't seem to matter with certain matters of
the heart and soul.

It's fucking cheesy is what it is but looking at Steve makes him not give a fuck about propriety when all he wants is to nuzzle his fucking jaw, kiss his face gently, make love-

*Oh god*.

The fact that he's been in love with Steve Harrington for far longer than he's willing to admit to himself or anyone else on this planet for that matter is secondary to the realization that he wants to *make love* to him.

What the fuck was happening to him?

Sex has only ever been sex to Billy but it's the closest to achieving that perfect symbiosis between them as they can possibly get.

Well...it transcends actually and sex is more like an off-brand version of it.

Does the trick, just not nearly as well as the real thing.

It makes him think of back when he was a kid and his mom was still alive and they'd been grabbing gas one day.

The moment they'd parked his mom reached over to gently put a hand on Neil's arm; who at this point was far less of a dick than he is now as she told him she'd pump the gas.

His young self hadn't understood at the time but looking back it makes perfect sense because his father had turned to him when she'd gotten out of the car, glancing down.

"Son, when you grow up, find someone who takes the time to learn you."

"Huh?" Billy asks curiously.

"I know you're a bit too young for these lessons but when you start meeting young girls, find the one that notices you pulled a leg muscle and you didn't tell her because you knew she'd worry but somehow she knew anyway so now she's pumping your gas for you even though it's not that big of a deal."

Billy looks up at him blankly, staring at the small smile on his face.

It makes him miss his father, the one that hadn't gotten destroyed over the death of the love of his life.

"Find someone who pays attention."

If Billy had to describe what being perfectly in sync with Steve felt like he'd say he couldn't tell you because this was far more than either one of his parents had tried to help him prepare for.

Before being bonded to Steve there was a clear sense of commonly human selfishness, single mindedness, a sense of being singular.

After being bonded it went away, a part of him is always aware that it's not just him, there's someone else always there, he feels just a little bit heavier.

Sometimes that weight feels like a warm blanket, other times he's on his knees from how heavy it feels.
It's easy to fall into it though, the desire and craving that's always simmering under his skin, makes him want to have Steve here forever so he can find out what he likes, what he doesn't like, hear his own name on his lips in that breathless, raspy way that he's becoming intimately familiar with.

"Fuck." Steve says, like it's punched out of him and Billy can't help but moan into his mouth, pressing him down further into the bed, wanting to press that weight into him like he's willing it into existence, willing Steve to understand how important he is to him.

Things get a little hazy after that when the realization that he could have died hits him.

They both get frantic like it's finally dawning on them and he feels-

He can feel Steve's desperation like it's his own, can feel what he's feeling and his base reaction is to pull away but a mental questioning tug in the back of his mind makes him go still in a far more mental sense.

Instead of pulling away from that feeling his soul goes still as that questioning tug turns into a gentle pull and it feels like they meld together into one.

Us.

Billy loses himself in it.

They angrily take off each other's clothes, so frustrated at the fact that they're in the way and it's clumsy, graceless and fast, so fast that Billy almost falls off the damn bed.

Steve somehow manages to get out that they need to be quiet because his parents are sleeping but Billy barely hears him through the hazy lust filled pounding in his ears.

Billy had wanted to work Steve open slowly, to make him beg for it, make him see nothing else but this.

"You're ridiculous." Steve says fondly into another frantic kiss and it should scare him that his mind was very clearly read just now but he's too far gone to care.

He can barely even think properly.

All of his plans go out the window as he fumbles to get Steve's side table drawer open, reaching for the lube they'd used only a handful of times in the past.

Not nearly enough yet in his opinion.

They refuse to break their make out session in the midst of the chaos, kissing sloppily while being unable to stay off of each other for even a moment, moving with him.

It's actually impressive teamwork and multitasking in retrospect.

Go team.

He thinks in his head and Steve snorts pulling back to laugh, throwing his head up and Billy sees the perfect opportunity to move his lips to the junction on his neck, moving up to nip gently at his adam's apple and Steve just melts into his arms, nearly going boneless.

Eventually the little minx moves up, resting their foreheads together while lightly brushing fingers over his nipples, making Billy's brain short circuit as he tries to focus on the task at hand.
He feels like a fucking virgin and he has no idea how Harrington has this effect on him, but if anyone can of course it would be him.

He finally grabs hold of the bottle, popping the top while clumsily pouring some with one hand onto the hand that's holding the bottle which ends up being a really stupid idea and turns into an absolute mess that he couldn't care less about when he's got a beautiful guy with the prettiest eyelashes he's ever seen under him.

Billy drops the bottle off to the side somewhere to grab for later as he reaches his lubed fingers down to open Steve up for him.

"Prettiest lashes?" Billy hears him ask all of a sudden as he presses a finger inside and Steve grunts after, getting used to the intrusion.

"Can you please stop." Billy huffs out as he kisses gently at his chest, nipping marks onto it.

"Can't help it, your- oh god... your fault." Steve says, like he's going to practically start purring any second.

He pulls the finger out to start tracing gently before Steve makes a pained noise in the back of his throat that does things to Billy as he presses back in with more ease.

"How is it my fault?" Billy asks to help him focus on something else, make him feel as comfortable as he can.

"Felt- I could feel..." Steve tries to say but he gets a bit distracted when Billy presses a second finger in.

He's glad he's taken the most time with this, getting Steve used to the sensations of this part of it.

Mostly because it allows him to look at Steve's face with abandon and he won't get a strange look for it.

There haven't been a lot of opportunities to work him open like this but they've found the time in stolen moments, somehow.

"Yeah okay, whatever." Billy says, stopping him from saying anything further.

It's not something he can handle right now because he's pretty sure it is his fault, like he's projecting his feelings and thoughts onto Steve but he's actually paying attention.

Steve shakes like he's going to fall apart when he starts getting a good rhythm going, sighing in frustration at times and Billy understands completely.

He wants this just as much as Steve does but he needs him to be ready, doesn't want to hurt him unnecessarily.

"Can you please hurry up?" Steve eventually asks with a growl and his mind catches up with Steve's earlier words of being quiet.

He's not sure how well this is going to work out.

It certainly doesn't stop him though.

When he slowly works a third finger inside Steve clings to his back, dragging his nails down and they're just long enough for Billy to know he's leaving angry red marks on it that he'll feel in the
morning.

There's arms around the back of his neck that slide down as Steve pulls away to lay his head on the pillow, looking up at him with pupils blown wide and his hands are caressing his face as he starts using his thumb to rub gently behind his ear.

"I swear to god, Billy." Steve says to him in a heated whisper and he has to take deep breaths to keep himself from coming before he can even get inside of him.

The gentle touches are making him quake and he's pretty sure Steve doesn't notice he's doing it.

"I don't want to hurt you." Billy replies, moving the three fingers in and out slowly, going in a bit deeper when there's less resistance and he knows it hurts a bit, it's a little uncomfortable, he can feel it.

"It's...it's gonna be that way at first anyway, just hurry- the fuck up." Steve says with insistence.

"I love it when you take charge, it's cute." Billy says with a chuckle.

"Billy..."

"That doesn't make me want to go any faster, pretty boy."

"I'm going to kill- oh my god." Steve all but moans out when Billy brushes against the spot he'd been looking for the moment that mouth of his started trying to get smart with him.

A hand runs through his hair and it makes his eyes flutter as he rests his forehead on Steve's chest where his shoulder meets to turn and suck marks into his collarbone.

Steve's back arches off the bed as he whimpers, both hands back in Billy's hair now as he thrashes a bit.

Fuck, he's so responsive. It's fucking hot.

Oh my god.

The realization he has is like a punch to the gut as he rests his face back into the softness of his skin, slowing everything down and he's pretty sure Steve is about to punch him.

"I didn't bring a condom." He mumbles into the softness of his skin.

Billy is the one that had been touting safe sex and shit because of this one story he heard back in California from a floof he'd met at a bar he snuck into once. Oddly enough they didn't fuck, the guy wasn't his type but he was nice enough to talk to, certainly helped kill the time before he had to go back home to Neil's temper.

Regardless he curses himself because how did he not bring a condom.

What the fuck is wrong with you Hargrove?

How does Steve not have a condom?!

Granted he did tell him he'd be the one to get them but that's besides the point.

Steve gets a fistful of his hair and it's fucking painful in all of the right ways as he pulls it, forcing
Billy to look him in the eyes while he stops everything he's doing, pulling his fingers out and Steve makes a noise in the back of his throat.

"You really think I give a shit? Billy our souls are bound, are you fucking serious right now?!" Steve hisses out angrily and he shouldn't listen, he really shouldn't but he knows he's clean.

Steve doesn't know that though and he has half a mind to lecture him on being too trusting of people but he's pretty sure if he does he'll get kicked out.

He definitely knows Steve is clean and he knows there will never be anyone else for him ever again and yeah, he's right.

They are bound.

It's only ever going to be Steve.

So, Billy shakes his head, leaning down with a "if you say so," as he gets more lube onto his fingers, gently pressing all three fingers back inside of him and Steve keens, arching his back to try and get more and Billy knows if he doesn't do this soon it's just not going to happen.

He's going to come in his fucking pants all because Steve Harrington is the hottest thing he's ever laid his eyes on.

He'll say or do something and Billy will just come embarrassingly fast.

Which was probably already going to happen.

Billy kisses him with purpose, taking his time to get himself back under control and Steve sighs into it, running his fingers through his hair and pulling at it roughly when Billy finds his prostate again.

"Fuck, oh fuck- shit." He starts babbling, jaw slack as Billy licks into his mouth to swallow the sounds.

It's fucking glorious.

If anything, it has the opposite effect and the last thing he feels is calm.

"You're so-" Billy says after pulling away only to nose back in against the side of his face.

Shit.

The noise that Steve makes is something he wishes he could have recorded to have for himself after he pulls his fingers out.

Fingernails claw at his back again and he wastes no time positioning himself because if he doesn't do this Steve will kill him.

Also, he's feeling a little desperate right now too.

Ok so, really desperate.

He takes it slow and Steve breathes out, shaking beneath him.

"You ok?" He asks breathlessly.

"I- Yes." Steve chokes out in response.
Billy holds him, kissing his throat gently, whispering encouragement in his ear, telling him how good he is, how fucking beautiful he looks and Steve bites down on his fist.

He moves it away for him and puts their foreheads together, breathing each other's air.

The bond flares again and he can feel what Steve is feeling, the slight pain, there's a slight cramp in his thigh that Billy starts trying to massage out with his free hand as he repositions them slowly and in that moment they share it all together.

They share the way Billy slides in a little bit deeper and it's raw but not bad, just new.

The way the soft beige blanket feels against Steve's back, their combined smell in the room, the warmth of their breaths mingling.

Billy bottoms out and they both cling to each other that much harder, breaths coming out heavier and Steve nearly sobs.

"Oh god, it's too much."

Billy chuckles because he knows that Steve means the bond but is aware it can easily be taken out of context and Steve lets out a breathy laugh, reading his mind.

"It's always too much." Billy says because he's just kind of used to it at this point.

"Gl- glad one of us i- is." Steve stutters out, still trying to adjust.

Billy pulls out halfway and there's lips at his neck mouthing wet kisses and marks that make him push back in and electricity goes down both their spines.

"I'm not going to last very long." Billy admits and Steve just lets out another breathless laugh as he slams his fist down onto the sheet and pulls at it so hard he starts to think it might rip.

"Me neither." Steve says a little too coherently.

Can't have that.

He stays there for a moment again and rubs his hands over Steve's body to soothe him but he shifts in his hold, trying to get Billy to just move.

So fucking impatient.

Billy thinks, chuckling into his ear as he breathes Steve in, runs his hands through his hair before kissing him gently and Steve throws his hands around Billy's neck again, holding tight.

"Will you just fucking move?!" Steve hisses into his mouth and when Billy doesn't, he starts pulling at his own hair with one of his hands in frustration.

Billy pulls all the way out slowly, going back in slowly because regardless of what Steve was saying he still needs a bit more time and the only reason he knows this is because he can feel it for himself.

Billy grabs Steve's hand that's pulling at his own hair, interlocking their fingers as he rests it on the bed above Steve's head and starts going at a steady pace.

"Ah- fuck." Steve moans out, head thrashing a bit.

Billy nuzzles his face again, moving to the crook of his neck to give him another mark.
"You said we have to be quiet." Billy whispers quietly, tone amused.

"Fuck you." Steve says as Billy mouths yet another mark on his neck, not caring that it's more noticeable than usual as he chuckles lightly at Steve's attitude.

Billy can't help himself as he tilts Steve's chin up, forcing them to lock eyes with one another as his pace stays steady but his thrusts are harder as he slams in and Steve actually sobs out this time, eyes squeezed shut.

It'd probably be a different story under normal circumstances but he can feel how distracted Steve's becoming from how good Billy is feeling, moving inside of his body.

It's this endless cycle of sensation and Billy wants to watch it, see every second of Steve falling apart for him.

"Look at me." He says and Steve whimpers in response, opening his eyes, lashes wet as they stare up at each other.

He's not sure how he went without this for so long and he tells Steve these things, whispers them to him, adjusts himself here and there, changes the angle when needed.

All the while, their hands stay interlocked.

Eventually Steve gasps out on one particular hard thrust and Billy knows he's found the spot as they both take a moment to adjust.

The wound at his side is starting to feel sore and if anything he's thankful because it's keeping them both from coming too soon.

"Oh fuck." Billy almost cries out a little too loud when he hits it again and he immediately has enough sense to clamp his hand over Steve's mouth who sobs out and even with Billy's hand over his mouth it's impossibly loud.

Steve is saying things that Billy can't hear, they probably wouldn't make sense anyway and he's gripping at Billy's wrist, digging his fingers in painfully tight.

Billy can't help himself at this point as his pace speeds up, wanting them both to come, can feel how close they both are.

He uses the pain from his wound as an anchor and when Steve comes untouched he does what he'd done before and bites down into Steve's collar bone, hard enough to draw blood this time because it's too fucking much.

He's going to lose his fucking mind as he fucks Steve through his orgasm and gets his own ripped out of him.

This shit was dangerous, could easily drive them to absolute insanity with the intensity of it and Billy can barely even form a coherent thought anymore.

Steve is crying, shaking, trying not to lose his own mind as beautiful tears are still streaming down his face and Billy licks at the wound he'd created, tasting Steve's blood on his lips.

They both black out for a moment.

When he comes to Steve is still shaking, pressing sloppy gentle kisses wherever he can reach and
Billy is essentially just laid out on top of him, probably crushing him but Steve doesn't seem to care.

Billy still lifts himself a bit and winces.

"Oh shit, fuck, Billy your wound." Steve says with a breathless gasp, touching him gently, helping him lay on his side.

"Totally worth it, I'm just sore that's all." He mumbles out to reassure him.

"I felt it but I just didn't pay attention. Also I don't think we were very quiet." Steve says with a snort and Billy looks at the door.

"Well they haven't barged in yet so I think we're in the clear." Billy says with a smirk.

The bliss he feels is overwhelming as they hold onto each other. He can't help himself, he'd been apart from him for too long and having him there in his head but not being able to touch him had just made everything so much worse.

They're silent for a while, laying there and basking in the fact that they can finally be near each other again and when Billy turns his head he sees Steve looking at him with an expression he hasn't seen before.

Billy raises his brow and Steve opens his mouth to speak but then closes it, like he can't find the right words.

"Nothing, we'll talk about it later." He says and Billy frowns, doesn't like when those kinds of words come from someone's mouth but isn't going to question it.

For the first time in a long time they finally get to fall asleep in each other's arms and Billy knows that whatever it is, they'll deal with it later.

For now he grips Steve tight and doesn't let go.

Chapter End Notes

Real talk, I've tried pouring lube into my hand with the same hand that has the lube in it before.

It is dumb, don't do it, there's like a 40% success rate and you will always get lube on the bottle anyway.

Also WOW OK WE'RE FINALLY HERE.

*rolls around on the floor*

OH also, practice safe sex kids.

Please.

I like to think of this as the per-transitional chapter into the next big arc so that should be fun.

*wipes sweat off face*
Whatever You Want

Chapter Summary

Happy late Thanksgiving my darlings. <3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Billy wakes up Steve isn't in bed with him anymore.

He absently thinks that maybe he's in the bathroom but after a while he realizes there are no sounds coming from it.

Billy opens his eyes and looks over at the clock, it's way too early in the morning and Steve's parents are already gone.

He notices that the door is open and grumbles, throwing on only his jeans and stalking out to find out why Steve is up so fucking early.

They could be sleeping in right now.

Billy's rational thought starts to go out the window when he doesn't immediately find him.

The house is absolutely silent and he can hear the low thrum of electricity throughout it along with the frantic pounding of his own heart.

He immediately comes up with the worst case scenario because his mind tends to be a bit chaotic, especially if it's in relation to Steve.

What if he's been taken?

When he gets into the kitchen he's already sick to his stomach, doesn't see Steve here either but as he turns to leave he hears it.

Soft sobbing.

Steve's soft sobbing and Billy immediately feels relief at knowing he's at least here but lets out a shaky breath.

Why is he crying?

And, if he is why can't he be in bed next to him where Billy can help?

Why the fuck didn't he wake me up?

Billy feels slightly offended at the thought as he pokes his head into the walk-in pantry and his heart aches to see Steve curled up into himself, sitting on the floor, face in his hands.

Billy leans down, running his fingers through Steve's hair gently, trying to get him to look up at him.
"Shit, m'sorry," he mumbles out while averting his gaze and Billy's concern increases tenfold and that sick feeling in his stomach is back.

He fucking *hates* that word, he *hates* hearing it come out of Steve's mouth specifically.

It never means anything good.

"What's happening right now, what's wrong?" He asks because he's so far out of his depth right now it's not even funny and this is freaking him out a bit.

He rubs Steve's shoulders gently in an attempt to get him to just *talk* and eventually he gets himself together enough to grab on to one of Billy's hands, fingers locking together loosely.

"Before El grabbed me out...I was stuck inside of your memories and they kept coming, they wouldn't *stop* and it just- it kept getting *worse.*" Steve says, taking in a deep shaky breath.

"Your mother, that piece of shit Neil, seeing you go under water, seeing them try to get you *breathing* again, all of it-*" he says, choking out a broken sob.

There it is. He was right.

Billy lets out a sympathetic sigh, putting his arm up under Steve's legs as he lifts him up off the floor to carry him bridal style.

Steve almost immediately stops crying and it takes everything in Billy not to smirk because out of his peripheral there's a priceless look of surprise on his face.

"What...are you doing?" Steve hiccups out as Billy turns his head to press a gentle kiss to the side of his head.

He *almost* jerks away as an automatic reaction and Billy's heart clenches.

Has no one ever comforted Steve when he's at his lowest?

Billy had been pretty low when the thing with Neil happened but there had been no second thought for Steve.

He'd barreled right on into his mind, held him for as long as he'd needed.

Because he's selfless.

What makes him think Billy isn't going to do the same for him?

That must be why he'd left the room, went somewhere else so Billy wouldn't see him break down.

A sick realization hits him.

He must have been doing this shit to Wheeler too.

*Fuck.*

That means virtually *nobody* knows how freaked out Steve actually is, how much of a front he puts up and clings to when everything becomes *too much* or how *alone* he feels.
It's only ever been Steve taking care of everyone else while not voicing his own needs.

How many times has he broken down when no one was looking?

He's definitely the type to sit there and silently suffer, he's too perfect, too kind and selfless.

In his stupid fucking mind he probably thinks he's inconveniencing people with his feelings.

Billy thinks of the relationship or lack of one Steve seems to have with his own father.

All they ever talk about is Neil but never what Steve's home life is like.

The place between flashes through his mind, how cold he'd felt and Steve's house behind him.

The way he'd put his hands to his ears, squeezed his eyes shut and ignored it, ignored his own darkness for the sake of Billy.

It hurts.

Mostly it hurts because he's felt what Steve feels in those moments.

The panic attack at the store, how much his soul had gone from a bright and warm shield of protection to the kind of chill you feel deep in your bones.

It's the kind of cold you get when you take a hot shower but you're still cold, it takes forever to warm up but even when you finally get out it doesn't matter because you'll just be cold again.

"I'm carrying you." Billy replies, holding him a bit tighter.

"Uh...you don't have to." Steve says with a pained look on his face as if he's contemplating acting like a cat and getting free.

The visual makes Billy snort as he shakes his head with a simple, "shut up."

Oddly enough Steve actually does, like he's too deep in shock to respond back with a witty retort.

It just makes him hurt even more.

Billy understands that people are products of their environments, he's a pretty clear testament to that fact.

He's seen both sides, was young enough to remember what a healthy household is supposed to look like.

What kinds of things has Steve's father said to make him feel so unimportant?

He's kind of a little bit terrified to eventually, finally meet the man.

To him it's painfully obvious that Steve is touch-starved, hasn't been properly shown what it's like to have regular human contact other than with the kids.

It's probably why he's so protective of them.

They make him feel less alone.

It all starts to click into place.
Steve's movements at times can get a little awkward and gangly, like he knows what it's *supposed* to look like but he isn't sure at times because he's just going off of what he observes and not what he's been taught.

The biggest tell was anything at school when he gives pats on the back, barely touching anyone otherwise and only being super tactile with Nancy like he'd been trying to overcompensate.

Which means Steve has been taught to hide for his *entire* life, *nobody* can know the depth of who he *truly* is, *everyone* gets kept at arm's length.

Even Billy.

*Fat chance.*

He'll be damned if he lets Steve keep him out forever, he'll try his whole life if he needs to and with that thought in mind he reaches the room and lays him back down on the bed.

He can give Steve what he needs, what he's never had before.

It'll take time to get him used to it, he'll probably fight Billy every step of the way, put up resistance but the more you do something, the more it becomes a habit.

Steve just needs to be shown what he's never seen before, get introduced to it gently.

Steve is almost positive Billy is right.

They've been dropped into The Twilight Zone and it's kind of freaking him out.

Steve isn't expecting Billy to carry him back to the room or to lay him on the bed and proceed to kiss him *everywhere.*

His face, his neck, anywhere he can seemingly reach.

He grabs one of Steve's hands and starts placing kisses along the back of it and he can't help the shiver that goes down his spine.

So many alarm bells are going off in his head, screaming at him to pull away, make a joke and laugh it all off.

Billy turns has hand over, laying it against his cheek before turning his head to press a kiss into his palm and then sliding his lips down to his wrist, holding them there, feeling his pulse.

It's *impossibly* sweet, soul crushingly soft, nothing like the Billy he's used to.

It honestly throws him for a loop and he becomes more fascinated than anything, mesmerized, stuck in a trance just watching the scene unfold in front of him.

Usually Billy's default is yelling or getting upset when he's worried and Steve just hadn't been in the mood to deal with that potential outcome.

Honestly, he hadn't planned on having a break down in the first place but he'd gotten up to get something in his stomach and it hit him out of nowhere and he just happened to be in the pantry.

It was just *too much* at once and he had needed to cry it out for a moment.
The last thing anyone needs to worry about is him anyway and him losing his shit for no reason.

Meanwhile Billy still doesn't say anything, there have been few words and he's simply touching him leisurely.

It's unlike anything he's ever experienced.

He's never had someone do this to him, for him.

It's...weird.

Billy is the last person he'd have expected it from too. He doesn't like the sappy and mushy shit and is always making fun of Steve for it.

Or rather, that's what he claims.

But that's the words part of it, Billy sucks with his words if he feels out of his comfort zone.

He's never gotten to see Billy express himself physically, the way he likes to, the way that's natural to him.

It feels like an eternity as he just takes his time with it, maps out his skin and Steve feels himself getting half hard just from the attention.

Billy eventually reaches down, running his hand down his side in a deliberate manner before gently palming on his half hard member through the loose shorts he'd pulled on earlier and Steve gasps, running his hands over his arms, his shoulders, anywhere he can get to.

He wonders if maybe this is a trick, if he's still asleep as Billy starts expertly getting his shorts off with an unexpected tinge of tenderness, pressing kisses into the inside of his thigh as he works down his body only to work his way back up again after throwing them off to the side on the floor.

Now it's just overwhelming.

"Billy." He says a little breathlessly, hoping that his tone conveys his...he doesn't know.

Steve has no idea how to feel.

It's not that he's opposed to this per-say just...it's outside his comfort zone a bit.

Maybe he's messing around, maybe it actually is a joke and Billy will just laugh with an "aha, gotcha Harrington, can't believe you fell for it and thought I'd really do that sappy shit."

When Billy works his way back up he presses another kiss to the side of his face, lips moving near his ear as he takes the top part of it into his mouth, teeth nipping gently.

Apparently it's very sensitive, something Steve wasn't ever personally aware of as he shivers in his hold, letting out a punched breath.

The other shoe doesn't drop like he expects it to and the hand he has on Billy's upper arm squeezes tight.

"Is this alright?" Billy asks softly in response a moment later, reading his body language and maybe he should be a little more direct, use his words but it's hard to find them and the fact that he doesn't need to is making him go warm all over.
Is it alright?

He doesn't know.

The fact that Billy is paying such close attention as if he knows this is...new to him is probably the only thing keeping him from jerking away and crawling off the bed. It takes a lot of self control for him to not just take control back, distract Billy and just blow him or something.

Part of him thinks that might not work.

He seems a lot like a man on a mission right now.

"I- I don't know…” Steve says honestly, brain feeling a bit fried with every affectionate touch.

Billy chuckles but it isn't...rude, it seems more like a knowing one than anything.

"If you need to stop, let me know." He says, halting everything to stare at him.

Oh.

He wants permission.

For some reason it helps to hear that and Steve's not sure why.

He nods slowly, averting his gaze afterward because he's...still not even sure what's actually happening right now.

All he knows is that this is something Billy wants and Steve thinks that maybe a part of himself might want it too.

After that things stay slow, gentle, hazy like they're in an unrushed dream-like state and any time Steve tries to pick up the pace Billy slows it back down again.

Whimpers have started filling the room that he belatedly realizes are coming out of his mouth while Billy soothes him, especially when he pulls away to grab the lube but not before kissing him sensually.

It's not until Billy finally gets two fingers inside of him that he realizes he's shaking like a leaf and this must be why he said they can stop if he needs to.

This is the opposite of the desperation they've had every other time.

This.

This is something that scares Steve, something he doesn't want to look too far into because it had never crossed his mind.

It isn't something he'd have ever asked of Billy, was willing to just accept that he found it hard to express himself and was going to leave it at that.

Steve is very quickly finding that to be an untrue assessment.

Clearly it was all just a front.

Even the way Billy prepares him is tender, done with care which is nice considering he was feeling a bit sore.
Not a bad kind of sore by any means, last night had been completely new and wonderful and it seemed that Billy knew what to do to help ease any discomfort or pain.

It's a little too much though, a little too intimate and he's not sure how much longer he can handle it because he feels like he's about to burst apart at the seams.

He feels weak, vulnerable and laid open in a way he isn't sure he can dig too far into without breaking down again.

The last thing he wants is to just burst into tears when they're having sex, that's about as unsexy as it gets.

When Billy slowly enters inside of him after deeming him ready enough they're not even kissing anymore, just breathing into each other's mouths.

It's so tantalizingly slow and there's so much care behind it that Steve can't handle it anymore, is wondering when the illusion will break because one way or another something was going to and it was probably going to be him.

So, he gives Billy the opportunity for them to just pretend this never happened, change the mood.

He wants to have sex just not...maybe not like this.

"God Billy, just fuck me." He says against Billy's lips because this is not fucking, it's not sex.

This is something different.

This is-

Billy chuckles at him and this time it sounds amused as he starts kissing under his jaw, up his neck, on his face again, pressing more into the side of his cheek with his nose, nuzzling in.

"Doesn't always gotta be a race, love." Billy says and Steve's eyes roll into the back of his head.

Holy shit.

Billy is making love to him.

What the fuck.

Billy Hargrove.

His Billy.

Steve was wrong about him again, so incredibly wrong.

Billy is damn good with his words as he starts to whisper soothingly into his ear, so fucking sickeningly syrupy sweet it's making Steve feel things he hasn't ever felt before.

"I've got you, it's alright. Going to take care of you."

Steve whimpers again, wetness forming at the corners of his eyes and Billy starts to hit that spot inside of him and his breathing gets shaky as he groans.

"Ah- Billy, there-" he cries out.
Billy puts their foreheads together as their eyes lock and Steve is overwhelmed at the emotion he finds there.

This is Billy.

Unguarded, completely open.

The mask is off.

Steve knows this is something for him to see and only him, not for anyone else, never for anyone else.

It's breathtaking and Steve wonders if he should even be worthy of something this fragile, something so delicate. The intensity of it isn't lost on him, that Billy would trust him with this, this side of himself.

"Are you close?" Billy asks him after a while of the steady careful pace that's filling Steve up to the brim, threatening to spill out all over.

He clamps down on the indescribable feeling, nodding his head instead.

Billy grips him and the pace is so-

"Look at me." He says and it's different from last night as Steve opens his eyes.

He hadn't even realized he'd closed them.

There's no other way around it, Billy is making love to him.

No one has ever-

"Don't look away, wanna see you. Wanna take you apart, put you back together again." Billy says softly and Steve moans into his mouth as they share another long, drawn out kiss.

"Will you let me do that for you?" Billy asks after they pull away for air as he cups the back of Steve's neck, caressing his cheek lightly with his thumb.

Steve cups Billy's face with both hands, gripping a bit too tight and can't help the moan that comes out of him.

Jesus fucking Christ.

Steve wonders what universe he's suddenly entered into where Billy is the most gentle lover he's ever been with and it's not computing in his brain, this has to be a dream.

He supposes he shouldn't be too shocked though.

Deep inside Steve has known there was this side of him in there, has seen it for split seconds since they've known each other in the soft touches, fond looks and hand holding they'd done in the hospital and last night.

Never like this though, he never expected this.

Steve nods, "yes, anything" he tells him because it's true.

He'd let him do anything.
Billy speeds up his pace a bit but it's still *so fucking gentle*. It's just absolutely fucking *perfect*.

Romance and Billy are two things he never would have put in relation to each other but it sure feels exactly like that as they lock eyes with another again and he's not sure *why* but *that's* what tilts him over the edge.

Seeing Billy looking at him like this, like he's impossibly precious.

Those gorgeous *expressive* blue eyes he could just get lost inside of forever.

It's *fucking amazing*.

He can't help it as his eyes squeeze shut, the feeling of his orgasm washing over him.

"That's right, come for me baby." Billy whispers to him as he kisses his under his jaw.

Steve can't help the long series of moans that come out of him, the intensity of the orgasm making him see white.

"Oh god, Billy I-" he says, clamping down on his words, keeping them inside so they can't escape because he was about to say something *really* stupid against his lips and Billy *groans*.

It feels like it goes on forever as Billy eventually picks up on how sensitive he is, letting go to bury his face into Steve's neck, mouthing at it some more as Steve holds him, whispers to him how much he *wants* him, how much he *needs* him as Billy still keeps hitting *that* spot inside of him and it feels like one prolonged orgasm.

It's *too much* but also *exactly* what he needs, what they *both* need so he just *takes* it, wanting Billy to feel good *too*.

He'll *definitely* be sore but it's *so* fucking worth it.

Billy comes soon after, getting a grip into Steve's hair, breathing heavily against him and it's complete fucking *bliss*.

Steve starts to run his fingers through Billy's hair in return when he realizes he does *indeed* have functioning limbs that are capable of motion and puts them to use.

Billy is still on top of him, running his fingers up and down his sides when he finally speaks.

"You good?" He asks and Steve chuckles.

"Good would be putting it lightly." He finally manages to say and he feels Billy's smile against his skin.

"I'm sorry you had to see all of those things, I'm sorry I got you stuck inside my head." Billy says quietly as he moves off of Steve and stares over at him with a look of genuine apology when he gets himself situated.

Steve blinks.

"If this is your idea of an apology you are *definitely* forgiven." He says because *holy shit*, that had been incredible.
Billy snorts and rolls his eyes and he goes to say something else only to close his mouth again as the front door to his house opens and slams shut, reverberating loudly through the walls.

Steve frowns and starts to get up as Billy puts a hand on his arm to keep him still.

His bedroom door is still open and he didn't hear a car pull up, maybe they just hadn't been listening. They'd been a little busy. Or his mom came home early during lunch, he knows she does it sometimes every once in a while.

"Let me." Steve whispers and Billy throws him a glare as he gets up before he can.

_Really?_

Billy wants to act all macho protective, it's sorta sweet but also kind of annoying as he rolls his eyes. Steve is more than capable of protecting himself, he certainly doesn't need Billy's help.

Not that it ever seems to fucking matter.

There's no logic in Billy being the one to pad around half naked in _his_ house.

Billy throws his jeans back on and Steve waits until he's out the door before he throws on his own pants and a shirt to follow behind.

When Steve turns the corner into his living room he hears muffled voices.

"You don't know how to fucking knock?"

"We did, you were clearly busy."

"Yeah, we were, thanks for noticing."

Nancy?

When Steve sees them he raises his brow and when Nancy looks at him she gets what can only be described as a smug smirk.

Jonathan is right behind her as he averts his gaze and Steve wonders if he's missing something.

"Anyway, get dressed I'll make us all some coffee, we need to talk." She says as she saunters off into the kitchen and Jonathan follows after.

"Well then." Steve says, utterly confused.

"So much for sleeping in." Billy grumbles under his breath as he moves past Steve to go back into his room to put on a shirt.

When Steve goes to follow him he figures he may as well run a brush through his hair or something and when he goes to look at himself in the mirror of his bathroom he makes a noise in the back of his throat.

"Billy!" He yells out a little _too_ loud and when he turns his head he sees Billy next to his bed, looking at him with an eyebrow raised.

"What the fuck!" He says angrily.
There are very noticeable marks on his neck that can't be easily hidden and now he understands the look Nancy had given him.

Billy just gets a smug look on his face and shrugs.

"We don't go back to school for two days, they'll be gone by then and you heal fast." He says and Steve just gives him a look that he hopes conveys itself as *you can't be serious*.

The fact that Billy has been paying attention to how quickly his marks fade like he's got some sort of internal alarm clock going labeled *mark Steve up again* is probably the least shocking thing he's encountered regarding Billy so far.

It doesn't even surprise him.

"I came out of a coma after being kidnapped. That's my cover story and a few days later I have *hicckeys* on my throat. What the fuck are my *parents* going to say!?!" He hisses out.

"You'll figure it out." Billy tells him as he walks up to him while Steve's still in the bathroom glaring daggers at him.

"I can give you another if you'd like." He says seductively and Steve puts his hand in his face when he goes to lean in, pushing him away as he walks past him to get out of the bathroom.

He hears Billy's low amused chuckle behind him as he leaves to go into the kitchen.

*Prick.*

"I don't know how Billy takes his coffee so I'll leave that to you." Nancy says when Steve gets into the kitchen, grabbing a cup as Billy turns the corner.

"Black." They say in unison as he hands the cup over to Billy who looks at him like he hadn't expected him to know.

Rude, *of course* he pays attention.

Steve lightly brushes his fingers over his knuckles as he lets go of the cup and Billy averts his gaze.

He can't help but think of how *adorable* it is.

God forbid Steve tries to be sweet on him when company is around.

Billy has a reputation to uphold of course.

Nobody would fucking believe him if he told them that Billy Hargrove is actually a sappy romantic that doesn't want to admit it.

Nancy clears her throat and raises a brow at them.

Steve waves his hand in the air for her to start as she nods.

"You've talked to Will?" She asks, turning to look at Billy who grimaces and runs a hand over his face.

"Yes, I talked to him. How do you know that?" Billy asks her grumpily.

"He told Mike and I got it out of him, more or less." She admits with a shrug.
"Actually, how did you even get in here?" Billy suddenly asks.

"I know where they hide the spare key." She replies like that should be obvious, which it kind of is.

Billy just gives her a 'fair enough' look and waits for her to continue.

"Wait, Will talked to you already?" Steve asks him before Nancy can say anything.

"Yeah, the other day." Billy says after taking a sip from his cup.

"We wanted to ask if you know anything else, we got the bare minimum from Mike." Jonathan says and Steve had almost forgotten he was there.

The guy is so damn quiet.

"I've got nothing. Whatever he felt, I've felt nothing." Billy admits as if it annoys him.

"You're sure?" Nancy asks him.

"Of course I'm fucking sure." Billy says in frustration as Steve levels him with a glare only to get an eye roll in response.

"We are talking about the Mind Flayer thing, right?" Steve clarifies after turning away from Billy to look at the couple in front of him.

"I see...and yes we are. I think I know what may have happened." Nancy says, tone suddenly serious.

Steve frowns because he really does not want to know, a large part of him just wants to ignore it and move on with his life but he's pretty sure that's not possible.

"When the lab purged you, what happened when it left your body?" Nancy asks Billy.

Billy grimaces and puts his coffee onto the counter, having finished it rather quickly.

"They burned it." He tells her as she nods in acknowledgment.

"You saw it burn, the black smoke?" Jonathan asks and Billy nods.

"Well, we didn't burn it." Nancy says and Steve gets a confused look on his face.

Billy's eyes widen and Steve can see the wheels turning in his head like he's realizing multiple things at once.

Steve isn't sure what those things are and if anything he's not sure what they're implying.

"Run me through it." Billy tells her and Steve can see his jaw clench involuntarily.

"When it left Will's body, it left the cabin. I followed it outside and watched it leave." She says, letting that sink in.

"I thought maybe it would dissipate but it simply kept going so I figured it must be going back to where it came from." She says, throwing her arms over her chest to grip at her arms.

"You think it didn't?" Steve asks her.

"I don't think it went back." she replies quietly.
"You think it found a new host." Billy says.

Both Nancy and Jonathan nod and everyone stands there for a moment.

"I think it also explains why Will sensed it and you couldn't." She says and Billy raises a brow.

"That part of it was inside of Will, it probably has a stronger connection to him than you." She says and that actually sort of makes sense.

"But...it's a hive mind." Steve says, still confused.

"It commands, like a queen bee and each bee still has a form of sentience, minds of their own but the queen still gives them the orders." Billy says and they all look at him like he's grown two heads.

"It was inside of me, I know how it ticks." Billy says with a shrug.

"That's the thing you were talking about, knowing things you shouldn't." Jonathan says and Billy nods.

"So, the part that was inside of Will has a connection to him but not Billy?" Steve tries to clarify.

"With the gate closed, yeah...probably or that's how it seems at least." Billy says.

"What do you mean?" Nancy asks.

"Anything it connects itself to...there's a thread of sorts or a vine, a mental one. When it gets cut off it becomes damaged so my connection is damaged but Will's would be stronger." Billy says waving his hand in the air, "that's how we found Will when this all first went down, it felt for the frayed mental thread leading to him and we followed it but since the gate was still closed it could only see him, not touch." Billy clarifies.

Steve remembers that.

He remembers seeing Will.

That had been because of Billy and the Mind Flayer?

"Wait, you're telling me you helped that thing find my brother?" Jonathan asks, tone dark as he steps forward to get into Billy's face.

Nancy and Steve share a panicked look as Nancy pulls on Jonathan's arm.

Billy doesn't move and glares at him, his usual bright blue eyes turning impossibly dark like an oncoming storm and Steve really doesn't like where this is going.

"It used me as a conduit you fucking idiot, even if I wanted to resist, it wouldn't have lasted very long." Billy hisses out at him.

"Oh, so you didn't want to resist and you put my brother in potential fucking danger." Jonathan laughs out except it comes out dark and empty.

"Ohhjkay, I think it's time to go. It was really nice seeing you both, we can talk more later." Steve says getting between them while Nancy starts cupping Jonathan's face, forcing him to look at her as she starts whispering something to him and he tries to get out of her grip.

"You know what Byers, this is good, let's just get it all out in the fucking open." Billy says grabbing
Steve tightly by his arm and pulling him to the side and behind him but when Steve goes to grab at his upper arm Billy wrenches away and turns to him instead, getting in his face to point a finger at him in warning.

"Don't." He growls out and there's a lot going on there, a lot being said with just that one word and the way he says it.

Steve's jaw clenches and he's really not sure how to diffuse either one of them.

This right here?

It has been a long time coming.

They've both been egging each other on for what feels like forever which would usually be fine.

Steve isn't against a good old fashioned fight to settle differences but he's fought Billy and knows what he's like.

The guy smashed a fucking plate over his head before Steve had pushed him into that fridge, he could easily put Jonathan in the hospital or worse.

Steve has also been in a fight with Jonathan and lost that time too.

There's a darkness inside of both of them and he'd felt it in the way Jonathan had lost himself when Steve had been beneath him, when Jonathan had started to lay into him.

Also, Steve is begrudgingly beginning to realize he doesn't seem to be very good in a fight overall.

Not to mention Billy's fresh out of the hospital from a gunshot wound and he'd probably lose.

Maybe.

Ok...

He'd actually still bet on Billy if he's being totally honest.

They're both just waiting for an excuse to unleash those parts of themselves, however and Steve does not want to know what happens when that happens.

Nancy apparently has enough sense to notice that she's most likely going to get herself hurt and moves out of the way, casting a look at Steve that he doesn't know how to decipher and disappears out the front door which throws him off for a second.

"You're right, I felt bad for those things I said at the hospital but now? I don't take a single word of it back." Jonathan suddenly says and they're chest to chest now.

Steve is still not totally sure what Jonathan had actually said to him but Billy's expression becomes thunderous as he pushes Jonathan backward and he slams into the counter behind him.

"Okay seriously, this is my house, can we not break my shit?!" Steve yells as he goes to get in the middle of them again because something will break and it'll break soon.

Multiple things happen at once.

Jonathan recovers and is about to tackle Billy, Billy sees Steve trying to intervene and begins to turn on him but they all hear the sound of a gun cocking and everyone stills.
Nancy had apparently gone into Jonathan's car and grabbed the handgun that was inside because she's pointing it right at Billy.

"The fuck do you think you're doing?" Billy asks and his tone is light considering the fact that there's a gun pointed at him.

Nancy's expression changes as she moves the gun over and trains it on Steve and he involuntarily puts his hands up.

"Whoa, Nance-" he yells out.

"Nancy!" Jonathan says in disbelief.

Billy's eyes widen and he immediately steps in the way so that it's trained on him instead.

Steve would roll his eyes if the situation were different.

"You'll definitely let yourself get shot before you let Steve get shot but from this distance it'll go through you and hit him too, the shoulder should be fine but I can't promise how bad it'll be for Steve." She says with such detached calculation it sends a shiver down Steve's spine.

What the actual fuck was going on right now?!

Why did Nancy keep pulling a damn gun on him?

Why does it feel like he's the only sane person?!

"Little over dramatic don't you think? And that's coming from me." Billy says, snorting.

"I'm not going to let you kill my boyfriend." She says and wow, poor Jonathan.

Apparently nobody thinks this is a fight he would win.

Jonathan makes an offended noise in the back of his throat.

"I'm not going to kill Jonathan, I'll definitely beat the shit out of him though." Billy says with a shrug.

"I made Hopper tell me what you did to those two men you killed and I saw the photos he took. I'm entirely aware of your capabilities." She hisses out and honestly he's never seen Nancy like this and he wonders what she's really capable of.

He likes to think she's bluffing but Billy doesn't know that.

Honestly, Steve doesn't know either and it's a little terrifying.

"He took photos?" Billy asks angrily.

"Probably as insurance because you're fucking crazy." She says with a scoff and Steve blanches.

"No offense Wheeler, but you're the one with a gun."

They stare each other down and it's like watching an immovable object and an unstoppable force. The only thing Steve can do is just stand there and wait them out.

Jonathan seems more upset at the fact that they've been interrupted and Steve really has no idea why they seem to hate each other so damn much.
"I've come to like you Billy. Don't make me shoot Steve, I really don't want to." She finally says and he can't see Billy's face but he does hear him sigh deeply and it seems like the worst of it is finally over.

"I'm not stupid, Wheeler."

"I never said you are."

Steve isn't really sure what's happening right now and he looks at Nancy's calculating face like she's taking him apart, dissecting him, figuring Billy out.

*Good luck.*

Steve wants to say.

*I'm bonded to the guy and even I still struggle with figuring him out.*

Nancy's face visibly relaxes a little bit as she purses her lips.

"Satisfied?" Billy suddenly asks.

*Huh?*

Now Steve just feels lost.

For some reason Nancy just stares at him like she knows exactly what Billy is talking about and after yet another staring contest she finally just nods.

"Yeah, yeah I'm satisfied." She says and it seems to be going great, whatever just transpired between them will finally end, it's looking hopeful.

Except right when she goes to lower the gun it gives Billy the opportunity to grab it from her in a way that makes it look like he's done it many times before as it ends up pointed toward her instead.

*What the fuck, how does he know how to do that?*

Steve's blood goes cold and for a split second he thinks Billy might shoot her before stopping himself.

*He'd never.*

Would he?

Nancy looks at him like she's still trying to catch up with what just happened as Billy takes the clip out and takes the gun apart within seconds, putting all of the pieces onto the counter before turning back to Jonathan who also gets caught off guard.

"I wouldn't *willingly* put Will in danger. You have no idea what the *fuck* you're talking about Byers, about anything. Do us *both* a favor and keep your fucking *mouth* shut." Billy says as he turns on his heel, stalking back up into Steve's room, slamming the door closed behind him so hard the pictures against the wall rattle.

They all stand there in silence for a long while and Steve rubs his hands over his face.

He's getting the feeling Billy was trying to prove a point but he doesn't have all of the data so he can't really say if that's true or not.
"See yourselves out." He says as he turns to follow Billy.

When he walks into the room and closes the door behind him gently Billy is grabbing his things like he's getting ready to leave.

"Hey, big guy...come on, talk to me." He says, grabbing him by his wrist.

Billy stops and turns to him.

"Byers wants to sit there on his fucking high horse and talk shit when he has no idea, no fucking idea!" Billy yells out, waving his hand around violently.

"Okay, so what did he say then?" Steve asks him, getting his hand up underneath Billy's shirt to lightly drag his nails up and down his abdomen, causing Billy's muscles to flex.

It causes Billy to falter, nostrils flaring while he looks away and down at the floor.

"He told me you deserve better and that I don't care about a single person on this fucking planet other than myself." Billy says, the heated anger beginning to leave his voice.

Steve snorts and shakes his head.

"They don't know you the way I do but that's also because you're an asshole." Steve tells him, brushing his fingers over his nipple, causing him to jolt as he grabs Steve's arms to hold him in place, taking a deep breath to turn and finally look at him.

"Gee, thanks." Billy says through gritted teeth.

"I'm serious, they're assholes too and I don't condone what just happened but part of it is because you teach people how to treat you." Steve tells him honestly.

Billy frowns and goes to pull away but Steve grabs him by his waist, pulling him closer.

"The only reason you didn't beat the shit out of Jonathan is because you like being right more than taking the high road for the right reasons." Steve says with a chuckle.

Billy rolls his eyes, looking away again.

"You need to give them time but you also need to put in some effort too. You've been awful to them, to a lot of people. They're afraid of you Billy." Steve says, cupping his chin to force him to look at him in his eyes.

"Are you afraid of me?" Billy asks, expression completely closed off like he's bracing himself for the answer, like he already knows.

"Sometimes."

Billy breathes out heavily through his nose, trying to pull away again but Steve just grabs his face with both hands.

"You're off your rocker and that's coming from a guy that's been inside of your head." Steve tells him because lying won't help anyone and Billy's a big boy, he can handle the truth.

Billy snorts, leaning into the touch.
"I have seen into your soul, however." Steve says, tone serious.

"And what's the consensus Dr. Harrington?" Billy asks jokingly as Steve rolls his eyes.

"You wanna do the right thing, you just suck at it."

"Inspirational."

"Shut up, what I'm saying is maybe they won't come around, maybe they shouldn't but they can't use anything against you if you choose to be more in control of yourself and not just because you want to be right." Steve says to him, trying to get him to understand.

"Yeah alright, I get it you fucking nag." He says.

Steve pulls him in, giving him a chaste kiss and it just makes Billy chase after him as he pulls away.

"Come on, you can't keep overexerting yourself," Steve says chuckling, trying to get away but Billy is gripping at him now.

"You're the one being a fucking tease." Billy says and it actually looks like he might be pouting.

Steve gives him a mischievous smile, pulling on Billy's shirt and maneuvering him to the bed as he pushes him down to straddle his waist.

Billy let's him and just watches, clearly enjoying himself.

Steve leans down, letting his hot breath fan over his ear.

"I could ride you, won't have to do any of the work." He whispers, voice husky.

Billy moves his hips up to create friction as they both groan at the contact.

"Whatever you want, pretty boy."

Chapter End Notes

I'd be lying if I said this chapter wasn't more self indulgent than anything.

But there was still plot sprinkled inside of it.

I'm a sucker for Steve and Billy development though.
So my posting schedule is not as stable as it had been because my work schedule is all kinds of different.

I'd been at a set 12-8 and then she went and alternated it with my counterpart and I'd gotten such a nice thing going.

Oh well, I write when I can so here's your chapter my lovelies <3

The posts I've seen on Tumblr have killed me dead, you guys are just too much, I don't deserve any of you, thank you so much.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Steve is on his way to basketball practice when Nancy corners him.

"I wanna talk, please." She says with her big doe eyes that used to work on him.

Now, he just wants to tell her where to shove it.

"There's nothing to talk about." He says as he turns away from her.

She grabs him by his wrist and he stops, turning back around to sigh. He'd been turning her away every time she tried to apologize.

Nancy had been trying every tactic possible on him.

"Please Steve, what do I need to do?" She pleads.

Honestly, he doesn't know. He's angry on behalf of Billy more than anything but also hurt because Nancy had pulled a gun on him, on Billy, on them.

Steve pinches the bridge of his nose.

May as well get this over with.

"Library, let's go." He says.

They use the room they used to sneak into when they needed to talk and by talk he means mostly to have sex. Nancy had always been far more daring than she liked to let on because more than half the time she was the one suggesting it.

He assumes it was the thrill of maybe getting caught.

When he'd first met her she'd been fairly conservative but as time went on she started coming out of her shell a little bit more.

He suspects a lot of that was due to Jonathan more than him though.
Steve tries not to think about it too much.

Although, the things that bothered him before feel like distant memories from a past life with no real emotion attached to them.

When he thinks back on his time with Nancy it doesn't hurt like it used to.

It actually feels kind of nice and freeing in a way.

All he can think of is how insanely hot it would be if Billy was here instead so he can push him onto the desk, convince him to make it hard and fast, so fast that they still have most of their clothes on and-

He halts his thought process in an instant.

When had he started only thinking of Billy?

Everything he does he finds himself wishing his counterpart was there with him or experiencing it with him when they're apart.

He feels clingy in a way he's never felt before and whenever Billy isn't beside him it feels wrong, like he's missing a limb.

It's honestly pretty fucking embarrassing.

He has to actively stamp it down and even right now it's taking all of his willpower to keep from telling Nancy they need to take a raincheck on this conversation.

He's currently late for practice, which isn't exactly unusual but he knows Billy will be waiting for him.

Will he worry?

It'll be fine.

Billy worries far too much anyway, Steve is still his own person who can make his own decisions no matter how much of a control freak his soulmate tends to be at times.

If anything Steve should be the overbearing one considering Billy has taken the brunt of literally everything.

Logically he knows it's much deeper than that.

Billy is terrified to lose anyone he cares about again and all of that insecurity is being projected onto Steve.

It's going to be a fucking mess one day and Steve has no idea how to stop it.

It's like he's watching a runaway train and it's probably going to crash into something with civilians and everyone will suffer.

Oh well.

His mother had always told him he can only control himself, not other people.

There's only so much he can say or do, the rest is on Billy.
The only thing he can do is attempt to set boundaries and put his foot down when Billy starts being...himself.

Steve mentally sighs in that moment because it probably wasn't helping that things were starting to kick up a notch and had been for a while now, ever since Billy got shot.

It's like the bond got cranked up to eleven.

Pun intended.

When Steve closes the door behind them he locks it, pulling the blinds as well as he pulls his mind back to the task at hand.

Nancy Wheeler and how pissed he is at her.

"I'm sorry for how out of control things got." She says before he can say anything and Steve barks out a laugh.

"Who's fault is that?" He asks, voice laced with animosity.

"Look I know it was a bit dramatic but the things Hopper told me-" she goes to say and Steve holds up his hand.

"I can't defend Billy, I could try but it would be a lie and I know how insufferable he has been toward Jonathan but pulling a gun out doesn't help, especially when Billy didn't even do anything," he says.

"I know…" She says as she looks down at her feet.

"By the way, that is the second time you've pulled a gun on me, there won't be a third time."

She gets a defiant look on her face, huffing out a frustrated sigh but still doesn't say anything.

It's not like she has a good enough excuse.

"Also, pulling it on Billy first? Don't make me fucking hurt you Nancy." He says as an afterthought because it's scary to him that he would hurt her, stop her, shoot herself if it meant protecting Billy.

Perhaps that should worry him, perhaps it should worry him that he understands why she did it even though he says that.

"I never would have pulled the trigger on you, don't be silly. It was a total bluff and whether he believed me or not the risk was too high for him." She says and Steve just levels her with a look.

She sighs, continuing on.

"I'd definitely shoot Billy if I had to, but not you. Jonathan provoked that whole thing and I'm pretty pissed with him about it actually, but I can't just let Billy get in his face like that." Nancy explains to him but Steve doesn't really care at this point.

"Here's the thing, if you ever pull a gun on Billy or me for that matter ever again, you are dead to me Nancy."

Nancy purses her lips, crossing her arms over her chest, looking completely defensive.
"You need to let me handle Billy." He says to her, trying to make things perfectly clear.

She still has the audacity to look defiant.

"I'm being serious, I will cut you completely out of my life. Not that you'd give a shit." He says with a scoff.

"Now wait-" she goes to say.

"No, fuck you. We both know it's true, you're a fucking psychopath Nancy. You walk around pretending to be someone you're not." He spits out.

It's not until he says the words that he realizes he's projecting a little bit, trying to make her feel like shit for all of the times she's made him feel like shit.

"I do care, Steve I'm sorry-" she goes to say trying to grab his arm as he wrenches it away from her.

"You care about Jonathan, that's about it and that's fine but this is a warning and a threat. If you try shit like that again on me or Billy it will not end well for either one of you." He says, getting back in her face.

She stands her ground, looking at him passively as he continues.

"Billy didn't do shit and you wanna turn him into the bad guy, Jonathan provoked him and you are the one that escalated it for no fucking reason."

"I've already admitted we fucked up, I don't know what more you want from me." She says with a frustrated huff.

Now he's just being a hypocrite, he starts to realize.

He'd told Billy to treat her with respect yet here he is, letting his emotions get the best of him like the asshole he's always been.

He goes to open his mouth when he gets a strange feeling.

It feels like he's being pulled toward something and he tilts his head up, looks around for a moment and Nancy shoots him a look of confusion.

The hell?

He thinks before shaking it off and turning back to look at her.

Many would argue that Billy has no patience and they'd be right.

Which is why when Steve doesn't show up to practice he feels pissed.

Now is not the time to be doing a disappearing act if the Mind Flayer really does have a new host body and there's some random stalker still unaccounted for.

Billy had been running it all through in his head ever since.

If Will had felt it but it was trying to hide, did that mean it had been nearby at some point?

The thought sends shivers down his spine.
If it was nearby why did it suddenly fall off the grid? *Had it moved on?* Was Steve being *followed* somehow connected to all of this?

His rapid thoughts make him feel sick to his stomach.

His brain had been going into overdrive ever since Will had talked to him initially, which only became worse after the whole Jonathan and Nancy thing.

He's used *any* distraction available to keep from going completely mad which usually meant Steve.

A very insatiable Steve, he was coming to find out very quickly.

Not that he's complaining, far from it, he just hadn't been expecting Steve to be so-

*Perfect.*

Billy likes sex *a lot*, but sex with Steve is addictive as *fuck* and he just can't seem to keep his hands off the guy, he's never felt this way about *anyone* and he's so tired of fighting it for once. Consequences be damned, caution to the wind.

Part of it was being separated for too long and how hard they'd fought against that sexual pull, fought against the bond *in general.*

Against what they both truly want.

*Truly need.*

Another part of it is just-

He's *intoxicated* by him, he's not sure if it's the bond or maybe Billy's just that insane but being near Steve had changed at some point.

It's strange, feels different in a *good* way, like a low thrumming current running through his body at all times, under his skin.

Constant.

For so long it had been a struggle, their dangerous dance to keep eachother at arm's length became familiar.

But now?

Everything they do is to make up for lost time and there's this internal strength he feels now that's unlike anything else.

How had he *not* been touching Steve before this? The fuck was wrong with him? Also, why is he *still* not *here*?

The very last flimsy thread of his patience snaps in half and he curses under his breath.

*Fuck it.*

He takes off, leaves practice and sure, it'll probably look bad but who really gives a fuck?

Certainly not Billy.
"Hargrove, where the hell are you goin'?!" He hears Tommy yells out as he opens the door into the hallway and everyone else stops to stare at him too, even the coach.

He ignores them.

If something happens to Steve while he isn't looking he'll never forgive himself.

He's put way too much effort into keeping him alive, no point in stopping now.

"Just tell me how to fix this Steve." Nancy cries out, eyes watering.

"Look, I don't know if there is anything, let's be honest. Jonathan and Billy hate eachother but that's on them and I don't understand it but that's just how it is." Steve says with a sigh.

"Let me talk to Jonathan-" she goes to say.

"No, how about we let me talk to Jonathan?" He says, glaring at her.

He doesn't trust her with it, knows she won't say the right things.

Maybe he won't either but he gets the feeling she'll make everything worse and maybe that's resentment talking, but he'd still feel more comfortable if he was the one to talk to Jonathan.

She stares at him for a moment and he thinks she'll fight him on it but she just nods her head instead.

"Alright, I really am sorry Steve. I know you don't believe me but I'd have never hurt you." She says, still trying to clarify her point.

Steve doesn't really care.

Ok, he kind of does but this is what she's good at.

Getting her big doe eyes to water, that adorable look on her face she gets when she pouts.

All things he used to like about her but it had been pretend, fake, she'd never actually loved him.

Bullshit.

The hairs on the back of his neck suddenly stand at attention and it feels like there's someone right behind him as he turns around to frown at the door.

He isn't sure why he opens it but he feels compelled to.

So, he does.

A very angry looking Billy is revealed, glaring right at him.

"Billy?" He asks, blinking rapidly as his brain tries to process what just happened.

It's not that he's surprised to see him, it's the strange sensation that-

Billy's eyes land on Nancy and he starts muttering something under his breath as he pinches the bridge of his nose.

"Just in case you've both conveniently forgotten, there's still a fucking mind flayer out there and you weren't at practice." Billy says, glaring at them both and pointing a finger at Steve.
"It's my fault, I wanted to apologize." Nancy says, moving closer to them and they all just stare at each other for a moment.

Awkwardly.

It's great.

"Billy I'm sorry for what happened, I really am." Nancy says, thank god, breaking the silence and averting her gaze.

"Don't sweat it, kind of respected it if we're being honest, it was a ballsy move." Billy says with a shrug and not only does Steve stare at him like he's gone even more insane but Nancy does too.

"I can't promise to play nice with Byers but we do need to figure things out about our new issue. I'll make an exception this time and try to be on my best behavior." Billy says and it actually sounds partially genuine with a hint of his usual humor and Steve can't believe how...agreeable he's being.

Nancy also looks floored.

"Oh, uhm ok- yes of course." She says looking to Steve for some indication of anything.

He just shrugs at her because he's not sure what game Billy is playing right now.

"We'll all meet at your place after school today, yeah?" Billy asks except it sounds more like a demand.

"Okay, sounds good." She says excitedly, like she has pep in her step again as she moves past them to walk away, throwing a blinding smile at Steve after grabbing his upper arm gently in yet another attempt at an apology.

Steve just stares at Billy, totally deadpan.

"You told me-" Billy starts to say, waving his hands in her direction in exasperation.

"I know what I told you but I was trying to make a point, she can't just keep thinking she can get away with that shit, Billy." He says, crossing his arms over his chest.

Billy rolls his eyes and puts a hand on his elbow, pushing him back gently so he can get inside the room as he closes the door behind him, locking it soon after.

Steve's brain goes somewhere else completely, takes a vacation at an island to the south as he suddenly gets a very intense desire to pin Billy to the door and-

"Did you feel that earlier?" Billy asks him, changing the subject and Steve blinks at him in confusion.

"Uh, the weird pully thingy?" He replies because he assumes that's what Billy is referring to.

"I was able to see you or rather... feel you. I wanted to find you and it worked." Billy says, sounding genuinely excited for once.

It's kind of cute in a...potentially might backfire on them but for now it's super neat, sort of way.

"Wait, really?" Steve says in slight disbelief.

The thing is...he's not sure if it's a good thing or a bad thing.
Time will tell, he supposes.

Billy starts running his hands over Steve's arms, forcing him to put them down at his sides, loosening him up.

"Yes really," and his tone is taking on something far more seductive all of a sudden.

"I didn't know we could do that." Steve says nervously, mouth going dry because he's pretty sure Billy is catching his drift and wants to have sex in here too but now that it might happen he's not sure if that's a good idea because they both know how loud he can be.

"Mm, yeah." Billy says as he leans in to kiss him and it's languid, relaxing, a gentle coaxing until Steve leans away after a moment.

"So...I'm going to be honest with you right now. I've had sex with Nancy in here back when we were still together, maybe we should go-" He goes to say 'somewhere else' but Billy gets a smug look on his face.

"Did you now?" He says with a chuckle, running a hand through Steve's hair and pulling on it hard, making him hiss in a perfect mixture of pleasure and pain.

"Maybe we should make some new memories." He whispers out, stepping forward and backing him up against the desk and Steve is seriously starting to forget why he was even trying to play hard to get in the first place.

In his mind it was him backing Billy up into the desk but this is just as good-

Oh yeah, now he remembers.

"M' loud." He says a little breathlessly when Billy starts attacking one of his weak spots and he has to slap a hand over his mouth to keep from flat out whining.

"I'll just have to shut you up then." Billy says with a low, husky chuckle.

When school is over Billy has him go in his car with him to the Wheeler house and Steve absently wonders if they should be a bit more careful.

Ever since they'd gotten back to normal life people had been looking at them strange.

The kidnapping cover stories were both completely different with Billy's being drug related and Steve's being family related.

They had chalked Steve's up to a domestic issue due to the insanity of one of his distant relatives because when he had been small his aunt had actually tried to take him.

He vaguely remembers it and his parents never tried to keep her away she just...kept her distance ever since.

The memory is muddled in his brain and if he thinks about it for too long his head starts to hurt.

He had mentioned it off hand to Hopper though and he'd rolled with it.

So, they used it to their advantage and he'd allowed his aunt to get some brownie points back with him, calling in the favor.
The conversation had been strange since he'd specifically told her to keep this from his parents and she'd agreed immediately, sounding overjoyed to hear his voice.

"If you need anything...please don't hesitate to ask me Stevie."

She'd said to him like there was more she wasn't saying.

Any time he'd ever tried to ask about her his mother would look almost panicked before smiling down at him.

"Your aunt and father love you very much but they don't always agree on certain things, that's all."

In his young mind it placated him but as he got older and brought it up more it became a problem.

His father started telling him to never speak of her and his mother tried to convince him to stop for his father's sake.

Something had apparently happened between them but he doesn't know what.

For a long time he assumed it was about whatever happened when she'd tried to take him.

Did she though?

He doesn't remember, he'd been too young.

Was he though?

The only thing he remembers is how cold he felt.

His head starts to hurt as he takes a deep breath and looks out at the other students in the rearview mirror behind them, everyone getting smaller and smaller as they drive away.

In regards to Billy he's heard their whispers about how people think they're getting along now due to having something moderately in common but he also sees the other looks.

People aren't stupid, not entirely at least.

Steve doesn't personally care what other people think but he does care about Neil finding out.

"How have things been with Neil lately?" He asks and Billy let's out a deep, frustrated sigh.

"He's trying to make things right in his own fucked up way like this is all some sort of wake up call or something." Billy tells him.

"How do you feel about that?" He asks because that might not be a bad thing.

"I told him where to shove it and that I'd be out of his house in a year and we wouldn't have to deal with eachother anymore." Billy says with a shrug.

That actually isn't an awful outcome in Steve's opinion.

Billy's right, he's getting ready to move on with his life and he'll be able to be out on his own without Neil breathing down his neck.

It makes him a bit uneasy in a way, where does Billy see Steve fitting into his life?

Where does Billy see himself and Steve in the future?
Steve still plans on taking his dad's job offer even though him and Nancy hadn't worked out but he imagines Billy won't want to stay in Hawkins.

He doesn't really blame him.

Steve puts the thought out of his mind, no point in stressing over something of no relation to anything right now.

Best to take everything one step at a time and not overwhelm themselves.

"So." He says nervously.

Billy glances at him and frowns like he already knows he won't like what Steve is about to say. Spoiler alert, he won't.

"So?" Billy answers.

"My parents were trying to get me a therapist and I told them I know someone, so my first appointment will be in a few days." Steve says, looking out the window while tapping his finger on his leg.

"Where's the part of this I'm not going to like?" Billy asks because he knows Steve far too well.

"I lied to them." He mumbles.

"Speak up Harrington, I can't hear you when you fucking mumble." Billy says, glaring ahead while keeping his eyes on the road.

"It's Dr. Owens but I told them it's someone else."

He's already got his hand braced against the dashboard when Billy slams on the breaks, pulling over.

"What the fuck?!" Billy yells out, putting the car into park and turning to look at him.

"This is why I didn't want to tell you, I knew you'd get angry!" Steve yells back, crossing his arms over his chest to glare at him and he's pretty sure he looks like he's pouting.

"Of course I'd get fucking angry, the fuck is wrong with you?!" Billy says slamming his hand on the steering wheel.

"Look, I get that you don't trust the lab and that's fine, I don't either but Owens is a good man. I can't go to a normal therapist because of our bond because it wouldn't make any sense. I'm not asking anything of you either, I would never try to tell you how to live your life but I can control mine, I want to do this." He says and he feels like he's pleading with Billy for some reason.

There's no reason for him to be doing this right now, not really.

"He's not even a therapist!" Billy says in exasperation.

"But maybe he can help me understand the bond. We've been putting this off for too long. I know you feel it Billy, the bond is getting stronger and we can actually feel it now, you can too right?" Steve asks him because it had happened like a slow progression.

It was the day after Billy had made love to him he suddenly realized he could tangibly feel the bond inside of him, always there, a comforting presence right under his skin.
Billy just stares at him, tapping his finger on the steering wheel.

"Yeah okay, it feels like- like a buzzing under my skin." He says, waving his hand in the air and Steve nods, feeling like he's getting somewhere.

**Finally.**

"Right, I don't want us to accidentally hurt eachother. We've already fucked shit up enough as it is, I don't want my ignorance to keep causing you harm." Steve says, trying to get him to understand.

Billy frowns and he keeps going.

"I made a promise to you that I wouldn't go inside your head again and I broke it and I'm still kind of surprised you haven't chewed me out for it."

"You didn't mean to, no point in beating a dead horse." Billy says with a sigh.

"That's my point exactly, we're letting this bond control us instead of us controlling it, I don't wanna keep doing this." Steve replies, running a hand through his hair.

Billy simply stares at him and he has no idea what's going on right now because the look on his face is downright **strange.**

"Do you...do you want to get rid of it?" Billy asks.

Steve's heart clenches painfully in his chest and he thinks that for one inexplicable moment it **stops,** it's a physically **tangible** feeling as his eyes widen.

"What?! No! Billy no, god- of **course** not. I don't think we could, even if we tried." He says with complete and utter honesty, feeling as if his heart is going to pound out of his fucking **chest.**

The thought had never **once** crossed his mind, not until now.

It's like his whole world tilts as he imagines the **worst** possible outcome.

Steve had **felt** what it's like to merge with his soul enough times to know that Billy will always be a part of him, always.

There's no scrubbing him out, he'll just always be there.

Steve just figured that's how it was going to be from now on and there's no changing it.

"Do- do you?" He asks timidly, immediately becoming nervous and chills run down his spin, it gets a little bit harder to breathe and he thinks...he might **actually** have an anxiety attack or he might already be having one.

It's hard to tell, his brain is overclocking.

He would **never** want to force Billy to be bonded to him if he didn't want this anymore and he finds himself on the verge of becoming hysterical and it makes him feel so **damn** pathetic and out of control.

Billy grabs his wrist gently, rubbing his thumb over his pulse soothingly, looking him dead in the eye.

"Stop it, whatever is going on in that head of yours, just **stop.** I will **never** want to unbind myself
from you, I've felt what it's like to have you ripped away from me and it's fucking unbearable.” Billy says and it's _him, his_ Billy, the one only _he_ gets to see.

Steve takes a large gulp and nods.

"Okay, cool, that's good." He says a little stupidly because he still can't get used to this side of him.

Billy sighs and lets go of his wrist, running a hand over his face.

"Steve, I don't want anything to happen to you, I can't properly protect you if you go and do things like this." He says softly and Steve furrows his brow.

"Look, I can protect myself and honestly you aren't my keeper Billy and I'm not yours, this is me letting you know what I'll be doing.” He tells him so there's no room for negotiation.

Because if he gives Billy an inch, he'll take a mile.

Steve wouldn't be shocked if Billy wants to lock him away somewhere with how overbearingly, _obsessively_ protective he is.

Billy purses his lips and his expression hardens as they stare each other down and his mask slips back into place.

I've pissed him off.

"Alright." Billy says and it's calm, collected, calculated as he puts the car back into drive.

 Fuck.

"Alright?" Steve mimics because that can't be all.

"Just, alright." He replies.

They drive to the Wheeler house in complete silence after that and it makes him uneasy the _entire_ time.

They've never fought like this.

They always talk it out, there's always yelling or screaming, they always say what's on their minds and work it out but this time Billy has just completely shut himself off.

But, Steve refuses to give in.

He wonders if this is just a tactic Billy is trying to use to guilt him into not going or something.

Or, maybe Billy is just _finally_ learning that he can't always impose his will onto others and get his way.

If that means he wants to get _moody_ about it Steve is more than willing to put up with that.

Regardless, it has him on edge because he feels like he's waiting for a nuclear bomb to explode.

---

When they get to the house it's to Mrs. Wheeler opening the door and the moment she looks at Billy her entire demeanor changes.

"Steve- Oh _Billy!_" She says in shock.
"Karen, it's good to see you again. You're looking lovely as ever." He says, exuding a whole lot of smarmy charm everywhere, all of a sudden.

No.

 Fucking.

 Way.

 How the fuck does Billy know Nancy's mother?

Steve doesn't know and he's finding out very quickly he doesn't want to know as Mrs. Wheeler looks at Billy like he's a snack to eat and he may or may not throw up in his mouth a little bit.

I swear to fucking god-

"I wasn't expecting you to be here, it's good to see you again." She says, gripping the door handle a little too tight.

Again?

Steve might commit murder, he might murder Billy.

"We're here to see Nancy and Jonathan." Steve says before Billy can respond, internally wincing because his tone is unmistakably harsh not that she seems to notice with the way she's eye fucking his-

No.

He refuses, fuck Billy, fuck this.

Again, he'd fallen for this sort of shit, again.

Idiot, idiot.

'Karen' takes a moment to get out of whatever daydream she seems to be having of Billy when she finally looks at Steve and he can't even pretend to hide his obvious disdain which she still doesn't seem to be catching on to.

"Oh yes, of course. Please come in, did you need anything?" She asks, touching Billy's arm and Steve can't help his fists clenching involuntarily at his sides, leaving them both behind quickly because if he doesn't, he'll do or say something really fucking stupid otherwise.

He tunes out the rest of whatever the fuck they both say and simply walks off.

When he turns the corner to open the door to the garage he feels a hand on his arm pull him back before he's able to turn the handle.

"Hey come on, you can't be serious right now." Billy whispers in his ear.

Steve whips his head around so fast he almost gives himself whiplash, glaring at Billy with enough anger that he falters for a moment and Steve uses the opportunity to wrench his arm out of his grasp.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Steve tells him, feigning indifference because he refuses to
give Billy the satisfaction even though it's pretty obvious he's pissed.

"Nothing happened, I was just trying to find Max, you know...on that night." He says pointedly, running a hand through his hair and looking behind him to make sure nobody is listening.

Steve's jaw clenches as he turns to look away.

"It's none of my business." He says as he goes into the garage because he doesn't even want to know what that means.

The night they'd gotten stuck inside of the upside down together, when he had sacrificed his life to stay in that hole with him, the night both of their lives changed forever.

Billy had been fresh off of fucking Karen Wheeler?

That very same night when Billy had smashed a fucking plate over his head, tried to beat the shit out of him.

This piece of shit had just come from being at this house, he'd been here, coaxing information out of Nancy's mother, his ex girlfriend's mother, Mike's mother.

That's how he'd found them over at the Byers house.

Was Billy being fucking serious right now?

He stamps down hard on his emotions because Billy isn't fucking worth it, putting on a fake smile as he says his hello's to Nancy and Jonathan, sitting on the couch.

There's a sick part of him that gets a great deal of pleasure to watch Billy come inside, completely unable to do or say anything because he'd simply walked off.

The pleasure increases as he sits at the opposite end of the couch, as far from Steve as possible, looking completely dejected.

It makes it even easier to pretend he doesn't care.

"Do you- do either of you want something to drink?" Jonathan asks, darting his eyes between them, noticing something is up.

Billy says nothing and lights a cigarette like he's ready to tune the whole world out so it's up to Steve to be a normal human being that's capable of being part of society to speak for him.

"We're good, thank you." He says as politely as possible, tapping his foot rapidly on the floor.

He can't help it, it's always been a nervous tick of his, whenever he's upset or angry he does it.

So, when he looks up and locks eyes with Nancy he knows that she knows he's pissed.

"I'm hungry, I'm gonna go see if maybe we can get some snacks or something. Jonathan, come on." She says, getting up to drag Jonathan out of the room with her.

And then there were two.

Steve kind of hates Nancy right now.

When the door closes behind them Steve refuses to be the first to talk, he refuses to even look at him
as they both sit there like a couple of *dumb fucks* in awkward silence and Billy smokes his *stupid* cigarette.

"Funny, none of your business." Billy says, sounding completely indifferent, slowly exhaling a puff of smoke.

"What?" Steve bites out, not knowing what he's suddenly on about.

"So, if that's none of your business, does that mean what you do is none of mine?" Billy asks, turning to look at him and he looks utterly emotionless.

It sends a chill down Steve's spine.

"The hell do you mean by that?" He asks in confusion yet his tone is still heated because he feels like he's *missing* something but he refuses to back down to him right now.

"The people you choose to fuck, that's none of my business right?" Billy clarifies with a dark chuckle.

Steve gets a dark look on his *own* face.

"So you *did* fuck her!" He growls out, and he's always known about his own jealous streak but the kind of jealousy that washes over him right now is nothing he's ever felt before, not even when it came to the Nancy shit.

Billy's face contorts into something ugly and he puts out his cigarette before turning back to Steve.

"I didn't *fuck* her Steve, *nothing* happened." He says like somehow he's the idiot.

"Oh, but you *needed* to know where Max was, right?" Steve says in a mocking tone, crossing his arms over his chest and leaning back into the couch.

"I *sweet* talked her and *that's* all, fucking *sue* me." Billy says throwing his hands in the air as he goes to stand up and pace the room angrily.

"Oh yeah, very *likely* considering your track record, you think I'm going to believe that?" Steve says barking out an ugly, hollowed out laugh.

Billy stops and turns to look at him as his jaw clenches.

"It's great how you've *completely* avoided my question, Harrington." Billy hisses out, stalking closer.

Steve *hates* it when he does this but refuses to allow himself to be intimidated as they get in eachother's faces.

"What *fucking* question, Hargrove?" He asks because he is honestly *too* pissed off to remember what Billy's talking about.

"The people *you've* fucked, it's none of my business, right?" Billy replies, their noses inches from touching.

"I haven't *fucked* anyone other than Nancy and that was when I was *with* her!" He hisses out at him in heated disbelief.

Billy *actually* thinks he's been with *other* people?
"That's rich."

"It's none of my business though, right?" Billy says yet again and Steve doesn't know why it's so important.

"Why, have you been fucking other people?" Steve suddenly asks because he can't help himself.

A large part of him doesn't even want to know.

Billy gets a look on his face like he's shocked that those words even came out of his mouth as he rubs his hands over his face and pulls at his hair in frustration.

Before he can speak though, Steve interrupts him.

"Let's say you didn't do anything, you wanted to though, didn't you?" Steve growls out.

Billy gets a look of disgust on his face but Steve isn't done yet.

"I bet you still wanna fuck her, bet you'd have let her if she had offered to that night, you might still let her." Steve spits out before giving Billy a hard push.

Billy almost falls flat on his ass but somehow catches himself like he always does because of course he does and Steve is done with this, he's way too fucking pissed off.

How'd it get so heated and why did he feel so angry about this?

Things between them had been going really well and suddenly it was all one huge dumpster fire.

_Fucking asshole._

He starts to leave and it's right as his hand gets on the handle that Billy speaks.

"Don't you fucking leave."

It's a harsh tug on his mind, a compulsion, he feels deep within his soul and suddenly his hand isn't on the handle anymore as he holds the appendage up to his face in confusion.

_Wait, what?_

He turns around to look at Billy who looks just as shocked as he does.

Had Billy just-

_Oh no._

Nope.

_Fuck that._

"I fucking knew it!" He screams, pointing an accusing finger at him and if no one heard them fighting before, they sure do now, "I felt it at the library too, I felt compelled to open that door, that was you!"

Billy looks like he's still trying to process the fact that he just forced him to do something against his will and Steve just barks out a hysterical laugh.

"Un-fucking-believable." He says, shaking his head as he goes to turn back around, leaving Billy
behind.

When he gets inside the house there's music blaring from a boom box which he's forever grateful for and Nancy sees him from the kitchen but she has that look in her eyes where she knows something is wrong.

He doesn't even care right now but before he can walk over to her Billy is in front of him, grabbing him by his arms, rubbing them gently, touching his face and Steve is trying to pull away, push at him to get him the fuck off.

"Wait please, let me at least take you back to your car, Steve please." He says into his ear and he doesn't really see how he has all that many other options.

He could ask Nancy or Jonathan but he doesn't really see the point. This isn't really their problem, they shouldn't have to deal with this.

It's a Billy and Steve problem.

Meanwhile Billy looks completely out of sorts and like he doesn't know what to do. Steve would usually feel a tinge of sympathy except he's kind of freaking out right now about the fact that if Billy wanted to, he could force his will onto him.

How had they not noticed this was going to be a thing?

It's nearly one of the first things Billy did to him, he was the one that had erected that wall inside of his mind, fucked his memories up, made him forget.

How did they not put together that he'd also be able to control Steve if he wanted to as well?

Granted, it's not like they've got a guide book or some shit.

Steve just nods in agreement which seems to placate Billy slightly and before he leaves he goes over, leans in to talk in Nancy's ear and they put on a good show, fake it pretty well.

"I'm sorry, we need to go, we'll talk later." He says and she just nods with a clear look of concern on her face.

He catches sight of Karen Wheeler watching Billy leave and wants to fucking throw something against a wall.

"I didn't mean to do that, you know I didn't mean to do that." Billy says when they're in the car driving away, gripping the steering wheel tightly.

"Oh I know. This is exactly what I was talking about, we don't know how to control it." Steve says, tone impossibly dark.

"Do you want me to say you're right or something?" Billy hisses out, "because you are, I was wrong, you were right. Are you fucking happy?"

"As a fucking clam, so glad you can now impose your will onto me Billy, it's just exactly what I wanted in life." Steve says with mocking sarcasm.

"It won't happen again." He says and Steve just laughs at him.
"You can't promise that because we can't control it Billy and you have no fucking self control!" He yells out, not understanding why he can't seem to get that through his thick stubborn fucking skull.

"What do you want me to do Steve? Tell me what to do." Billy pleads with him and Steve is so far out of his depth right now it's not even funny.

They both are.

"Stop the car." He tells him and Billy doesn't even question it as he pulls off to the side of the road, putting it into park.

Steve rubs his hands over his face and just keeps them there for a minute, trying to gather himself together as they turn to look at each other.

Billy actually looks like he's going to cry for once and Steve suddenly feels like the asshole.

Of course he's afraid, this is definitely a little out of left field, even for them.

There's not really any way they could have possibly known this was going to happen as much as he wishes that were true.

"Hey- look just...come with me to the appointment with Dr. Owens, let's figure this out." He says, taking Billy's hand into his own.

He looks panicked, like he's at war with himself, eyes darting around frantically.

If he says no?

Steve doesn't know what he'll do.

He's kind of scared at the thought of him saying no and he...he's a little bit afraid of Billy in general right now.

He doesn't want to be, but he is.

Or rather, what he's capable of and it doesn't seem like Billy would ever actually hurt him, not anymore, not with the bond the way that it is.

Which is reassuring.

It's a little worrying that the bond is probably what's protecting him from Billy's wrath but also it's better to give credit where credit is due.

His self realization of how fucked the action was had been immediate, that's a great sign.

"Ok, ok, I'll go." Billy finally says quietly after a long while and Steve realizes he's shaking.

They're both shaking.

Steve puts his hand on the back of Billy's neck, pulling him forward to bring him into a gentle kiss, trying to reassure him, trying to help him because he's probably just as freaked out as Steve is, if not more.

He knows how much Billy hates that lab, knows how much he doesn't want to do something like this, knows how traumatizing that place was.
It's also not everyday you learn of being able to compel your own soulmate.

Steve also understands how worried Billy has been about everything, about him, Will, El and about how much he just wants to protect them and he gets it, he really does but Billy needs to bring it back in a little bit, get it all under control.

"Calm down big guy, you're shaking like a leaf." He whispers to him when they finally pull away, breaths still mingling.

"I'm fucking terrified." He says honestly against his lips and Steve kisses him anywhere he can reach.

His forehead, his eyelids when they fall shut, his cheeks, his chin, under his jaw, just sits there and comforts him, whispers soothing words to him until he finally has himself together again.

"It'll be okay."

Won't it?

Chapter End Notes

This is where some of you are probably going "Ohhhhhh, that's why the control issues tag is in this story"

*hides*
Chapter Summary

Whew, this one took longer, a lot of plot thrown in and setup.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Spring Break**

As Steve goes to pick up the last of the luggage from the car he feels Billy come up behind him.

"What's a pretty little thing like you doing in a place like this?" he asks teasingly.

"Haha, very funny. Be a dear and grab the last bag" Steve says back to him.

Jonathan still hadn't come back to close his car and lock up and Steve had wondered if maybe they got distracted and forgot.

When he turns to start lugging the suitcase into the cabin Billy steps in front of him for a moment, kissing him lightly on the lips just quick enough for it to look like he hadn't even done it in the first place.

He walks past him right after, running his fingers feather light over Steve's wrist as he goes to grab the last bag.

He feels the heat from where Billy touched and kissed him, like a low burning flame under his skin, a good kind of warmth that comes to life only of Billy's volition due to the heightened strength of the bond.

_Fucking tease._

Steve looks up at the cabin as he walks to the front door, the last time he'd been here he'd gone into his coma after getting himself stuck inside of Billy's head.

Now, it turns out Hopper had actually bought the place for Kali and her people as a reward for their help and assistance in saving Billy and everything else they'd been asked to do as a result.

As Steve goes in he sees Nancy near the kitchen and carries the luggage over to her.

"Which one is this?" he asks because he'd already brought all of his own inside.

"Jonathan's, sorry I thought we'd grabbed all of his" she says and he just rolls his eyes as he takes it upstairs as she goes to lock the car up.

"Oh, sorry-" Jonathan says as Steve walks up the stairs and turns a corner to see him coming out of the room him and Nancy had chosen.

"It's all good, that should be the last of it" he tells him.
"Thanks" he says and before Steve can turn to leave Jonathan grabs him by his arm, pulling him in so his shoulder hits Jonathan's chest to whisper in his ear.

"Nance says that Kali said something strange over the phone this morning on our way here, didn't sit well with her. Don't say anything to Kali or her group, don't know why but I'm just passing on the message" he tells him and Steve frowns while he nods.

Wouldn't it be beneficial for Kali and her people to know their plan?

Leave a paper trail in case things go south?

---

**4 Weeks Before Spring Break**

"We need to use our Spring Break to follow a lead" Nancy tells them as she hands Steve another beer.

"What kind of a lead are we talkin'?" Billy asks.

They're at the Wheeler house in the living room, nobody else is home other than them and they're getting drunk off their asses.

Ok, Steve and Nancy are getting drunk off their asses.

Billy's tolerance seems to be unnaturally high or maybe Steve is already too buzzed and he doesn't know shit.

He probably just doesn't know shit.

Jonathan is slowly being coaxed into drinking more by Nancy since he'll be staying the night anyway and Steve can tell he's one more heated glance from Nancy away from caving completely.

Steve is considering passing out on the couch, he's tired as fuck and the alcohol is making it worse.

So he drinks more to stay awake except it's kind of making it worse.

Not that he'll admit that of course.

Nancy's parents are off on some getaway for a couple days and all of the kids are over at Lucas's place so Nancy suggested they hang out over here for the night.

Things have been going well between all of them, they had eventually all made up from their collective fight as much as they can given the circumstances to figure things out about the Mind Flayer.

Jonathan and Billy are still always one bad comment or misunderstanding away from killing each other but there's a begrudging civility to them now, like they tolerate each other for the sake of Nancy and Steve.

"Just outside of Hawkin's a wife reported her husband missing along with his younger brother after a hunting trip gone wrong, they haven't been seen since" She tells them.

"What does that have to do with the Mind Flayer?" Steve asks, feeling like he's missing something.

"The husband was acting strange before he went missing" she says like somehow that answers his question.
"What she means is he went missing soon after we purged Will, the timeline adds up" Jonathan clarifies.

"How do you suspect we follow up on this exactly?" Billy asks, taking a deck of cards Jonathan had handed to him.

"What do you mean?" Jonathan asks.

"We can't just go knock on her door and demand she tell us everything" Billy says like he's talking to a bunch of idiots.

"I know, we get Jonathan's car to break down outside of her house and ask for help, the cabin Hopper gave to those people that saved you is nearby the places we need to be, I was hoping you could call and ask if we can spend our break there" Nancy says like she's already thought of everything.

Billy raises his brow and whistles.

"I'm impressed Wheeler, I'm liking this more and more, I'll call them up tomorrow and get something arranged, don't wanna be stuck in one car though if you don't mind" Billy says while shuffling the deck.

Nancy lifts her beer up in a 'cheers' gesture and Steve can tell her ego has been thoroughly stroked.

"I figured, we'll bring both cars and meet there" she says with a shrug.

"Do we tell them why we're there?" Jonathan asks, taking the cards Billy has dealt him off the table and into his hands.

"I mean it isn't really their business, we can just say we need to get away" Nancy says shrugging.

"Bare minimum, got it" Billy says saluting to her.

"I think Steve passed out on us, he only gets sloppy drunk like this when he's exhausted" Nancy says giggling as she lifts her leg to kick him gently in his side.

"M' not, I'm totally awa- awake" he says, slurring his words, curled up on the couch very much in a sleeping position and his eyes are very clearly closed as he doesn't even flinch from Nancy kicking him.

"You downed that whole pack by yourself, you were already tired enough as it was, man" he hears Jonathan say and he can pretty much hear him rolling his eyes.

"Alright, come on pretty boy, up we go" he hears Billy say and he feels himself get onto his feet as the room starts spinning.

The next thing he knows he's on a bed he doesn't recognize and Billy is over him and he can't help the fond smile he gets on his face.

"Mm, hello handsome" he coos at Billy, reaching up to tuck a bit of hair behind his ear as it falls down around his face, framing him beautifully.

It's seriously unfair how gorgeous Billy is.

*And those eyes.*
Billy just snorts in response.

"You've had a long day *handsome*, get some sleep" Billy tells him, tone amused as he goes to get up but Steve wraps a hand around his wrist to keep him there.

"No- come to bed with me, I'll like, do something for you- or something" Steve says waving his other hand in the air not really knowing what he's saying.

"You'll get halfway through a blowjob and fall asleep on my dick you mean" Billy says with a chuckle, crawling back over him and the weight of Billy is nice and grounding against the drunken fog of his mind.

"No that's- that would be *rude*" he says frowning and his eyes are already closing.

Shit, he sucks at this.

Billy buries his face into the crook of his neck, inhaling and chuckling lightly.

"Calm down princess, I'll be back before you know it" he says into his neck after pressing a few light kisses there.

"Nooo, fuck- fuck Nancy and- and Jonath- Jona- Jon, they're just gonna have sex or something anyway" Steve tells him and he feels himself going in and out of consciousness.

"Wasn't that good doctor of ours telling us we need to work on that whole dependency thing?" Billy says to him as Steve feels him take his shoes off for him and hears them thump against the floor as he wiggles his toes and he realizes just how numb he feels.

"That's stupid, Owen's is stupid, he doesn't know- he doesn't get it, I wanna be around you like, *all of the time*" Steve groans out in an overly dramatic manner as Billy props him up and helps him take his shirt off.

"Careful there love, you're going to say something embarrassing if you keep talking" Billy says gently and Steve opens his eyes at the sound of Billy calling him *that*, it's his biggest weakness and he'll never admit it even though Billy probably knows it.

They lock eyes while Steve grips his hands into Billy's shirt, pulling him impossibly closer, not thinking about what he's saying, not caring.

"But- I love you, I looooooove you, I love-" he starts chanting and Billy kisses him gently, leaning him back down to lay on the bed again as Steve feels himself finally fall asleep.

*You gotta be kidding me.*

Billy thinks to himself as he pulls away from the kiss and Steve starts lightly snoring underneath him.

He sighs while running a hand over his face in exasperation.

They hadn't said that shit to each other yet, not that it mattered to Billy.

It's pretty obvious how gone they are for each other but he *knows* Steve, he knows how important hearing it is to him.

Steve is one of those sappy traditional types, in his mind the whole pinnacle of promising
commitment stems from the first time Billy says 'I love you' to him.

He knows this because he's been inside of Steve's mind, knows what he wants, knows about some of those parts of himself he tries to hide from Billy, has seen glimpses of it since the beginning, since before they'd started getting a grasp on the bond.

Steve has this strange detachment towards Billy, this one thing that holds him back, causes a few of his insecurities to surface sometimes because Billy hasn't explicitly stated that he loves him out loud.

Like somehow it's the next big step of the relationship or something.

Billy had wanted it to be the right time, still wants it to be the right time.

He's kind of embarrassed by it more than anything because he thinks it's stupid, he doesn't feel like it needs to be said, it's not really something he likes to say in the first place, he's a man of action.

He knows that Steve knows this and as a result the guy never pushes it, sacrifices his own wants for the sake of keeping Billy from feeling uncomfortable.

He appreciated it at first to a degree but it's just annoying now because ever since they'd started seeing Dr. Owen's it's one of the first things he'd advised them to do.

*Don't be afraid to ask for things from one another, don't assume things just because you've felt each other's emotions or thoughts on an issue, let the words be said.*

---

**Dr Owen's Office, Session 6**

**Billy POV**

"I know it must be difficult, you can feel each other's emotions at times, you've explained to me what it feels like when you merge, you catch glimpses into the depths of one another but that doesn't mean communication isn't needed anymore" Owen's tells them as they sit awkwardly on the couch together, far apart.

They'd been fighting before they got here in the car because Billy hates this place, he hates doing this and gets out of sorts before every single session.

It pisses Steve off that he can't go one session without Billy being like this.

"It's fucking stressful enough as it is, one time, one single time without this shit, that's all I ask."

The doc can clearly tell.

"If anything communication is even more important for a situation such as the one you two find yourselves to be in" he tells them.

"We talk all the time" Steve says angrily and Billy just snorts in response causing Steve to turn and glare at him.

They had been synchronizing more often lately and when Billy gets upset, Steve gets upset that Billy's upset, thinks it's stupid and then there's a feedback loop and they both start getting angry about everything.
Owen's had started trying to get them to learn about how to put up mental walls inside of their minds, to get a separation, to keep a sense of self and it had been a struggle at first.

Billy was unsurprisingly the one that hadn't taken to it very well at first.

At one point Billy had gone off on him, started getting hysterical, his insecurities had blown up in his face all of a sudden when he felt like Steve was pulling away.

It's because whenever Billy would accidentally hit one of his mental walls due to lack of control it somehow translated in his mind to Steve not wanting to be with him anymore.

Steve had to explain that he just wants his own space, wants Billy to have his own space.

Billy doesn't need to know everything, Steve doesn't need to know everything, they can sometimes have thoughts and feelings and emotions and memories to themselves, they're allowed to have that.

When he was finally able to get Billy to understand that, things got better, a lot better.

He knows it now, understands it now.

Of course they still fight, they're always fighting about something but Billy wouldn't have it any other way because it's them.

Owen's had asked them at one point if they could change the way the space within their bond looked instead of it being absolute darkness, if it can be altered and Steve wasn't sure if it was possible.

Steve is the only one able to pull himself inside of the bond at will.

Billy still can't do it, even now, he'd never actually been able to pull himself inside, it was always Steve which was strange to all of them, they still haven't figured out why that is.

It also hadn't occurred to Billy until that moment that every time they had entered into that darkness, gone inside of the bond it had always been because of Steve.

On the other hand Steve can't impose his will onto Billy, he's tried but has never gotten it to work, not even once and Billy can tell it frustrates the shit out of him.

Why can Billy do it but he can't?

Of course, Steve being the only one able to enter inside of the bond and pull them both into it pisses Billy off so at least there's that, it probably makes his princess feel slightly better.

They're quickly finding out that sometimes one of them can do something the other cannot but they have no actual explanation for it.

"Yet here you both are, upset with one another because you won't talk about it" Owen's says with his eyebrow raised.

Neither one of them says anything.

"All I'm recommending is don't be afraid to ask for things from one another, don't assume things just because you've felt each other's emotions or thoughts on an issue, let the words be said" he tells them.

They still say nothing and Owen's sighs.
"At the end of the day feeling another person's emotion doesn't mean you know things for certain, you're still interpreting it in your own way from your own perspective, perhaps you may still not fully understand why they feel a certain way about something. That's where talking about it comes in handy" he tries to say, coming at it from a different angle.

"Oh I understand why, I just think it's stupid" Steve spits out.

Billy rolls his eyes.

*Here we go.*

"How does it make you feel when Steve says something like that to you Billy?" Owen's asks and Steve makes a noise in the back of his throat before Billy can respond.

"Seriously, you're doing the whole 'how does it makes you feel' spiel right now?" Steve asks in disbelief.

"I know I'm not a therapist and you're both here to control the bond more than anything else but I'd still like to help you learn to communicate with one another" he tells them genuinely.

The whole session had divulged into a mess after that, Steve and Billy yelling at each other until they finally got it all out.

Owens had learned very quickly the kinds of things *not* to say.

Billy chuckles at the thought as he looks down at Steve's sleeping form fondly.

He's a bit peeved that Steve had the audacity to tell him he loves him for the first time when he's shitfaced drunk but he supposes he shouldn't be shocked.

He's a repressed little shit after all, but he's Billy's repressed little shit.

He gets up after taking Steve's pants off and the guy barely budges, just snores away and Billy goes back downstairs for a little bit to finalize plans.

---

Present Day

Spring Break

When Steve gets into the room that he’ll be staying in with Billy he hears the door close and lock behind him.

As he turns around he gets pushed onto the bed as Billy straddles his waist, looking down on him with a cocky smile.

"What have I told you about planting your feet?" Billy says, dark and low as he licks down Steve's throat, gripping it with one hand with *just the right* amount of pressure.

Steve chuckles and it gets choked out a bit with the hand around his throat as he arches up, getting a bit of friction going between them.

Billy gets out some sort of half growl, half groan and Steve uses the distraction to turn them over so
he's the one straddling Billy instead.

"What was that again?" He teases lightly, kissing Billy tantalizingly slow only to pull away as Billy's
eyes flutter open and he frowns at the loss of contact.

Billy's hands come up to grab at him again.

"Whoa there, hold on big guy, what's this I hear about Kali knowing something?" He asks, wanting
to get that cleared up before Billy erases his ability to think.

"The fuck you talkin' bout?" Billy asks clearly frustrated that Steve isn't shutting up and they aren't
getting naked.

"Just got told that Kali said something weird over the phone this morning to Nancy, don't know what
it was, did you spill the beans Hargrove?" he asks, pinning Billy's hands onto the bed as he grinds
down on him and Billy gives him a heated look.

Steve knows this position isn't going to last for very long.

"I haven't said anything Harrington, you done talkin' or am I gonna need to take drastic measures
here?" Billy says, tilting his head to the side in a manner that informs Steve that Billy is indeed
quickly losing his patience.

He supposes he can understand Billy wanting to be all over him like a man starved, they'd been busy
this past week, barely getting to see each other, the drive here together with just the two of them had
been a nice relief but they're on a time frame so the entire car ride had been a test in resilience as they
both kept escalating the teasing touches.

Neil had been breathing down Billy's neck again lately and it was making him irritable and distant.

Steve had no intentions of tipping the guy off so he kept his distance and sometimes he'd visit Billy
in his sleep, pull them both into the bond and they'd view each other's memories, the good ones,
visits to certain places, traveling, the works.

It had been a nifty trick to learn, pulling on memories, displaying them, he theorizes it's because
when he had gotten trapped inside of Billy's head and gotten back out of it, it unlocked something he
wasn't aware he was capable of doing because when Owen's had suggested it to them he'd done it on
the first try, it had been as easy as breathing for him.

He'd also learned how to keep them both from getting raging migraines afterwards which was a nice
change.

All in all Owen's had been a good decision, they were finally learning how to control their bond and
the hiccups along the way had become minor.

---

Dr Owen's Office, Session 13

Steve's POV

"Let's discuss the 'Mind Flayer' today, I know you'll both be going on break soon and we won't be
seeing each other so I want to get it out of the way" Owen's tells them when they sit down, when
they had told Owen's what everyone called it he'd taken to the term fondly, dropping the scientific
one the lab had given it that Steve would never be able to remember even if he tried.
Billy immediately gets a grimace on his face and Steve sighs deeply.

"Through our sessions so far I've come to theorize that a lot of the abilities you both seem to exhibit as a collective are all things the Mind Flayer seemed to be capable of" Owens states and they both nod, agreeing with him.

"We know the bond only happened because Billy had been trying to protect you and it had allowed this to happen because it had been trying to forge a mental connection to trap all of you, to infect the bond and get to Steve as well" he continues to say.

Steve can tell he leaves out Eleven on purpose because he had gone out of his way to keep her safe through the coaxing of Hopper.

He'd also been a great help in keeping things on the down low so Hopper could get the adoption finalized.

No matter how Billy felt about the guy Steve was certain he could be trusted.

"But it didn't, it never infected Steve, he merely felt your pain Billy" he says, tone serious.

"Yeah, ok, so?" Billy says, eyeing him suspiciously causing Steve to kick his ankle.

"It's just, I've gone over both accounts of the stories you've given me when the bond was first forged, that creature had every intention of latching itself to the bond but it couldn't and it didn't because it got stopped" he says, pursing his lips.

"I'm not sure where you're going with this either" Steve says.

"It's just strange is all, I wonder if you both being able to do certain things while the other cannot is connected to the fact that the Mind Flayer was unable to corrupt Steve" he says like he's talking to himself and before either one of them can say anything there's a knock at the door.

"Come in" Owens says absently, waving his hand in the air.

"Sorry, your second appointment is here, he says he needs to reschedule" the lanky man tells them.

Owens frowns and sighs, "Excuse me a moment, I'll be right back" he says as he gets up to leave.

When they hear the click of the door closing Billy turns to him.

"This, this is why I don't like this" Billy says glaring at him as Steve glares back.

"Because he's theorizing and asking questions we knew he'd ask anyway, calm down Billy, you're being paranoid" Steve says rolling his eyes as he turns to look away from Billy and out the window.

"A little convenient that he's talking about it now, he could have brought it up in any other session, the first few that we used to tell him everything, the one after that even but he chooses now?" Billy says in a heated whisper.

"You heard him, we're going on break, we won't be having another session for a while" Steve says not really knowing where Billy is going with this.

"Convenient excuse or maybe a cover up because he's trying to figure out where we're going and why" Billy huffs out.

"That's ridiculous, he can't possibly know anything, it's between the four of us" Steve says, tone
strained from exasperation at having to deal with Billy when he gets like this.

"Something doesn't feel right and I can't figure out what the fuck it is, like something on the tip of my tongue and it's pissing me off" Billy admits, putting a hand on his chin and scratching gently at his 5 o'clock shadow.

"Or maybe you're just freaking out for no reason" Steve says with a chuckle.

Before Billy can respond Owen's comes back in apologizing for the interruption and they get back to work.

---

Present Day

Spring Break

At some point Billy had taken control back and Steve was now pressed against the bed, face turned to the side pressing into the mattress after they had pushed everything off of the bed as Billy starts to fuck into him at a brutal pace and Steve knows this is Billy getting his frustrations out, probably in regards to his shit week and just wanting to touch Steve with abandon.

Steve is not complaining, he loves Billy like this, wild, unhinged, rough, gripping bruises onto his waist, into his skin that he'll feel for a couple of days, marking him up more than usual like he owns him, like he's going to consume him.

He's trying to keep quiet but it's definitely not easy so Billy has his fingers in his mouth.

Not that it's helping much, or at all really.

If anything it's just more of a turn on.

They like it this way sometimes, they like things a bit more on the dangerous side, more pain mixed in than usual, lines blurring.

If it becomes too much they have a safe word anyway.

"You gotta be- gotta be quiet pretty boy, they're gonna fucking hear- god, so fucking good for me. They're gonna hear you" Billy grunts out and Steve buries his face into the bed as Billy takes his fingers out of his mouth and trails them down his throat leaving a trail of his own spit on it as it dries quickly against his skin.

Billy lifts him up so his back is against his chest, arm around his waist and he gets impossibly deeper inside of him, getting him to sit right on the spot that makes him see stars as he clamps a hand over Steve's mouth, keeping completely still as Steve's eyes roll into the back of his head as it lolls back against Billy's shoulder and he starts mumbling against Billy's hand.

"Oh god- move, fucking move" Steve hisses out when he grips the hand to move it away from his mouth to speak while using the other one to grip onto the arm around his waist, digging his fingers in painfully hard as Billy just holds him there and Steve can't seem to get himself up, can't lift himself up with the way Billy is holding him.

Billy has him trapped purposefully so that he's the one in control of this, he's the one giving Steve this pleasure, none of it is his own.
He fucking loves it.

But he's also losing his damn mind because he can't help that the tiny movements he is managing to make are just barely brushing against his prostate more and more and it's not enough.

"Please, please, please" he whispers out like a mantra and Billy puts his hand back over his mouth again.

Billy bites into his neck hard and Steve almost wonders if he's drawn blood as he gives out a muffled cry and he's seriously going to lose his fucking mind.

He's about ready to just actually use his own strength, to take some control back to get something done when Billy takes the arm from around his waist that had been keeping him down, bringing it up to grip his throat with a teasing pressure.

"Ride me" Billy growls out into his ear and Steve almost cries out again as he immediately starts lifting himself up and back down onto Billy, slowly at first and then it's so good, the angle is too good.

He can't even stop himself, his legs are burning but he doesn't even care, is chasing the pleasure at this point.

He's gripping his hand onto Billy's wrist, the one that's over his mouth while using it as leverage as he starts fucking himself on Billy faster but he can't fucking come, keeps hitting that spot over and over and he can't fucking come.

"Yes you can, you're going to come just like this, princess" Billy whispers harshly in his ear as he lifts his hips up and Steve stutters, letting out a long moan.

He hadn't realized that Billy had pushed into his mind for a moment.

Fucking Christ, it's so good.

"That's right, you look so fucking pretty, so well fucked like this, wanna see you come, wanna feel the way you tighten around me" Billy starts telling him, grip tightening on his throat, cutting off his air and Steve whines.

He feels the tears streaming down his face at how good it is, how much closer he's getting, how frustrating it is because he's right there, about to tip over the edge, he's so, so close.

"Come for me, love" Billy whispers, kissing right above his jaw and that's all it takes.

That's all he'd needed apparently, the mixture of how rough Billy is being as it all gets brought back in with that one gentle word paired together with a gentle kiss.

It tips him right over the edge and Billy grips his member with the hand that had been around his throat as Steve is able to breath again, starts pumping him and Steve's back arches as he goes wild, almost lifts himself off of Billy, it's too fucking good.

Billy pushes him forward, Steve's mouth uncovered for a moment as he's on his hands and knees again.

Billy slams himself inside of Steve, one hard thrust that makes him grunt through his mumbling as his orgasm still washes over him after trying to get away and Billy has enough sense to clamp the hand back on his mouth.
The other is still gripping Steve's dick as he works him through his orgasm, trapping him underneath as he starts fucking into him again and Steve can't help it, he's sobbing, there's no use being quiet anymore, he can't even think anymore.

Billy's hand over his mouth helps but anyone nearby can definitely hear them, he absently hopes they're all at least downstairs.

He senses Steve's too sensitive and lets go, starts fucking into him, gripping his hair and pulling, chasing his own orgasm.

Steve wants it so fucking much, wants to feel Billy come inside of him as he pushes his emotions into Billy, makes him feel what Steve is feeling and Billy makes a choked off sound, moves the hand on his mouth onto his waist, tightens his grip so hard while pulling his hair even harder and he knows he'll be getting another bruise.

"Fuck, Steve, fu-" he grunts out, finally coming as he starts shaking above him for a long while and it feels incredible to feel Billy inside of him, he'll never get tired of the feeling of it, of feeling Billy pulsing inside of him filling him full to the brim.

Steve helps maneuver him onto the bed as they lay down, curled around each other and when Billy turns his head Steve kisses him, sloppy, slow, like they have all the time in the world.

Steve feels the cum dripping out of him and he groans into the kiss as Billy reaches down, using his fingers to push it back inside of him.

Working him up again and the sounds, how open he is for Billy right now, it's fucking filthy.

He's pretty sure he's going to get hard again as Billy brushes against his prostate gently, making Steve jolt as he grips onto Billy, trying to keep it together.

Steve goes to pull away because they're going past the point of no return and he sees the fond smile on Billy's face as he nuzzles his nose against Steve's cheek and then against his nose.

Steve can't help the chuckle that comes out of him.

"Ever wonder what it would be like if we hadn't gotten bonded?" he suddenly asks him.

It seems to take a minute for Billy to catch up, to realize Steve is asking him a question and he has his eyes closed, brow furrowed and when he opens them again to look at Steve he seems to catch back up as he pulls his fingers out of him causing Steve to sigh.

He considers putting them back inside of him.

"What do you mean?" Billy asks.

Ok, so maybe he wasn't fully caught up yet.

"What would we be like, how would we treat each other if the bond wasn't here?" he asks, running a hand down Billy's chest, kissing his shoulder.

Billy laughs and puts a hand on Steve's waist, pulling him impossibly closer.

"Honestly, I'd probably be a piece of shit, rough you up, pull your pigtails, pretend I don't give a shit when in reality I do, I'd be the fucking worst" Billy says with a snort.

"So basically you'd just be the same?" Steve says teasingly and Billy pushes him off the bed and
Steve knows he deserves it as he starts laughing and pulls the discarded blanket up onto the bed with him as he crawls over a pouting Billy.

Steve presses feather light kisses on his face and Billy just keeps trying to turn away and push him off but Steve won't budge.

Billy is about to speak when there's a knock at the door.

Steve sighs and rolls his eyes, "Yeah?" he yells out.

"Come downstairs when you have a minute" he hears Nancy say through the door.

When her footsteps fade away Steve looks back down at Billy and gives him a smile and Billy just rolls his eyes as he moves quickly and pushes Steve onto the floor again except this time it's a surprise.

"Aw, jeez, dick" Steve says, rubbing at his lower back, laughing some more and when he goes to get up Billy is in front of him, head tilted to the side.

"Hello" Steve says unsure, not knowing what's going on in Billy's head, doesn't recognize the look he has on his face.

Billy moves forward, pulling him into a kiss, pulling at his lower lip gently with his teeth and oh shit. He's doing that thing, the thing that drives Steve insane with his tongue.

Steve is helpless against it as he moans into his mouth and Billy pushes him so he's sitting on the bed and his head is tilted up, neck straining as Billy grips a hand in his hair and pulls hard, sticking his tongue down his throat, deepening the kiss and it's fucking hot, it's intoxicating and Steve can barely breath.

He starts to realize what Billy's doing too late because he's impossibly hard again and Billy pulls away looking like they hadn't just made out in the filthiest way possible, completely deadpan as he looks down at Steve, seeing him hard again.

Billy smirks and lowers himself down onto his knees, resting his hands on Steve's upper thighs and his dick jumps involuntarily as Billy just stares up at him for a moment.

Suddenly there's a shirt in his face and he sputters and when he pulls it away Billy is suddenly standing, putting his clothes back on and Steve makes a noise.

"What-" he says and Billy goes to open the door.

"See you downstairs, sweet cheeks" Billy says as he closes the door behind him and Steve falls back onto the bed letting out a frustrated groan.

Ok, so maybe he deserved that.

Nancy doesn't like this, something isn't right as she stares at Kali while they wait for Steve to get downstairs.

Maybe she's being paranoid but it wasn't what Kali had said, it was the way she had said it on the phone this morning before they had left.

Nancy had let her know they were on their way and she seemed reluctant, reserved, resigned.
She doesn't know Kali but she likes to think she can tell when something more is going on and it became even more suspicious when Kali had asked her what they planned to do while they stayed here.

It's not a suspicious question but it still rubs Nancy the wrong way.

Nancy just doesn't want to fuck this up, wants to make sure they're able to follow the lead to see if there's any merit to it.

There's just something going on and she can't seem to figure it out, it's making her irritable and less trusting and she knows she has been taking it out on Jonathan, feels bad for doing so.

When Steve finally makes it downstairs she rolls her eyes, there's a huge hickey on his neck and she supposes it shouldn't be shocking, they're away from home, away from anyone that matters, of course they'd take advantage of it.

She's happy for them.

"I just wanted to let you all know you're welcome to anything in the house, there are no restrictions, do as you please, come and go as you please, it's nice to have the extra company" Kali says to them after they're all gathered in the living room.

They seem like nice enough people.

"Thanks again for housing us kid, it's nice to get away from dingy Hawkin's for a bit" Billy says and they all nod, agreeing.

"Got any big plans while you're here?" Axel asks and there it is again, they keep asking.

They're just being nice Nancy, calm down.

She tells herself as she locks eyes with Billy for a moment and they silently agree to let her take the question.

"I heard there's a few good spots we can go to, no real plans just playing it by ear" she says sweetly.

Axel and the others proceed to take turns telling them of good places to go and check out and Kali excuses herself soon after.

It's nice, they get to know the group and the group gets to know them as they all start playing cards and talking about anything and everything.

They even learn a little bit about the men they've been tracking lately and how Hopper has asked them to find Richards who is still completely AWOL.

Richards is the least of their problems right now.

When Nancy finally gets tired enough she excuses herself and Jonathan follows after her.

She's staring out the window as it starts to steadily rain, sighing as Jonathan wraps his arms around her, kissing her lightly on the cheek.

"I thought the forecast said no rain?" she says, leaning into his touch, allowing her stress and worries to wash away as she lightly traces a hand over his arm.

"Dunno, I didn't really pay attention" he says with a shrug as he turns her around and kisses her
"I hope it doesn't carry into tomorrow" she says with a frown after pulling away, putting her hands around his neck.

"I think you worry too much and I think I can help with that" he whispers to her as they smile at each other and he picks her up and carries her to bed.

When Steve and Billy get back up to their room Steve walks past the window and stops, glancing at it, tilting his head to the side, feeling a tickling in the back of his mind.

Billy comes up behind him right in that moment and just stays there, wrapping his arms around him, holding him, breathing him in and Steve sighs, turning his gaze from the window to close his eyes and lean into Billy.

"Haven't been able to sleep in the same bed for a while, it'll be nice" Steve says, turning in his embrace so they're facing each other.

"Yeah" Billy says, running his hands over his shoulder, down his arms and back up again.

"You and Neil ok?" Steve asks him because he doesn't like to ask when he knows Billy is in a bad mood.

Billy grimaces and sighs, "He's just being his usual self, don't worry about it" he tells him even though they both know Steve is going to worry.

He still gets nightmares, still struggles sometimes with the memories he's seen but Billy works him through them, keeps him sane, helps him through his attacks.

And sometimes Billy sees the Upside Down, has been seeing it more lately for some reason, gets nightmares that the Mind Flayer finds them again, takes Steve and they're awful and vivid.

Steve works him through it, reassures Billy that nothing is going to happen, that he's alright, that he's here and nobody is going to take him.

Tells him that if anything Steve is the one that should be worried because Billy had already been taken from him once, he doesn't want it to happen again.

All in all Steve hopes whatever happens they find something out about the Mind Flayer and get this over with as quickly as possible.

Steve takes one final look out the window to see a raging storm outside and they fall asleep to the howling of the wind, rain, and thunder.

Chapter End Notes

Glad I was able to get this one out. It's about to get spicy.
"Steve, you're up early" Nancy says to him as he turns the corner into the kitchen, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"I'm surprised you're the one up and not Jonathan" he replies to her with a yawn.

"He's in full on vacation mode, doesn't have to worry about Will, it's nice when he's like this" she says fondly and he smiles at her.

He likes seeing Nancy happy, likes seeing them all happy, there hadn't even been a fight between Jon and Billy lately which was probably because they hadn't been able to talk much not that he's complaining, he prefers there just isn't animosity in general but he knows that's too much to ask.

He likes to think that Jonathan is growing on Billy but every time he ends up thinking something like that Billy will catch Jonathan merely looking at Steve and he gets that wild jealous look in his eyes unnecessarily.

Steve had finally gotten Billy to open up about it one night not too ago after a particularly rough session of sex and he's still just as confused as he was before if not even more so.

"I seriously don't understand you" Steve tells him as he puts his shorts back on, entire body muddled with marks from Billy teasing him all fucking night.

He kept delaying his orgasm, tortured him slowly and then fucked him brutally still keeping him from completion until he was the one sated, chasing his own pleasure until finally he'd turned his attention to Steve and had just completely ruined him, turning him into an absolute fucking mess.

"You wanna come princess, I'll make you come" he had said as he proceeded to overstimulate him, hadn't stopped until Steve had come four times, had almost done a fifth but Steve was a fucking sobbing mess, begging him to stop.

"Can't- please, no more- Billy, please" and he'd finally had mercy on him, kissed him gently, held him through it as he'd eventually come back to himself.

Apparently the torture had started losing its edge, he'd started to become thoroughly convinced Steve would not be going to anyone else.

"No one else Steve, no one else but me, do you understand?" he had growled out to him and eventually Steve didn't know what he was saying anymore, wouldn't be able to remember even if he tried.

He had tried to put up the good fight because he knows that's how Billy likes it but somewhere after the second orgasm he'd been completely lost to himself, all for Billy to do as he pleased and he didn't even care.

He hadn't even done anything either, he found out halfway through Billy was just acting jealous from seeing Jonathan talk to him earlier that day as they had been leaving school and Billy took it out on him.

He's fine with that because the sex had been amazing in the moment but now that it was over he'd started to get a bit worried.
"What do you mean?" Billy asks, not catching the hint, smoking a cigarette without a care in the world.

"I'm all for the whole 'you're mine' speech during sex, I really like it don't get me wrong but are you being serious?" Steve asks because it's Billy and he can never be sure.

Billy just looks at him up and down and raises a brow and Steve has his answer.

"You realize Jonathan is the guy that essentially stole my ex right?" Steve says trying to explain this to him yet again and at this point he's lost track of how many times he's tried from so many different angles.

"You really wanna know what it is?" Billy asks him and finally, Steve feels like he's about to get somewhere as he nods and gestures for Billy to continue.

"I'm being serious, do you truly want the answer Steve?" he asks again and now he feels a bit worried.

"Yes, I seriously want to know" he says because now the curiosity was going to kill him.

Billy sighs, shaking his head as he mumbles something under his breath Steve can't hear.

"I've never given a shit about your feelings for Nancy, I've got nothing to worry about from her, I felt the relief you felt upon seeing her the day I was purged and when she sat there and told you I was alive the emotions you felt in regards to me were a blaring neon sign, I've known for a long time the way you feel about me" Billy tells him in such a matter of fact tone it makes Steve nervous as he looks down at his feet.

He thinks he might be blushing a bit too.

"That's why I pulled away, your feelings for me, it was the most terrifying thing I'd ever experienced in my life and I've had quite a few terrifying experiences as you very well know, they're all nothing in comparison to feeling what you felt for me in that moment" Billy goes on to say and Steve suddenly feels put on display.

He's not sure what any of this has to do with Jonathan though.

"Byers is an anomaly, it could go either way, he could use your compassion for others against you and I'm powerless to stop it, he already makes you feel bad for him, you already feel guilt in regards to him" Billy says and it suddenly feels like he's talking to himself, like Steve isn't even there anymore.

"I've fucked guys like him, the repressed creepy ones that have a lot of fucked up baggage, that's how they worm their way in, they appeal to your empathy at first, draw you in to a trap, pretend they're weak. By then you've already fallen into the trap, it's snapped shut and you don't even know it until you're in too deep and it's too late, you can't get out" he goes on to say as he gets a far off look in his eyes and Steve feels sick to his stomach all of a sudden as he grips his own arm, rubbing it up and down.

"They're liars, they lie to themselves, don't even know they're doing it, it's how they get away with it, even the best bullshit detector can't pinpoint them, they prey on people who can read others well because they're the easiest ones to fool, they don't see the silent ones, the ones that have no tells because you're too busy looking for the tells. They've convinced themselves of the character they're playing, they become the role" he says with a snort and Steve feels sick to his stomach all of a sudden as he grips his own arm, rubbing it up and down.
“You of course aren't a good bullshit detector but you're still too compassionate. He already took Nancy from you which could be some creepy way of getting close to you, having a piece of you to himself and he doesn't even know he's doing it” Billy says like it could go either way and Steve gets a disgusted look on his face.

“I think you're reading way too deep into this” he tells Billy because this was just insane, too much, he'd put way too much thought into this.

“Maybe, I don't like not knowing, I can see your emotions and your feelings but I can't see his, I can't pin him down and that's what I hate about him” Billy says with a grimace as he puts out his cigarette to light another.

“Or maybe you see some of yourself in him, the parts you hate” Steve says without thinking and he wonders if Billy will get upset with him.

"Could be, that's probably part of it" Billy says after taking a long drag and letting it out slowly and that's not the response he'd expected at all.

"Has someone done that to you?” Steve asks, brain slowly catching up with a few things he said from before.

"Done what?” Billy asks, brow raised.

"Trapped you?" he clarifies.

Billy just lets out a chuckle, shaking his head "No, no, I'm worse than guys like him, I ruin guys like him, they usually want the ones that are like me. They hate themselves too much, want to be destroyed, punished, it's just fucking chaos” he says, waving his hand in the air.

“They give themselves over completely to the kind of monster I am. So submissive, they crave someone who will appeal to their fucked up nature and draw it out, it's really boring” he says darkly and Steve gets a worried look on his face.

Unfortunately Steve knows what Billy is talking about, has felt that monster, has seen it, has been consumed by it and torn apart into tiny pieces because of it.

He could only be put back together again with Eleven's help.

"Obviously there are exceptions, Byers is the one that pretends to be submissive but he's got a side to him that I just- there's something else there, that part I can't pinpoint, the anomaly” Billy says, the gesture he makes with his hand is familiar to Steve, when he'd found Max at the house, had confronted him, had said he had a bad feeling about all of it.

He hadn't exactly been wrong.

"You're fucking insane, you know that?” Steve says to him all of a sudden.

"You asked and I asked you if you really wanted to know” Billy says with a snort and it's true, he can't fault him for that, he'd asked.

"He's in love with Nancy" Steve tells him, that's just a fact.

"So were you but alternatively she's a fucking psychopath, she's like me but better at hiding it, that's my point” Billy retorts.
Well shit, he's not wrong.

He'd yelled it at her face after the gun incident.

The second gun incident.

"Anyway, too many variables that could go too many different ways, I don't like not knowing, something could change at any moment" Billy says with a sigh.

"I think when you worry too much like this it has a higher chance of going a way you don't want it to" Steve tells him honestly and Billy turns his head to look at him and just stares.

And stares.

He stares for a bit longer, putting his cigarette out without looking, still locking eyes with him and Steve isn't sure what's happening, like Billy is seeing something for the first time.

"You are an anomaly at times, you know that?" Billy says, pointing a finger at him and Steve frowns.

"I don't know what you mean by that" he says quietly.

"You don't give yourself enough credit Steve" Billy replies, lowering his finger.

"You always keep me on my toes, you never truly give in. Since we're being so honest with each other right now you're actually the one in control, I'm fucking helpless against it and when you do give in it's because you wanted to. Sometimes I think you're the dangerous one" he says, shaking his head as he lets that sink in for a moment.

"Come on, let's go to bed" he finally says flippantly when Steve can't find the words to respond with, holding his hand out to him.

Steve just raises a brow for a moment, trying to understand what that all means but he can't, he doesn't fully understand the implications of that, probably never will as he rolls his eyes and takes Billy's hand, crawling back into bed as they fall asleep together.

"Billy still asleep?" Nancy asks him while cooking herself some breakfast and he nods as he goes into the fridge, pulling out the glass bottle of orange juice.

"So, how are the two of you?" she asks and Steve snorts.

"We gonna talk about boys and braid each other's hair?" he asks her, a bit peeved because it's not her business and they weren't totally back to being on good terms just yet.

"I can certainly manage it, you've got more hair than I do" she tells him.

She's not wrong, she'd been keeping it in on the short side for a while now, he likes it on her, frames her face more.

"We're good, how about you and Jonathan?" he asks just to be courteous when in reality he doesn't actually care.

"Come on, don't hold out on me, has he told you he loves you yet?" she asks as he goes to take a sip
of his orange juice only to almost spit it right back out, the acidity of it burning his throat as he clears it.

"That's- it's a touchy subject for him, it's not a big deal" he tells her, turning away to hide his blush.

Nancy just raises her brow and looks at him, her mouth doing that side smile like she doesn't believe him.

"You're the biggest hopeless romantic I know, have you told him yet?" she asks as she cracks another egg into her pan.

"Jesus Nance, no I- uh, I don't think so?" he says with a grimace as he takes another sip.

"What is that supposed to mean?" she asks with a laugh.

"I dunno, I think- I think I might have said something a few weeks ago, when I got shitfaced and he took me up to the guest room" Steve says and honestly he isn't sure, that whole night is still hazy for him.

Nancy just stands there gaping at him and almost burns her eggs before she comes back to herself and starts scrambling them aggressively.

"You told him you loved him while you were drunk" she says like she's upset or something.

"Pretty sure the last person that can say anything about saying stupid shit when they're drunk is you" he retorts, frowning at her.

"So telling him you love him is stupid shit?" she asks, raising a brow at him, ignoring his jab.

"Well I mean if I said it while I was drunk then yeah" he says with a shrug, finishing the last of his orange juice.

"Do you really think you did?" she asks, pursing her lips.

Steve runs a hand through his hair and sighs deeply.

"Yeah, I- I think I did and he hasn't brought it up and I don't wanna bring it up because I feel like an asshole" he says, rubbing a hand over his face.

"Do you think he actually cares?" she asks him this time.

"Honestly, probably not but I still feel like an asshole regardless" he says with a look of defeat and Nancy just smiles up at him reassuringly.

"The only reason you'd feel like an asshole is if it means something to you, why not just tell him?" she asks, grabbing his arm and rubbing it before turning back to her eggs.

"It doesn't mean as much now that I've gone and drunkenly said it like an idiot" he huffs out as he goes back into the fridge to see if there's anything he wants.

"Well, apologize and say it again and this time he'll know you meant it" she says with a shrug like it's simple.

"He knows, Billy isn't stupid he just doesn't bring it up, we just don't talk about it, it's just one of those things" Steve tells her because she just won't understand the stigma behind it.
Nancy doesn't know what Billy had to deal with growing up when his mother would tell him she loves him only for her to be taken away too early as he sits here blaming himself for something completely out of his control.

None of them understand the times Neil would say it when things were good, when Neil was having a good day or a good month only to turn around and take it all back with vicious beatings and hateful words, blaming Billy for things that weren't even his fault.

Steve knows the word had lost its meaning a long time ago for Billy, it doesn't mean anything when someone says it to him now because the people who he'd needed to hear it from the most so early on in his life either died or tainted the word.

It had turned into something cheap to be thrown around carelessly like it isn't a sacred promise, something to be cherished and treasured.

He fucking hates Neil for it, for doing that to him. He hates Neil for a lot of things.

Steve would never ask something like that of Billy just because he's a silly romantic, it's not important enough to him to hurt Billy like that and force him into saying something that just causes him pain.

He knows Billy loves him, he shows it in so many other different ways instead because Billy prefers to let his actions speak for him and that doesn't bother Steve so it's why he doesn't push it, it's enough for him.

Steve suspects he'll never hear Billy say it and at the end of the day he tells himself it's just because of the things Billy has gone through, he'd probably be the same way so he lets it go, they're two different people who do things in different ways, experienced life differently.

His biggest thing is he wants to say it, wants to tell Billy he loves him, has to catch himself so often because he knows that Billy probably won't say it back and even if he does it'll make him uncomfortable, he'd be forcing himself to say it.

Steve can't do that, that's the part he can't handle.

So he says nothing, does nothing, asks nothing so that he doesn't have to deal with potentially getting nothing in return even though he knows it's a stupid thing to be hung up about.

He hates himself and how fickle his stupid heart is.

Nancy just sighs and shrugs, finally giving up as she looks out the window to see the storm still raging even into the early morning hours of the day.

"If it keeps up like this it's going to flood" Nancy says, changing the subject.

Steve stares out the window to see the storm still going, frowning as he scratches the back of his head.

Just looking at it was starting to give him a headache so he turns away, "We've still got time" he tells her.

"Maybe" she says with that tone like she has more on her mind.

Halfway through the day Steve's headache turns into a full blown migraine as he excuses himself to
go sleep it off as Billy shoots him a look of concern but he assures him he'll be fine.

Nancy is being irritable which was making Jonathan irritable so being around them was annoying enough already but at least Billy was still being his usual self.

He seemed to get along really well with Funshine and Axel but Nancy had almost started a fight for some reason and Steve couldn't figure out what the hell her problem seemed to be.

"Where's Kali?" she had asked.

"She's in bed, she's not a fan of storms" Dottie tells them and Nancy just eyes her suspiciously like somehow Kali is causing some group hallucination.

Why would she do that?

She'd already told them they were free to come and go as they please, it's not Kali's fault the weather is shit.

Even if she was doing it there was no sense, why would they be trying to keep them here?

When Steve gets up to the room he sees the door leading to a small balcony outside and for some reason he can't help himself, something isn't right and he's starting to wonder if maybe Nancy's right.

The closer he gets to going outside the more painful his migraine becomes.

He pushes through the pain though as he turns the handle to open the door and he feels the wind blowing, sees the curtains flapping violently around him, he can feel the rain on his skin as it slams into him like needling pinpricks.

When he sees the lightning flash across the sky he knows.

*It's not real.*

The illusion breaks and he hears a female scream from a distance as a chain inside of his mind breaks, something that had been waiting to be unleashed, something that had been keeping him down.

It's not Billy, it's not the same.

It's something else trying to keep him at bay, bolting him down in a last ditch effort to right the wrong it had made.

It had been trying to fix a mistake.

The sky changes back to normal, the illusion is broken but suddenly it's like a flicker, the sky turns dark and grey, the storm clouds roll in and he sees the lightning strike once more as it turns red after a few seconds and something snaps inside of his mind again.

Another chain.

He sees the Upside Down, he sees the Mind Flayer but it can't see him, can't feel him, can't find him.

But Steve sees it, hears it, feels it, it's nearby and his mind reaches out for it, chasing it down without thinking and his eyes roll into the back of his head as he feels himself collapse onto the floor.
"Dyl, you good?" Shel asks as he pounds on the glass of the containment unit to try and get his older brother's attention.

Shel was freaking out, he'd been doing as he was told, keeping his own flesh and blood locked away, watching and protecting him just like he'd been instructed but all of a sudden his eyes rolled into the back of his head and he seemed to be convulsing, had fallen to the floor.

This was new.

"Is it- is it takin' over, are we havin' a episode? Dyl, you gotta talk to me!" he yells out, using both hands to slam into the glass.

He's seconds away from opening the unit himself because damn the rules, damn all of it, that's his brother in there when Dylan finally come's back to himself.

Dylan jolts up, eyes wide in a panic as he starts to look around like he has no idea where he is and when he looks over at his own brother Shel feels himself start to panic.

Was this it?

Was Dylan finally gone just like they'd said he'd be?

There's no recognition in his eyes, like he has no idea who he is and Shel takes a big gulp.

Dylan rights himself and backs away slowly, looking around frantically as he slams into the wall and starts holding his hands to his head, pulling at his hair.

"What the fuck, what the fuck, what- who the fuck are you?!" he screams and Shel's heart breaks.

"Dylan, come on, it's me, I'm your brother" he says softly, like he's trying to handle a deer, just like he'd been taught as a child with the ones that didn't have no sense of self preservation, the ones that had gotten used to humans and would let you close enough to touch.

He gets a look on his face like he's suddenly gone insane as he looks over at the mirror on the wall.

They'd gotten him a nice enough room, one where he could do anything he wants, like a small apartment all to himself, he'd wanted Dylan to be as comfortable as possible, he'd demanded it.

It has a small kitchen area, bathroom, bedroom, the basics.

The only difference is it just happens to be surrounded in glass that you can't get through which is a small price to pay when your own brother has a demon inside of him.

"What the fuck, who the fuck is this?!" Dylan screams as he backs away and starts turning himself every which way, he sees Shel again and runs up to the glass and starts pounding on it, looking at him wildly as Shel takes a step back.

"Who are you, where are we, who has this thing contained right now?!" Dylan yells and Shel remembers what he'd been told.

*Don't say anything, don't talk to it, don't let it learn.*

He knows it's getting smarter, they all know it was getting smarter, maybe this was just a new tactic it was trying to use on him.
"I- you know I can't tell you that" he says, averting his gaze.

"This shit has Hawkin's lab written all over it, we're underground, are we under the lab right now, has it been under the fucking lab this whole fucking time?" he asks and Shel's brow furrows.

"Who- who are you?" he asks because he'd seen the demon, he's talked to the demon, the demon doesn't talk like this and it sure as hell ain't Dylan.

Suddenly Dylan grabs at his head and groans like he's fighting himself and after a few moments he rights himself, holds himself differently and this.

This is the demon, this is that thing, he knows it because he's seen the way it acts and talks, and walks, he's seen it more than anyone else.

The demon is in control now.

"Hello Steve, I was wondering when you'd find me" it says and Shel feels his palms start to sweat.

Who the fuck is Steve?

"How is Billy, I've missed him, I'm a bit tied up right now, I hope you liked the gift Sheldon left inside of the trunk of your car, I was going to do it myself but my dearest Will was starting to catch on, he's very smart" it says and that's not good.

It's saying things he doesn't understand and he knows they're in deep shit as he runs to the phone and dials the number he'd been given for emergencies.

The person on the other end answers on the third ring and he starts talking quickly.

"We got a problem, it's talkin' to sum people init's head, sayin' names like Will, Steve n' Billy and-" the line goes dead and Shel looks at the phone in disbelief.

He'd hung up on him.

The hell kind of rude shit was that?

"Death cannot stop me, you cannot stop me, you both tried before but I won't allow it this time, I want my children back and I'm going to rip you out of Billy, I will make you suffer for taking him from me Steve, I'm going to hurt you but then you can be one of them, I will allow it, you can be one of my children too Steve, I can forgive you, all I need is for you to come to me, I just need you to find me-"

Shel had heard enough, this thing was about to spout out nonsense and give away their location, that was rule one, you can't break rule one, he'd been told very firmly to follow the rules, to not be stupid.

He hits the button on the far wall and the gas fills inside as he sees the creature crumple to the ground and he feels bad because Dylan is the one that has to deal with the pain because the fall is hard, he'll get bruises from it.

When the gas finally dissipates from the chamber and he knows it won't be getting back up anytime soon he sits down in the chair and puts his hands in his face.

What the hell is he supposed to do now?
Billy's downstairs when he feels the piercing pain of Steve's migraine suddenly hit him as he leans forward and clutches at his head, he hears Kali start to scream from her room and he has no idea what the fuck is going on all of a sudden.

"Fuck" he hisses out as he goes to stand up.

_It's not real._

He hears Steve say in his mind and suddenly he feels nothing.

The bond is gone.

Billy falls to his knees and starts to hyperventilate, starts to panic, reaches for the bond and _it's still there, thank god, it's still there_ but he can't reach it, like it's far away, like suddenly Steve is far away and he can feel everyone crowd around him, everyone talking at once.

"Where's Steve?" he says weakly and they all go silent.

When he still hears nobody say anything he slams his fist on to the floor.

"WHERE THE FUCK IS STEVE?!" he growls out as he gets up and launches himself up the stairs into their room.

Steve is looking around frantically, stumbling over luggage like he has no idea how the fuck to walk, like he'd just righted himself after being on the floor or something.

When Steve looks at him he looks afraid, there's an emptiness in his eyes and Billy gets a bad feeling in his gut.

"Who are you?" Steve asks him and Billy grips the doorknob.

"What?" he asks quietly, not believing what he's just heard.

"I- where's Sheli?" he says and Billy is about ready to fucking shake him.

"This isn't funny" he hears himself say but he feels like he's having an out of body experience, like this can't be happening.

What the fuck is going on?
This one was a doozy, the rough draft for this had been finished yesterday but I had to go back through and keep adding details lol.

Hope you all like it <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Don't- don't come near me" Steve says and Billy is just standing there ready to grab him if he tries to bolt.

"Come on princess, knock it off" Billy says and he's probably five seconds from a mental fucking breakdown.

"The fuck didja' just call me?" he says and Billy knows in that moment, that's not Steve.

That's not his Steve, it doesn't even feel like him.

Steve feels far away, like he's off somewhere else and Billy has never dealt with having to sense him from miles away, it hasn't ever been a thing they've needed to do since learning to control the bond.

Also the strange southern twang, the mannerisms, it's just not him.

'Not Steve' keeps inching himself back more and more and it's stressing Billy the fuck out.

He can jump the balcony if he really wants to but it'd hurt like hell from this height.

That's not going to happen if Billy has anything to say about it because regardless of anything that's still Steve's body.

He sees Jonathan on the other end of the room slowly inching closer as well and knows if he can't get there in time then at least Jonathan will.

"You said a name, Shel, as in Sheldon?" Nancy suddenly asks and he has no idea what this chick is on about.

"My- my brother, yes" he says and somehow that's what gets him to stand still and stop moving which is a small relief.

"Does that mean you're Dylan?" She asks breathlessly like she can't believe what's happening right now.

"Yes, yes, I don't know this Steve you're talkin' bout"

Nancy takes a deep breath and let's it out but it's shaky as she whispers "Oh shit" under her breath.

Billy doesn't know what that means, none of that makes any sense to him, is he supposed to know these names?
Suddenly Nancy's in his face and he takes a step back as she cups his face with both hands and he
goes to pull away but his back hits the wall and he's about ready to push her the fuck off.

Who the fuck does she think she is trying to touch him like that?

"Billy you need to calm down, that's the guy that went missing" she says and Billy's brain still hasn't
captured up as he still continues to try and swat her away like a fly.

"Do you feel Steve right now?" She asks and he nods his head as she finally gives up and keeps her
hands at her sides which is good because he had been about ready to lay her flat on her ass.

"He's far away though" he tells her and she grimaces.

Kali chooses that moment to finally grace them with her presence as she pushes past everyone, blood
coming out of her nose looking like shit as 'Dylan' starts losing his shit.

"I know you, you're the one that-" he goes to say as he points at her with a shaky finger.

Kali snaps her fingers before he can continue as he passes out.

Billy goes to him immediately and almost makes Nancy topple over, not caring in the slightest as he
leans down next to Steve's unconscious body.

"Funshine, let's get him downstairs on the couch" Kali says as Billy picks Steve up bridal style and
his head lolls onto his shoulder and when Billy comes face to face with the huge grisly bear of a man
he glares at him.

"Fuck off" he tells him.

They stare each other down for a moment and the darker skinned man's face softens as he moves
aside for Billy to get by.

*Good man.*

Billy knew he liked him for a reason.

"Explain why you needed to have us under an illusion" Nancy says when they all get downstairs and
Billy deposits Steve gently onto the couch, tucking a piece of his hair behind his ear and his heart
physically fucking aches.

He's still far away, Steve still feels like he's not even here but Billy can see him, he's right here in
front of him, where did he go?

Whenever he tries to reach out, to expand the bond there's something stopping him and he absently
realizes it's one of Steve's walls, the ones they'd taught themselves to put up to give each other space.

*The fuck?*

Steve had put up a fucking wall to keep Billy from tracking him down, to stop Billy from finding
him.

*No fucking way.*

The anger he feels already increases exponentially because that's just a big huge fat absolutely not,
no.
Steve can't just do that, he gets to make all of these stupid rules in regards to the bond and then he goes and does some shit like this?

"It's nothing personal, I'm doing as instructed" Kali tells them and Billy gets pulled from his angry thoughts.

"Instructed by who?" Jonathan asks.

"We know it can't be Hawkin's Lab, you hate that place, you'd sooner kill everyone inside than work with them" Nancy says, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Actually Owen's tipped us off, said you might be coming here to search for it" Kali tells them and Billy whips his head over to look at her.

"I fucking knew it!" he yells out, stalking towards her.

Owen's must have had audio in the office when he'd left the room during their last session, that son of a bitch.

Jonathan suddenly gets in his face, stopping him.

"Seriously, you're going to do this right now, Byers?" Billy says, getting chest to chest with him.

"Come on, she's a kid, don't be like this right now Billy, control yourself" Jonathan says, not backing down.

"A kid that put us all under an illusion and incapacitated Steve" he hisses out as Jonathan raises his brow.

"Wait, Dylan, is- is he actually the new host body?" Nancy asks, a wild look in her eyes.

Kali glances away, averting her eyes.

Jonathan and Billy's eyes both widen as they realize what that implies.

If Dylan's body is the host and he's inside of Steve's body right now that means-

"Billy don't-" Jonathan goes to say as Billy barks out a loud "WHAT?!"

Billy pushes him aside but Jonathan grabs hold of his shirt, using it as leverage as he turns Billy around and punches him square in the face.

"Oh god-" Nancy says in horror as he hears cheers coming from some of the others which just eggs him on.

"You've been testing me for a long fucking time Byers, you know that?" Billy growls out at him, wiping his face and Jonathan looks just as pissed off as Billy spits out blood onto the floor.

This should be good.

He sees Axel and Funshine start to move towards them to break it up but Kali puts her hand up.

"Let them" she says and he's really starting to like this kid even if she is a total garbage piece of shit.

"No!" Nancy cries out as Dottie grabs hold of her and she gets a manic look in her eyes.
"I won't let it get too far" Kali reassures her which still doesn't seem to make Nancy all that happy.

Fuck Nancy, fuck Jonathan, fuck all of these people, Billy needs to hit something, he's too pissed off about too many things right now, he needs an outlet or else he's going to just tumble right off the deep end and that's not something he wants to do.

Honestly, getting the go ahead from somebody, anybody is good enough for Billy, he's been wanting to bash this guys face in for a long time and judging from the look on Jonathan's face they're both thinking the same damn thing.

Jonathan wastes no time as he grabs some silver looking thing off from the side table next to him, a statue, a candlestick?

Billy doesn't know as it gets swung at his face which would have seriously hurt if he hadn't taken a step back as it misses him by mere inches.

Except that's what Jonathan had been betting on as he uses the next moment to try and punch Billy but he's able to dodge that too, but just barely.

It's a damn near thing, Jon's much faster than he looks.

Billy takes the opportunity to return the punch from earlier and gets him pretty good.

Jon stumbles back and Billy is pleased to see him spitting out blood this time, completely unbothered.

Turns out Jonny's a bit of a dirty fighter too.

This is about to be some good shit.

"They'll kill each other!" Nancy screams out to Kali but she just continues to watch them and for someone as young as her she's got way too dark a look in her eyes.

This kid has clearly been through some shit, like she knows this is what Billy needs, that this is what they both need.

Only fucked up and broken people like them understand.

Nancy's a preppy little school girl that has only ever lived in Hawkin's, doesn't know what a real fight looks like.

They aren't pretty, they're nasty as shit and when you get someone else like Jonathan who doesn't hold back either it makes for a damn good time.

Billy starts laughing hysterically and looks back at Jonathan, "Fucking knew it, there's something off about you, you creepy little shit" he says as he goes to grab at Jon but he side steps back, circling around the couch to get distance between them.

He's corralling Billy somewhere, getting himself to some sort of advantage.

Most people try to do this when they get into a fight with Billy, it's something he's used to, even guys that should win the fight end up losing because he intimidates the shit out them, they psych themselves out.

It's these guys, the smaller ones like Jonathan that have actually managed to really fuck him up a few times.
All it takes is one time before you learn not to let someone lead in a fight and pull you into a trap.

Jonathan has to know he can't win in a straight up fist to fist fight against him so whatever this guy has going on in his head it ain't pretty.

It's probably enough to knock him out as he notices Jonathan slowly inching them towards the kitchen.

He wouldn't be shocked if it's to kill him or something either, finally get rid of Billy once and for all.

Billy knows he's been a thorn in Jonathan's side for a long while now, he's not stupid.

Ok, so maybe that's going a bit far but he knows Jonny boy has it in him, can see it in his eyes.

Billy doesn't feel like playing this game though so he pushes the couch over with his foot causing Jonathan to step back as Billy turns his body, using it as momentum to throw Jonathan onto the coffee table behind them.

The satisfaction Billy feels at seeing the table break in half, hearing the wood give out as it bends and snaps from the force of his body being hurled onto it is immense and he knows that's going to bruise all over.

He's been thrown onto a few tables himself, it fucking hurts but at least it ain't glass.

Those are the worst, you can go weeks without knowing you still got glass inside of you somewhere until one day it hits a nerve and hurts like a bitch.

Billy steps back over the couch and Jon recovers way quicker than any normal person would and Billy's impressed as shit until Jonathan grabs one of the table legs with a nail protruding out of it and gets him right in his fucking calf as he starts digging it in real good.

Nancy gasps.

She lunges forward only to have Dottie grab her by her waist as Nancy turns in time and clocks her right in the face and he hears multiple things at once.

The loud sounds of sympathy from the people in the room watching Billy who probably know how much it fucking hurts to have a nail lodged inside of your leg.

The hollers from the others who just saw Nancy lay a good one into Dottie's face.

Billy grunts in pain, that's not what he'd been expecting at all.

He takes the table leg out and it's seriously painful as he holds it in his hand above his head.

He considers laying it into Jonathan's skull for a split second but he knows that would probably upset Steve so he decides against it.

Instead he figures he'll return the favor and he's getting ready to lay it right into Jonathan's upper thigh, about to bring it back down to dig the nail in.
It feels like a literal punch to the gut.

The bond comes back to life.

He can feel Steve again, feels that tingling sensation underneath his skin as his nostrils flare and he inhales sharply through his nose.

*Steve-

It's a good enough distraction for Jonathan because he launches himself up and knocks Billy over as they topple backwards, falling back over the couch.

Billy pushes to get away from him and they end up on the floor as Jonathan somehow manages to straddle his waist and just starts laying into his face.

When Steve jolts awake it's to absolute chaos.

He takes a deep breath, immediately sitting up as he looks around frantically.

He flails so much he falls off of whatever couch he'd been placed on as Mick leans down to help him up and starts to tell him to take it easy.

He groans in pain and looks up to see-

Billy, with a table leg in his hand about to bring it down on Jonathan who is somehow laying on a broken coffee table.

The anger he feels is immense.

*I'm gone for five fucking minutes-

He gets up and Billy somehow just stops in place, had been about to swing down but he goes stock still instead like he's distracted or something.

Jonathan lunges at him and they topple over the couch and start wrestling around as Jonathan gets on top of him and starts beating the shit out of him.

Nancy starts trying to intervene, is about to grab hold of Jonathan and stop them.

Steve has already seen enough.

"WHAT THE FUCK!" he screams out, wobbling on his feet a bit as he steps over the broken coffee table to gracelessly crawl over the couch to get to them.

He grabs Jonathan by his shirt.

"Steve wait-

He grabs Jonathan by his shirt.

"Steve wait-" Jonathan goes to say as Steve lifts him up off of Billy as he gets a really mean looking right hook into the side of Jonathan's face as he falls backwards flat on his ass.

Steve hisses, shaking his hand out a bit before turning his attention towards Billy next and grabs onto him, lifting him up as they share a look.

Relief upon seeing Steve turns to a dawning of understanding.
Billy knows what's coming as he visibly braces himself.

Steve doesn't punch Billy nearly as hard as he had punched Jonathan but he knows he's gotten the message across loud and clear at the very least.

They've *talked* about this, multiple times, multiple fights, in multiple different ways.

Billy wants to turn around and pull some shit like this?

Fucking ridiculous.

Billy falls back, loses his footing and just lays there on the floor.

They're *both* writhing on the floor, groaning like a couple of idiots as Steve turns his attention to Kali.

"Why did you let this happen?!" he screams at her.

"Sometimes you need to let people fight it out, they both seemed to need an outlet" she says with a shrug.

"Bullshit, you're buying time, you wanted them to do this" Steve spits out and Billy starts to get up off the floor to right himself as Jonathan gets helped up by a frantic Nancy.

"I assure you I didn't-" she goes to say but Steve just barks out a laugh, interrupting her.

"How did you find out we were here for the Mind Flayer?" he asks her.

"Owen's, they said it was Owen's who tipped them off" Nancy supplies to him helpfully.

"Are you fucking- is it under the lab?" he asks, turning back to look at Kali. "I know it's a containment chamber somewhere underground, you've gotta know where it is, I got knocked out before that crazy demon fucker could tell me" he hisses out viciously.

Kali's face morphs into concern and worry as she shares a look with the rest of her group.

"It talked to you?" she asks him.

"Yeah it fucking talked to me, it has a lot to say too, talks like a proper gentleman and everything, you been giving it books, helping it learn?" Steve says darkly and there's a cold detachment in his tone, he's so beyond pissed right now he's starting to understand why Billy has such a hard time controlling himself.

"It had been starved, the only contact it has is with the younger brother-" she goes to say and Steve holds up his hand to stop her.

"The younger brother, the one that almost let it out of the unit because he saw his own brother in pain?" he tells her as she frowns.

"I don't make the rules, I just do as I'm told" she says like somehow *she* has a right to be upset all of a sudden.

"Oh my god, this is Hopper" Nancy says, gasping.

Steve whips his head around to look at her and they all stare at Nancy.
Oh fuck.

She's right.

It explains everything.

Hopper found the host, that's why he'd spooked all those months ago.

"The Mind Flayer put the bat and crowbar into the trunk, didn't it?" Billy asks, looking at Steve.

Steve's jaw clenches as he averts his eyes from Billy, "He made the younger brother do it because Will was starting to sense him" he says and Billy gives him a look he doesn't like.

That look he gets when he knows Steve is hiding something.

"Hopper catches wind of the incident, starts to look into it, that's how the plan with Richards got delayed" Nancy says, starting to fit the pieces together in her head out loud.

"The Mind Flayer gets the weapons into the trunk using the younger brother and soon after that, that's when Hopper finally catches up to them and puts it in- a containment chamber?" Nancy half says, half asks as she turns to look at Steve.

"Jesus Christ, you've gotta be kidding me" Steve says rubbing a hand over his face because that all sounds pretty likely.

"That's why Hopper seemed unsure that it was the Chicago group that had done it, he had seemed almost certain it hadn't been them" Billy hisses out like he's in pain.

"Chief, they didn't plant the weapons in Steve's car, it wasn't them" Billy says suddenly.

"Wait what?" Steve says.

Hopper's jaw clenches and he looks out the window of the room and then back again at Billy.

That motherfucking liar, that piece of shit had been lying to them this whole time.

"Which means Owen's is in on it too" Jonathan says.

"We've been giving him information this whole time" Billy says, glaring at Steve as he just continues to look away from him, not wanting to admit Billy had been right this whole god damn fucking time.

All of those fights he'd had with Billy, telling him to stop freaking out, that he's being too paranoid, that he's blowing it out of proportion, had held a shaking terrified Billy to tell him it would be fine.

He'd been wrong.

Now he feels like the biggest asshole on the planet.

"You walled me out" Billy suddenly says to him, tone on the cusp of something Steve isn't fond of.

Steve raises a brow, "What?"

"When you were fucking off somewhere outside of your body I couldn't reach you, you put up a
damn wall, I couldn't get to you!" Billy yells out, limping towards him.

Steve looks down, noticing the wound on his leg as a look of concern crosses over his face as he sees the blood dripping down onto the floor.

"Billy, your leg-" he goes to say as Billy just glares at him harder.

"Why were you keeping me out Steve?" he interrupts him to growl out and Steve meets him halfway, grabbing his arms, lowering him onto the couch that hadn't been tipped over to reach down and roll up his pant leg.

"Jesus- Billy what the hell!" Steve says, ignoring him as he looks up to glare at Jonathan. It looks like he'd gotten his leg gouged.

Steve goes to get up, launch himself at Jonathan to beat the shit out of the guy himself but Billy grabs him by his arm, keeping him in place.

"Don't ignore me, answer my question, why did you keep me out?" Billy says angrily.

Steve turns to look at him, shaking his head.

"Billy- alright, you wanna do this right now, we'll do this right now" Steve says.

"Listen to me ok?" He goes on to say as he cups Billy's face with both hands.

Billy looks at him suspiciously and grips a hand onto his wrist and frowns.

"You didn't fuck up my memories, you aren't the one that fucked with my mind" he tells him pointedly and Billy just blinks at him.

"Well ok, technically it was you but- do you remember how it felt, the moment we first became bonded?" Steve asks him, grabbing hold of one of his hands to bring it to his own chest, resting it over his heart.

Billy glances over nervously, probably because they have an audience but Steve doesn't care, he needs Billy to know, needs him to understand.

Doesn't want him to keep blaming himself for this because he knows how much it kills Billy inside to feel like he keeps fucking up.

Steve has felt his emotions, knows the guilt he carries around inside of him about so many things, has felt how much it eats him up inside like a cancer.

He's had to wake up at night to a sobbing Billy and just hold him and tell him it's alright, that he doesn't blame him, that he'll never blame him because Billy gets nightmares about all of the things he feels like he's done wrong and it breaks Steve's fucking heart every single time.

All he ever does is sit there and tell Steve that he should, he should be blaming him.

Steve can't, he won't, he'll always eventually forgive Billy no matter what.

He's his bonded, how can he ever not forgive him for stupid mistakes of the past, especially when Billy has been trying so hard to make things right.

Sure it's not perfect but it's Billy and that's all Steve has ever needed from him, is for him to try.
In this particular instance though, it wasn't Billy's fault.

"Of course I remember, what kind of a question is that?" Billy asks, clearly not understanding, growing more visibly nervous.

It's an explosion of feeling, of thoughts, memories, like he's being pulled in, welcomed, wrapped in warmth. A stark contrast to the cold that had previously overtaken him.

It feels like he's come home.

Like he's whole.

Every piece of him that had been tainted by the creature being completely healed, like he's one big gaping wound being closed shut.

"Why are you asking me?" Billy says when Steve just continues to look at him.

"I pulled us into the bond after that moment, I needed to find you, needed to see you, didn't even really know what I was doing" Steve says.

He wants to cry. It's so overwhelming and he feels himself crying, his soul, his essence, but then he's back inside of the darkness again. This time Steve is standing across from him and they stare at each other.

"Billy?" Steve says in disbelief, like he has no idea what's going on.

Billy gapes. Can't say anything, can't speak, doesn't even know what to say.

"I remember, what does that have to do with anything though?" Billy asks him.

"I didn't understand the bond at the time, I wasn't aware of how it worked, it used my inexperience against me, against us" Steve tells him, grip tightening on his hand.

The creature is still connected to him. It's still there, a sliver of it in the back of his mind, but it's holding itself at bay until it sees the girl and screams.

Billy doubles over in pain and he feels the dark tendrils start to surround them again. It starts to surround and consume him again and he hears himself and Steve scream.

It had tricked them, had wanted them all to find each other so it could make its move.

It wanted to have them all in one place.
"I fought it, I tried to, I wasn't even aware that I could fight back and you were in so much pain, so much fucking pain" Steve says, pulling him closer, resting their foreheads together as they lock eyes.

He feels Steve crouch down next to him, fighting through the feeling of being torn apart from the inside out. He can hear him calling out his name, but he shuts it out and shakes his head.

"You just wanted me safe, it used that against you. You remember when you talked about being a conduit?" Steve asks him this time and Billy nods his head, of course he remembers.

"That's what it did, it used your desire to protect me as a conduit, that thing is what threw up those walls, it used you to do it" he says, using one of his hands to rub at Billy's arm gently.

"It was trying to buy itself time because Eleven stopped it, it knew it had lost and failed and fucked up when it couldn't attach itself to the bond" he goes on to say and Billy can see Steve's eyes start to water.

His own are too, just from the memory of it, from the feelings of it, it's so raw, it's not something he usually lets himself think about too hard.

All three of them, him, Steve, the creature, they feel the pain and it feels like shards of glass tearing their way into them and they all collectively scream.

He sees Steve drop to the ground and fall completely unconscious.

"I understand now, I'm not inexperienced anymore, I can push it out of you, I can heal you Billy, I won't let it take you away from me" Steve says and the way he says it makes Billy inhale sharply.

It's overwhelming the fierce protectiveness he sees in Steve's eyes.

The last person he'd ever seen look at him like that, like they'd never let anything happen to him was his mother.

He wants to pull away, goes to pull away because it's too much, there are too many people around, like they're both being put on display but Steve doesn't let up, keeps him in place.

"Breaking Kali's illusion set off some sort of reaction, it unlocked whatever else that thing had tried to keep locked away inside of me, inside of us" he says and Billy doesn't know what to say to that, doesn't fully understand what that means.

"What does that mean?" Billy asks him, voicing his thoughts.

"I don't know yet" he says as a smirk falls over his face soon after while he looks at him.

We'll figure it out.

Are the unspoken words he sees in Steve's eyes.
Billy can't help it, he smiles back.

Their tender moment gets broken when Steve pulls away and starts to frown.

"Seriously though, your leg is all fucked up" he says and Nancy snorts from across the room and suddenly they fully realize that they'd just been feeling each other up while having a really important emotional bonding moment in front of all of these freaks and Steve can tell Billy is embarrassed.

"We couldn't have talked about this somewhere else?" he grumbles out, looking away from everyone.

"Could have but you were being an ass. Why the fuck were you and Jonathan fighting?" he asks and his tone had been light starting that sentence off before becoming impossibly serious near the end.

He's no letting that shit get swept under the rug, it will be addressed.

"He started losing his shit when we all realized you somehow swapped places with that Dylan guy. Pretty sure we didn't know if we'd be getting you back" Jonathan answers for Nancy who had been about to speak.

Steve frowns and turns to glare at Billy who can't seem to help himself as he rolls his eyes.

"Dylan was in my body instead?" Steve asks, catching on to what Jonathan had just said, he didn't know, hadn't even considered that Dylan would get displaced into his body.

"Yep, pretty sure he was going to hop over the balcony at one point too" Axel says with a snort.

"Pretty sure your boy was ready to launch himself over it too if that had happened, what a prince" Mick says teasingly.

Steve snorts at the use of the term and the irony behind it as Billy still looks just as uncomfortable.

"Perhaps we should be seeing to their wounds, if you'll all stop trying to leave that is" Kali says, interrupting all of them.

"Fine, we'll stick around but we need to regroup ourselves, find out what we want to do next" Nancy tells her and Steve wonders if she's telling the truth or not.

Regardless Kali nods, they're all at a stalemate anyway.

"Not sure how to bandage up being thrown on to a coffee table" Jonathan says suddenly with a hiss of pain but there doesn't seem to be any real heat behind the statement.

"Yeah well, you stuck a fucking nail in my leg, so fuck you too" Billy says, flipping him off but there's an amused smile on his face.

"That was after you'd already thrown me onto the table, Hargrove" Jonathan replies with a roll of his eyes.

"Preemptive strike, knew you'd pull some fucked up shit on me" Billy tells him, snorting as he goes to get up off of the couch.

Jonathan gets up too as they make their way over to each other, inches apart as they stare each other down and Steve has no idea what the fuck is even happening right now.
"We good for now?" Jonathan asks him and Billy just stares at him for a moment more before shrugging and waving his hand flippantly.

"Yeah, we're good for now" Billy tells him and Steve can't help but pinch the bridge of his nose. What the fuck is wrong with the two of them, they're seriously fucking insane and he's never ever in his life going to understand the way their minds work.

When Steve gets Billy upstairs to their room and helps him clean out and bandage up the gouge on his leg Billy clears his throat.

"Yes?" Steve says, not looking at him because Billy is a big boy who can use big boy words if he wants Steve to pay full attention to him.

Also he absently wonders if they should get Billy a tetanus shot or not but he thinks he won't be able to get Billy near a hospital anyway.

"That speech was nice and all but you still walled me out" Billy says petulantly.

"To protect you, I can't let that thing near you, it'll try to corrupt you Billy, that was the whole point of that speech or did you miss that part?" Steve tells him as he glares up at him.

"I didn't miss shit but not being able to know where you are or how to get to you is fucked up" Billy tells him as Steve gets up to sit on the edge of the bed next to him.

"I know, but I had to" he tells him, willing him to understand.

"Yeah, I know, doesn't mean I fucking like it" Billy says with a sigh as Steve grips his chin gently, turns it so Billy is looking at him as he plants a soft kiss on his lips that deepens as Billy makes a broken noise in the back of his throat.

"Nothing can happen to you Steve, nothing, I'll lose my fucking mind without you" Billy says to him as he pulls away, keeping a hand on the back of Steve's neck as he grips onto his shirt with the other as their breaths mingle.

"Hey come on, nothing is going to happen to me, it can't get to me" Steve says kissing him again as Billy cups his face with both hands, pulls him in deeper as Steve's eyes roll into the back of his head from the desperation of it, of Billy's feelings, the intensity of it.

"Need you" Billy starts to say breathlessly between kisses, "God, you don't understand, I need you safe" he continues to say, taking a moment to look at him before focusing his attention on Steve's throat, pressing gentle kisses to it and Steve lets out little breathless moans, holding onto his wrist, putting his hand into Billy's hair as he tugs gently.

"I'd burn this whole fucking world down if it meant protecting you" Billy says into his ear and Steve knows he's telling the truth.

The things Billy has done to keep him safe are-

He tries not to think about it, it boggles his mind how far Billy will go, how far Billy has gone for him, even before the bond he'd had this protective nature to him.

Steve remembers clearly that first moment Billy had used his body as a shield to protect Steve from the impending doom of the demo-dogs, he'll never understand it.
Maybe Billy feels the same, maybe he'll never know why Steve stayed there with him, why he did it.

Steve doesn't even know why he did it, it was just instinctive, like he had no choice.

Like somehow he's always known somewhere in the back of his mind there had always been *something* between them.

He hopes that's true for Billy as well, doesn't know if it is, he still wonders if the bond has made him want this, if Billy truly did hate him from the beginning.

It has caused him the most guilt, to think that Billy has never truly wanted him, has only ever wanted him out of necessity.

It fucking hurts to think that it might be a possibility as he lets out a shaky breath.

He doesn't get to think about it much longer as Billy pulls him closer, pushes him down onto the bed, grinds himself against his leg, causing friction as they both groan.

"I'm the one that needs to be worried, that thing wants me dead, it considers you its child or some shit" Steve says snorting, not thinking about what he's just said, trying not to give in to Billy suddenly wanting to take him apart, isn't sure if he can handle that right now with the way he's acting.

Billy pulls away and frowns, concern clear on his face.

"The fuck does that mean?" He says angrily, mood effectively killed and Steve is starting to regret having said anything.

"Uhhh, it hasn't gotten the whole lying thing down, tried to say some dumb shit about how it will forgive me right after threatening to rip you out of me" Steve tells him with a roll of his eyes.

"Forgive you?" Billy asks with a grimace.

"Yep, said something about how death can't stop him, I can't stop him, blah, blah, blah villain stuff" Steve says as he waves his hand in a nonchalant manner.

"Eleven, it means Eleven" Billy tells him.

"Wait what?" Steve asks suddenly confused.

"Death, that's the name it uses for Eleven, it's terrified of her, caught it in some of the memories before my purging" Billy says.

"Jesus, that's intense" Steve says, laughing nervously.

"Do you think she's known about this?" Billy asks clearly referring to the whole Hopper situation.

"Absolutely not, everything he does is to protect her, he probably thinks he's doing the right thing" Steve says with a sigh.

They sit there in silence for a while, keeping close, just feeling the bond between them, using it as a grounding comfort.

"So, what now?" Steve asks.

"We find Hopper or we get him to come to us, he needs to answer for this shit"
Steve nods, seeing no reason to disagree.

Chapter End Notes

I don't even really know what to say?

A lot happened in this chapter lol.

I will say finally getting to write a Jonathan and Billy fight was probably the most enjoyable thing to write.

Also Steve is an idiot, guy tells you he wants to burn the whole world down to keep you safe and you're like "But do you love me tho"

*facepalms*
Chapter Notes

Wow alright well...here you go guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Byer's House

Hopper & Joyce

Hopper POV

"Will is dreaming about it, now!" Joyce all but yells out at him as she slams a bunch of slightly crumpled drawings onto the table.

He had come over earlier than usual because she said they needed to talk.

This wasn't what he thought she had meant by that.

Hopper pinches the bridge of his nose as he looks down at them and eventually after taking a deep breath he sifts through them one by one.

It's the containment chamber that he and Owen's have the Mind Flayer held in and the kid had even drawn Sheldon in one of them sitting on a chair.

"Does it talk to Will in these dreams?" Hopper asks Joyce after he's done looking through each one individually.

"No, it says nothing. Will says it's like having a map uploaded into his brain"

"Has it talked to him in these dreams though?" He asks again just to make sure.

"I told you no, he says it's like walking to a destination, he knows every last detail down to the street, says he could get to it all the way from here at this point" Joyce tells him as she paces the room nervously.

"It's probably trying to get itself free" Hopper says with a shrug.

It's clearly desperate but it certainly isn't smart enough to realize Will would never wanna go near it. Unless it's trying to use a compulsion on him.

Owen's had mentioned that a new development of the bond between Steve and Billy is that Billy can now compel Steve to do things.

It's apparently the main reason they had finally caved and asked for help with the bond.

Hopper doesn't blame them, it's a frightening prospect he's not sure how he'd feel either if he knew someone could force him to do things against his will.
Regardless Owen's theory stands that they can do things the Mind Flayer is capable of doing so it's not far fetched to assume compulsion is something it could be using on Will while in Dylan's body.

He'll need to ask Will if he feels the need to find it.

Unfortunately there's no way for any of them to know anything for certain until it actually happens.

"I've respected the fact that you needed to do this because of Owen's, I get that your hands are tied on a lot of things but I don't like this" Joyce says and here it is.

He was wondering when she'd start going down this route because he had been starting to go down this route himself.

Every chance he'd gotten he'd been trying to push Owen's into just burning it, keep it on that side of the gate so they won't have to worry about it anymore but Owen's insists that if the gate somehow opens again they need to be prepared to understand how it works and what it's capable of.

Eleven can't possibly be the only person on the planet capable of opening the gate, it's just unlikely.

Hopper doesn't necessarily disagree but he certainly has other things to worry about, he really hadn't needed this Mind Flayer business to be added on to all of it.

"I would burn that thing in a heartbeat but I can't, this was the agreement. It stays alive for as long as Owen's wants it alive" Hopper says with a deep sigh.

"At the expense of that poor man it's inhabiting?" She yells out hysterically.

"Dylan wanted this, he agreed to full cooperation" he says and he knows how influential Owen's can be, it probably hadn't been hard to convince the brothers.

"So what do we do then Hopper? My child is seeing that thing, you need to fix this otherwise I'm going to kill it myself" she tells him as she slams her hands down onto the table as they lock eyes.

He knows full well she's not fucking around, he's learned how far she's willing to go to protect her children.

He doesn't take the threat lightly.

"We take Will to Owen's and go from there, maybe he'll deem it all too risky because of Will and we can finally wash our hands of it" he says, but he's definitely not holding his breath.

Joyce just continues to stare at him before finally sighing.

"I've got a good thing going with my son, he trusts me and I trust him, I told him the truth because he came to me, he didn't hide this, he asked for my help and I told him" she says, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Fantastic" Hopper says rubbing his hands over his face.

"I'm sorry Hopper but I won't allow the bond I've built with my son to be broken for your sake" she tells him and of course he knows that, how could she think he wouldn't understand that?

Him of all people, he'd never ask for Joyce to choose between him or her children, he knows she will always choose them, he would do the same in her shoes.

He'd always done the same in regards to Sara.
Now, he deals with the living, he has to protect El.

He almost wants to say something but he knows that won't be helpful so instead he changes the subject.

"In other news Nancy Drew and her Hardy Boys are at the cabin to look into Dylan and Sheldon's disappearance" he tells her as he leans back in his chair to take his hat off and place it on the table.

"I- wait really?" she asks incredulously.

"Yep, I know this is a Nancy idea too, she's been looking into the report and you know how her and Jonathan get, it's no surprise they roped Steve and Billy into it too" he says with a snort.

"How do you know for sure though?" she asks like she somehow doesn't believe him still which is strange.

That probably means Jonathan must have given her some long drawn out fake story.

"When I saw Owen's the other day he'd been in the middle of a session with Steve and Billy, we heard them talking in the room to each other, it's pretty clear what their intentions were" he says with a shrug.

"Heard as in you tapped into the audio" she says with a frown.

"Of course, what has you so upset about that?" he asks her.

It hasn't ever bothered her before, at least not enough to speak out on it.

"I can't imagine how much courage it must have taken for those two boys to finally ask for help" she says, glaring at him like an overprotective mother protecting her cubs and it's endearing to see when it's not directed at him.

Well she's not wrong, it's pretty clear Steve had to essentially drag Billy to those sessions kicking and screaming and sure Hopper feels guilty, that goes without saying but that's just par for the course.

He's guilty about a lot of things, he can handle adding another thing to that ever growing list.

All of those clear worries Billy had whispered to Steve during that one session were true but Hopper knows at the end of the day it's a necessary evil.

If Hopper doesn't keep an eye on all of these kids they start running around doing stupid shit.

Just like right now.

"Regardless I have Kali intercepting them, keeping them from leaving the house, I need you to find a way to get Jonathan to come back here" he tells her as she sighs, rubbing a hand over her face.

"I don't like any of this Hopper, any of it at all" Joyce says and they have yet another staring contest until the phone on the wall suddenly starts ringing.

When Joyce goes to walk past him to answer it Hopper stops her by grabbing her wrist, rubbing his thumb over her pulse gently.

"Wait, it might be for me, I told a few people to contact me here in the event of emergencies" he tells her as he gets up to go get it himself.
He'd been spending more of his time here than anywhere else, he doesn't remember the last time he'd gone back to his own house and if he wasn't here or at work he was with El.

When he finally goes to answer it he doesn't even get a chance to get a word in as he hears Sheldon's frantic breathing on the other end of the line.

"We got a problem, it's talkin' to sum people init's head, sayin' names like Will, Steve n' Billy and-" Sheldon says and Hopper immediately hangs up the phone as he locks eyes with Joyce.

He'd just said all of their names over the damn phone.

A flagged voice, Sheldon's flagged voice, a voice the lab is listening for had given three flagged names over the wire tapped phone.

Hopper has told him a million fucking times before how to talk over the phone and he had just gone and single handedly fucked everything up.

Fucking fuck.

"Grab your things, we gotta go" he tells her.

---

**Hawkin's Middle School**

**Will, Mike, Dustin, Lucas, Max**

**Will POV**

"What do you think is going to happen now that you've told your mom?" Mike asks Will loudly over the ringing of the bell as they all start walking out of school together with the others.

"She said she'd talk to Hopper so I don't really know" he tells them.

He's assuming it'll be back to the lab which he's not really looking forward to, he hasn't had to go back in months, he would prefer to keep it that way.

He also hasn't told any of them about the fact that the Mind Flayer is being contained because of Hopper, not even Mike.

His mom had asked him not to say anything.

"It's such an odd place to contain the Mind Flayer, I wonder who did it and why?" Dustin questions out loud as they open the doors to go outside.

Will says nothing.

He sees his mom looking more frantic than usual by her car watching him like a hawk.

"What's up with your mom?" Mike whispers to him, leaning in so Will can hear him.

"I dunno, must mean nothing good though" Will says with a deep sigh as he pulls at the strap of his backpack.

"Well, keep in touch, okay?" Mike tells him as he nods in response while waving goodbye to everyone else.
"Don't forget, D&D tonight!" Lucas calls out to say to him as he walks away with Max who gets on her skateboard, making Lucas have to catch up with her.

"I won't!" He yells back to him, laughing at how Lucas trips and almost falls flat on his face while he hears Dustin's loud cackling as he turns to look back at his mom.

When he reaches her she leans down and looks into his eyes, searching for something and he already knows something isn't right.

"Has anything happened today?" She asks as she rubs his shoulders.

"Uhm, no" he says, a look of confusion on his face.

"Nothing at all, that thing hasn't tried anything on you?" She clarifies.

"No, nothing at all, why?" He asks, suddenly uncertain.

"Ok that's good, we've gotta go stay with Eleven for a little bit, something happened and we aren't sure what that is yet but the Lab will be looking for you" she says ushering him quickly into the car.

He doesn't fight her on it.

"I thought we didn't mind helping them?" He asks, even more confused now than he had been prior.

"Those men that took Billy still have the lab infiltrated, we don't know who we can trust from that place" she tells him.

Oh.

That makes sense.

"Are Steve and Billy going to be okay?" He asks, knowing they're just as at risk as he is.

"Hopper is on his way to the cabin, he already saw Hawkin's vans headed that way" she says, worry lacing her voice.

"Oh" is all he says, is all he can say, doesn't really know what else can really be said in the face of hearing something like that, doesn't know what that implies.

He knows his mom is worried, worried about everyone, especially Jonathan and suddenly he finds himself worried too as he looks out the window with a knot of anxiety in his gut, hoping it's all going to turn out okay, wanting to believe it's all just a false alarm.

____________________________

**Kali's Cabin**

**Billy POV**

"I can't get a hold of Hopper" Mick tells Nancy as Billy rolls his eyes, spreading himself out on the couch like he owns the place.

*That just figures.*

"He gives you emergency contact numbers and suddenly he can't be reached at any of them?" Billy asks rhetorically because that's awfully fucking convenient for him.
"Maybe he's the one that was on the phone with Sheldon" Steve says as he walks back into the room coming from the kitchen to hand Billy a glass of water as he takes it graciously while Steve comes to sit down next to him on the couch while Billy makes room for him.

"What do you mean?" Mick asks, folding her arms over her chest as she ignores the glare coming from Nancy who had been the one to ask her to call Hopper in the first place.

"Sheldon called someone before he gassed the chamber, if it's Hopper he'd probably be on his way to the containment unit, right?" Steve asks looking at everyone to see if they agree with him.

"Depends on what was said I'd think" Kali says.

"He spouted something about how it's talking to someone in its head, mentioned my name, Billy, and Will's" Steve says shrugging as he goes to put his glass down in front of him before remembering there isn't a coffee table anymore.

He reaches past Billy, essentially climbing over him to set it on the side table as Billy shoots him a heated look, can't help himself from doing so.

Steve just rolls his eyes but uses Billy's upper leg as leverage to sit himself back down, gripping tight, rubbing his thumb gently on his inner thigh before settling back onto the couch, with a smug look on his face and Billy fights a smirk.

He absently wonders if he'll ever get sick of this, sick of Steve, sick of wanting to touch him, of wanting Steve to touch him, to be near him.

He won't, he'll never get tired of what they have, of what's growing stronger and stronger between them every day.

He doesn't mean the bond either, they've worked hard to get where they're at right now and it's so fucking imperfect but it's everything he never knew he wanted, it's fragile and terrifying yet all kinds of exhilarating.

Sure they have their hard days, some days he doesn't even want to see Steve, wants to fucking rip his own hair out and shake the guy.

They yell, scream, and fight but Steve will always be a part of him, part of his life, it's strange the feeling he gets like it's simply known in his mind, Steve is an eternal constant, there's no other choice, no other option.

The feeling is grounding.

Which is a nice change of pace considering the chaotic life that he leads in which nothing feels grounding.

He wonders if he's being sentimental right now because of the body swap or not, it had definitely given him more than a shock.

Billy isn't sure what he'd been thinking, he had just felt panicked more than anything.

The moment Steve had asked him who he was will be burned in his mind forever and he'll probably have fucked up nightmares from it.

He's just relieved, things could have gone so much worse.
When Steve had come back and punched him he hadn't even cared, would let him do it again if he had to, as many times as he wanted because he'd felt alive again.

Ever since being able to feel that burn under his skin he hadn't noticed how much it meant to have it there until it had been gone.

It's terrifying how much he relies on Steve and he knows he needs to tone it down, pull away, but it's difficult when you're bonded to the person, it's an addiction.

Billy feels like a fucking tweak needing to get his fix and it's a relatively pathetic feeling that's difficult to get a handle on.

"Eh, sounds likely, he could also be coming here for all we know" Axel says as he taps his foot on the floor, pulling Billy from his thoughts.

"If he's coming here there's no reason to leave" Jonathan says and Nancy nods, agreeing with him.

"Fact of the matter is we don't know where he is, what's the next plan of action?" Billy interjects to say, trying to get everyone back on track.

"We should wait, Hopper will want to call, get updates, we wait for the call" Nancy says which is probably the most logical course of action.

**Joyce & Will**

**Will POV**

They're halfway to the shack when Will notices his mom has changed direction and they were now heading away from it.

It takes a moment for him to realize it's because they're being followed.

"Mom-"

"I know sweetie, don't worry, we're going to the grocery store, we'll see if we can lose them there, get somewhere public" she tells him as he grips at his pant legs nervously.

"There's a gun in the glove compartment, take it out" Joyce says to him.

He looks at her, unsure as she just waits for him to obey as he eventually tentatively reaches to open it, the click sounding more ominous than it should be due to the circumstances.

There it is, a small pistol that could fit inside of a small purse, smaller than Hopper's gun.

Will hasn't ever seen one this small and that fact alone makes him feel even more anxious than he'd already been.

"Hopper got that for me. Hold it, the safety is on so don't worry, I want you to get a feel for it" she tells him.

The difference between looking and holding it is more substantial than he expects, it's heavier than it looks and the weight of what it can do isn't lost on him.

If anything that feeling is more enhanced as he feels the cool metal of it on the skin of his palms.
Will realizes in that moment he hates guns.

Maybe it's because he'd felt it through the Mind Flayer, had felt what it was like to be shot at by the 'soldiers' but in a different sense.

He's not sure but he just knows he doesn't like them.

"If anything happens I want you to use it, ok?" She says and Will nods just to appease her, to help make her feel a little bit better.

Will doesn't know if he can.

After his mom explains how it works and how to remove the safety he puts it back inside of the compartment.

They catch sight of the men that follow them inside of the grocery store, two of them, both tall and lanky.

One has a tattoo on his wrist of something Will can't entirely see with jet black hair while the other is clearly older and balding.

His mom goes to the freezer section and grabs out some Eggo's which Will can't help but snort at as she looks down at him and smiles.

When they checkout and get back inside of the car it won't start and he sees his mom start to panic.

*Oh no, they did something to the car.*

A few moments later the tall dark haired man knocks on the window while the other one stands on the side he's on.

Jonathan had warned him of this, that this is one of the tactics they use but he'd forgotten, he hadn't thought.

*Stupid, stupid, stupid!*

He thinks to himself as his mom gets the gun out of the glove compartment and rolls down the window, flipping the safety to point it right at him, holding it in both hands.

"Whoa, Joyce there's people everywhere, you're going to kill me in cold blood?" he says laughing like he's some sort of maniac.

"If I have to" she says simply and Will can see her shaking but he knows she'll probably pull the trigger.

"What are you doing to that poor woman?!" they hear a shrill female voice suddenly say as they all turn their heads toward it.

Will hasn't ever seen her before but he immediately feels relieved to see someone coming to their aid.

"Sorry we were trying to help her with her car, it stalled and we spooked her, I'm so sorry ma'am" he says, holding his hands up and shooting his mom and fake apologetic look.

"Clearly she don't want your help, screw off!" the woman yells as both men share a look before reluctantly leaving.
His mom gets out of the car and the two women start talking, he watches as the car the men were in drives off and wonders why he still has a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach.

The nice woman's name is Betty Dawson, she just recently moved to Hawkin's with her husband and she's a stay at home mother to two young boys and they were now in her car on their way to this woman's house to pick up her husband who she claims can probably help fix the car up.

He can tell his mom is grateful as he sighs deeply while the women chatter away, he stares out the window trying to calm his nerves but he still feels on alert, the hairs on his arms are raised, he feels hyper aware and he just wants it to go away.

Will hates this feeling, just wants to stop being so afraid all of the time, it feels so pathetic.

He remembers when Bob had told him to face his fears, even though he'd been taken over by the Mind Flayer it had still felt good to face it, it felt even better knowing that he'd survived the whole ordeal.

Will misses Bob, his mom does too, sometimes she cries and when they think he isn't watching, think he's asleep he sees the way Hopper holds her and tells her it's going to be alright and he knows Hopper's just saying that.

Because it's not, it's not alright.

Nothing is alright.

He hears a noise beside him, taking him out of his thoughts, a voice from far away that he thinks he's been hearing for the past twenty minutes or so, a voice and tapping, like someone is knocking on glass.

Glass?

The window?

He furrows his brow and when he turns his head he's submerged into darkness.

"You're in danger Will"

Will finds himself inside of the familiar pitch black overwhelming domain it controls except there's a glass wall in front of him, separating them from one another.

Just like the chamber it's being held inside of and it's inside of a human body that's staring down at him from the other side of the glass.

Dylan's body.

This is the man his mother had told him about, the new host, he'd seen him in the last dream he'd had from this morning.

He'd walked down the stairs into the underground room just like he always does in his dreams and when he'd seen the glass this time it was on the other side.
When they had locked eyes he'd woken up in a cold sweat.

Was the connection stronger now because of this?

It would make sense, each time he dreamed he would get closer and closer to the glass, see more than he had before.

Has it been trying to restrengthen that frayed tendril between them from when it had inhabited his body?

Dylan leans down so they're face to face, placing his hand on the glass with a look of what Will can only call concern which is strange considering the nature of the demon that inhabits the poor man's body.

"She's one of them Will, it's a trap" it says to him and his eyes widen.

"How- how do you know?" he asks, wringing his hands together, averting his gaze.

He knows he shouldn't talk to it but-

"You felt it, you should listen to your gut" it tells him.

"That doesn't- that doesn't mean anything, she's trying to help us" he says, frowning.

"The middle compartment has a sedation gun inside of it"

It's tricking him, this is a trap, this isn't real.

"Your mother is in danger, I don't want to see you hurt Will, I'm trying to protect you"

"You're lying!" he yells out to it as he steps away from the glass and it goes back into a standing position as they stare each other down.

"You are my child Will, I would never hurt you, I never once hurt you, it was always them, those soldiers were the ones who hurt us, burned us, tortured us" it says, looking at him pointedly.

"Will, you're losing time, don't let your mother die because of your own stupidity"

He feels himself falls to the ground, clasping his hands over his ears as he yells and screams for it to go away, just wants this to end, doesn't want this to be happening anymore, just wants all of it to go away.

Go away, go away, go away!

When he opens his eyes he's in the car again and his mother is turned in her seat looking back at him with a look of concern on her face.

"Will, you're pale and sweating, are you alright?" she asks and he looks up at her, eyes wild as he looks at the middle compartment the Mind Flayer had been talking about.

Joyce looks down at it too and frowns as she goes to open it herself.

She inhales sharply, pulling out the sedation gun as the woman turns to look at her.

"Shit." Betty says, slamming on the brakes as his mom gets a dark look in her eyes, anger at having
been tricked.

Will whimpers and curls into himself.

It had been right, it hadn't been lying to him, she was trying to take them too.

His mom points it at Betty, no hesitation as she shoots it right into her neck while she takes her other hand to shift the car into park.

Betty goes to try and get out of the car but his mom won't let her, stops her, grabs her as they struggle for a few moments before Betty finally slumps over, falling unconscious.

His mom deposits Betty onto the side of the road and luckily nobody sees them.

They don't look back as they continue on their way to Eleven, original plan still in mind.

"Will, how did you know that gun was in there?" his mom finally asks him when they're driving after a while, both calmed down a bit, her grip still tight on the steering wheel though.

He gulps, taking a moment to answer, not knowing how to answer because he doesn't want to lie, doesn't see the point.

"It told me" he says, knowing she'll understand what he means.

She visibly starts to panic as she looks over at him, then back at the road.

"Is it- does it-" she goes to say.

"I'm still in control, it can just talk to me is all, it warned me" he tells her, keeping it simple.

"Oh- you'll tell me if this happens again right, if it starts talking to you?" she asks.

Will nods.

They sit in worried silence the rest of the way there and Will realizes they left the Eggo's in the other car, they had left most everything in the other car.

When Will looks into the side mirror he doesn't see the road behind them anymore, he sees the containment chamber in the distance, glass separating them as it looks right at him from a distance.

He blinks once and it's suddenly gone again.

---

**Kali's Cabin**

**Steve POV**

A few hours later their questions get answered as they hear a loud screeching of tires from outside. Steve is close to the window which gives him a good vantage point of the front of the house as he peeks out of it and sees Hopper's car.

"Oh, he's here" he says as everyone stops what they're doing and he feels Billy come up behind him.

"He was coming in pretty hot" Billy says and Steve turns to see him with a frown on his face that he
can only describe as suspicious concern.

When Hopper gets through the front door he looks frantic, sweating, in a panic and Steve has a bad feeling all of a sudden, a knot forming in his gut.

"Get your guns, we're surrounded" Hopper tells them as Kali's group immediately goes into action, no questions asked.

"Wait, what?" Jonathan says, voice raised a bit more than usual and Steve can hear the shake in his voice.

Nancy sits there with her mouth agape, surprise also evident on her face as she goes to speak only to decide against it to look over at Jonathan.

Billy's face gets dark as he goes to stalk towards Hopper and Steve grabs Billy by his arm to stop him as he whips around to raise a questioning brow at him.

"Now is not the time" he whispers as Hopper closes the front door, locking it.

Hopper's hands are shaking.

Shit.

It's amazing to Steve how things can seem so normal in one moment and then in the next instant your entire life can change, all it takes is a few seconds.

Suddenly you're just thrown into absolute chaos and there's nothing you can do about it.

You've gotta just sink or swim, wade your way through the waters and find your way back to shore.

All it takes is one single moment, the time it takes to breathe in and let it free.

Time slows down for him as he watches it all happen helplessly.

Kali walks back into the room as Hopper starts to walk towards her, mouth open to speak, to say something, probably to instruct her to use her powers.

The windows suddenly shatter all around them like it's coming from everywhere, every direction.

He feels Billy grab hold of him and throw him to the ground, covering himself with his body as he catches sight of everyone else ducking down, sees Jonathan make a grab for Nancy as he throws her down too, to cover her.

It's too late.

Steve sees the dart that flies towards Kali right before his own body hits the ground.

It lodges itself right into her neck.

Her eyes flutter for a moment as she falls forward and within seconds Funshine lunges to grab her falling body, catching it as he holds her in his arms, ducking down to cover her with himself, glass still flying everywhere.

There's gunfire coming from everywhere and Steve has no idea what the fuck is suddenly happening.
Hopper crawls his way over to them as he grabs hold of Billy's shoulder to yell out to them.

"It's Richards and Owen's, Sheldon fucked up over the phone, said your names, both sides found you at the same time because Hawkin's Lab is still infiltrated by some of Richards men, they must have wanted to wait until they knew you were all in one place" he tells them and Steve's blood runs cold as he feels Billy's grip tighten on him.

It's a showdown.

Both sides battling for dominance and they're all stuck smack dab in the middle of it.

Him, Billy and Kali, they're the potential rewards and it had all spiraled out of control.

Having Eleven right now would have been really useful.

Jonathan and Nancy crawl over to them and the gunfire has moved towards another end of the house but they know they're just sitting ducks and they have no idea how many men are here surrounding them from either side.

He sees Funshine start to crawl towards Kali's bedroom, dragging her with him and Hopper catches sight of it too as he looks at all of them.

"There's a tunnel leading underneath the house, let's go" he says and they all gape at him.

What the fuck kind of shit is that?

Hopper buys a huge cabin with a tunnel underneath it and gives it to a group of homeless people, what the hell kind of crap is this guy planning for at this point?

They all oblige and when they're halfway there three men walk in through the kitchen, guns trained on them as they all go stalk still.

He feels Billy's hot breath against his ear, his back to Billy's chest and he may as well be sitting in his lap at this point.

Billy seems far more calm than any person has the right to be in a situation like this and Steve feels ready to curl into a ball and hide, Billy's sense of calm is grounding as he focuses on it to help calm himself.

"Give the freaks over and nobody dies" one of the men suddenly says, stepping closer and he's young, easily in his early twenties which is shocking, how do they get them this young?

The front door gets torn down and suddenly there's gunfire again as the three men drop to the ground, one of them from being shot in the head and the other two to avoid the same fate and it doesn't take long for them all to use this distraction to keep moving towards the room.

When they're all inside the room Funshine hands Kali over to Jonathan as he goes to move the dresser in front of the door to keep it shut, Billy leaves his side to go help him and Steve turns to see the small opening next to Kali's bed that's open, a drop down leading god knows where.

Hopper motions for Nancy to go first, whispering something in her ear that Steve can't hear as she nods before turning to Jonathan and Kali, he takes Kali from his arms as Jonathan lowers himself down inside and Hopper goes to lower Kali's still unconscious body down to him.

"What about the others?" Steve asks.
"There's other ways in there" Funshine says to reassure him as he nods.

Steve hadn't realized it but he'd had his back to the door leading into the small bathroom, he hears the door crack open behind him and before he can turn he feels a hard pressure against his lower back.

"Nobody fucking move" the deep male voice says from behind him, the man's arm coming up to grab his shoulder as he presses the gun into his back.

Everyone freezes in place.

"You won't kill him, you need him" Hopper says, tone dark as he inches forward, hand on the holster of his own gun.

"I'm not paid enough for this shit, if I can get at least one of you I'll be home free of this cluster fuck of a mess" he spits out, pushing the gun against him harder.

Steve locks eyes with Billy.

Dr Owen's Office, Session 10

"I have a suggestion, one that you may not like Steve but if you're willing to hear me out-" Owen's tells them halfway through a particularly smooth session that hadn't had any hiccups along the way yet.

"Lay it on me" Steve interrupts him to say with a sigh, already bracing himself.

"We know Billy can compel you, is he able to take over your body as well?" Owen's asks him and Steve makes a noise in the back of his throat.

"First off that's a question, not a suggestion, secondly I don't know, we haven't messed around with his ability to control me at will" he spits out and Billy suddenly just looks uncomfortable, staying uncharacteristically silent for once.

"Perhaps we should, I know you can't control Billy but if he can control you perhaps certain things you are unable to do he can make up for in times of high stress" Owen's says and Steve just gets this look on his face he knows looks ugly and contorted as he looks over at Billy who just averts his gaze, not wanting to face his ire apparently.

"Alternatively he could just teach me" Steve grumbles out.

"True, but perhaps it could help build trust between the two of you, if you're willing to give up control every now and again then Billy will most likely be less controlling as a result" he says with a shrug.

"Doc, you keep trying this whole therapy approach, I think you should stick to your day job unless we're talkin' bedroom stuff right now" Billy says, wagging his eyebrows lewdly at Steve as he flushes involuntarily.

"I'm just saying that I've noticed when you are both more at peace with one another, when there's more of an understanding the bond seems easier to control" he tells them ignoring Billy, tone a bit more serious than before to keep them on track.
They both say nothing, considering his words and Steve is definitely not a fan of the suggestion, he doesn't like it, he hates that Billy could control him if he really wanted to and Billy knows it, had tried lightening the mood with his joke.

Except it's not a joke, Billy doesn't take it as seriously as he does, he'd be more than willing to use it on him in a more intimate setting because he doesn't see it the same way that he does and Steve knows this.

The idea of even giving over control to Billy at all makes him sick to his stomach.

Sure, there's a part of him deep down that would like to be able to trust Billy that much but he's seen inside of Billy's mind, knows the things he's capable of, that's not someone he wants to have in control of him and he knows Billy doesn't mean any harm, not to him at least but it's just flat out scary to him.

Give Billy an inch and he'll take a mile.

"You hated the suggestion" Billy says later in the car when they're on their way back to Steve's place.

"Of course I did, fuck that, no offense Billy but that's a resounding no from me" Steve says shaking his head.

"Ok" Billy says quietly after a few moments of silence and it throws Steve off, makes him stare at Billy who looks a bit more vulnerable than usual.

"What do you mean?" Steve asks, looking at him suspiciously.

Billy frowns but doesn't look at him, "I just mean ok, it's your call, not mine" he says with a shrug.

"I- well I mean it's a joint- we've got a joint decision making thing going on here so I mean it- it's your call too but I just-" Steve says suddenly not knowing what to say, not having expected Billy to give in so easily.

"Steve, I can control you against your will, it will never be my call, that will always be on your terms, it's not fair that you can't do it to me too, if you say we don't use it then we don't" Billy says and Steve looks at him like he's grown two heads.

"That's probably the most mature thing I've ever heard you say" Steve tells him in disbelief as Billy rolls his eyes.

"Yeah, whatever" he grumbles out as they park in Steve's driveway as he notices his parents are unfortunately home tonight.

Steve looks at him in consideration as he tilts his head while Billy lights a cigarette and waits for him to leave the car, clearly wanting this conversation to be over, totally closed off all of a sudden.

"What do you think?" he asks him and Billy's brows furrow as he looks at him, taking the cigarette out of his mouth to hold between his two fingers.

"About what?" he asks like he's annoyed.

"The suggestion, do you think we should try it? I know you can disarm someone with a gun and take it apart, I think it'd be useful for something like that" Steve tells him and Billy blinks rapidly a few
times like the thought hadn't crossed his mind.

"I- well you mentioned I could just teach you though" Billy says sounding nervous which is very much unlike him and a little bit endearing.

“True, but Owen's isn't wrong, maybe building trust is a good idea, we could try it and if it isn't something I want to do we can stop” Steve says, not really caring either way, it seems simple enough and it benefits them both in more ways than one.

Billy just stares at him for a long while and Steve almost says something to kill the silence until Billy finally takes another puff of his cigarette, turning the other way to let the smoke out of the window as it dissipates into the open air before turning back to look at him.

“Yeah ok, if that's what you want” he finally says and Steve smiles, nodding to himself.

They've tried this a few times, they know it works and Steve nods his head in the most minuscule of ways which is all the go ahead Billy needs as he suddenly can see himself looking through Billy's eyes.

The expression on his face hardens as Billy takes control of his body and it's always a strange feeling to watch himself as he sees Billy turn his body sideways to bring his arm down and up around the man's arm, trapping his wrist as he brings his other arm over to grab at the hand holding the gun.

He seems to anticipate that the man will shoot blindly as he adjusts the aim towards the far wall, away from anyone else and the sound of the gunshot is loud in close quarters as it lodges itself into the plaster, making their ears ring.

Billy elbows him in the face, wraps his leg around the back of the man's knee to force him to kneel as Billy turns the gun inward toward him, causing the man to lose his grip as he takes the gun and aims it at his head instead, backing away a few steps as blood pours out from the man's nose, his hand coming up to cover his face as he glares up at him.

Billy gives control back over and Steve grunts from the force of it, lowering the gun slightly because no matter what it's always a jarring experience.

"If we're going to do this and it works I need you to know I refuse to kill someone using your body" Billy says as they're standing in an open field, far away from anyone else as Jonathan stands there waiting for them to be finished so they can get started.

They'd asked Jonathan for help in the whole body control exercise they'd agreed to and Billy had agreed to using Jonathan mostly because it meant he'd be able to use him as a rag doll.

Steve had of course told Billy not to be unnecessary and that they'd stop the whole thing if he decided to try anything stupid.

He's not sure why Jonathan agreed to this though, maybe he's a masochist or maybe he's expecting a fight, Steve isn't sure.

"Oh- uhm ok" Steve replies, not expecting that to be what Billy would say.

It makes sense though, he doesn't want to deal with the potential resentment that may arise from
something like that and sure it isn’t Steve actually killing a person but it would still be his body doing it.

It's a logical precaution to take and he's actually proud of Billy for mentioning it.

Suddenly the weight of this whole thing starts to hit him a little bit harder as he averts his eyes but refuses to spook because of it, he'd agreed to this and he was the one that had pushed it.

They were going to go through with it, he wants to be able to build something more based on trust and communication then what they've been doing which is just going by feeling alone, letting everyone and everything control the momentum instead of it being their decisions that move them forward.

He's sick of being worried about what other's think of them, of Neil, the stupid fucking kids at school, the strange bigots they'd see around town who could pick up on the nature of their relationship, all of it.

He knows that part won't go away but maybe it will be easier to handle if they both become stronger and more secure in themselves and with each other.

They've been allowing their emotions to dictate the direction of the bond and their relationship in general, they can do better than that.

He wants them to be better, wants himself to be better, wants Billy to be better because he knows they can be.

If this is the first step towards that then so be it, bring it on.

"Alright, let's start" Billy says.

When Steve holds the gun back up, levels it to aim right at his head again it only takes about two seconds for him to decide as he pulls the trigger.

He'd thought about it a lot, had wondered if he'd be able to do it in the moment if the situation ever came about and he had convinced himself he could never do it, that's just not him.

Give him a Demogorgon any day, he'll kill those without hesitation and even like it a little bit but another human?

That's different.

Except in this moment he realizes it doesn't matter to him, he sees someone trying to kill him, someone who could easily have another gun, could shoot it at anyone else in the room, could hurt Billy, could kill him.

There's no question in his mind, he needs to protect them if he has the opportunity, can't allow his mercy to potentially get someone else killed, it's just not an option.

The bullet goes straight through the man's skull as he falls over onto the floor in a crumpled heap as blood starts to pool out from the wound.

He feels nothing.

Billy comes up behind him, pulls him, takes the gun from his hand, runs a hand through his hair
reassuringly to place his lips against his temple in relief, they stand there in silence for a moment until Billy pulls him toward the drop hole and they all leave the chaos of the battered and broken cabin behind them.

Chapter End Notes

I don't really know what to say about this chapter.

I'm nervous and I hope you all enjoy it!
Chapter Notes

Been a while since I've done a Steve & Billy only chapter.

(°_°)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"These tunnels are old, they were commissioned and funded by Levi Coffin himself" Hopper tells them as they walk cautiously through them, they'd been walking for quite a while to the point where Billy's legs were starting to burn and he still has no idea where it was going to lead them.

"Levi Coffin, the leader of the Underground Railroad?" Nancy asks in disbelief.

"Well they called him president but yeah, same difference" Hopper says with a shrug.

"Is that why you bought the cabin?" Jonathan asks as Hopper nods to him.

"If I'm going to be hiding power using fugitives all over Indiana there's no better way than to utilize what's already here" he tells them.

_Huh._

Billy's actually impressed, he still wants to beat the shit out of Hopper but he's definitely impressed at the amount of foresight this guy puts into a lot of things like he's just as paranoid as Billy is.

Except Billy is pretty sure he has nothing on Hopper at this point, he almost thinks he should start upping his game.

That'd probably just annoy the shit out of Steve though.

Which makes it all the more tempting.

He chances a glance at Steve who is being uncharacteristically silent, watches him a like a hawk, keeps him close because Billy knows that any moment now he's going to go into some sort of mental breakdown.

Billy knew he'd had it in him, had expected Steve to pull the trigger because of his protective nature but it still shocked him to some degree to see Steve killing someone.

His Steve, his bonded, the one who could pull him out of the depths of his own mind and wrap him in an impossible unconditional warmth and has done so multiple times, _killing someone_ in cold blood.

Perhaps that's how Steve has felt about Billy at times, shocked.

He knows Steve is afraid of the things he can do, the things he has done, it helps keep him in check because the last thing he wants to do is turn any of that onto Steve, knows they're both trying to be better, trying to build themselves up and all that other philosophical mumbo jumbo.
Unfortunately there's no good advice on how to handle killing someone for the first time and Billy isn't very good with his words in situations like this but he's going to damn well try.

Steve's expression has been closed off, emotionless, there's nothing there like he's just putting himself on auto pilot which is probably for the best.

Billy would prefer to be able to get Steve away from everyone else because nobody needs to see it when Steve snaps, that's for Billy to handle and Billy alone and he's ready for it at this point, at a moments notice.

He'd brushed against the bond just barely, a slight nudge, not wanting Steve to get startled or pulled into some sort of downward spiral on accident from the concern Billy feels for him and the only thing he could gather from Steve's side is that he feels numb.

Again, probably for the best.

Eventually after what feels like an eternity they come up on some stairs that lead up to a metal door, when they go through it they find themselves inside of a basement.

"Another house?" Jonathan asks.

"It's an underground safe house with bunkers, this is where the slaves would hide during searches" Hopper says as he walks up to another metal door across the room, unbolting it and unlocking it after pulling out a large chain of keys and Billy wonders how he keeps track of all of them.

"How did you even get the money for this?" Nancy asks which is a pretty valid question, one Billy would have probably asked at some point.

"Owen's is the financial part of it" Hopper says and Billy's expression darkens except suddenly Steve takes a step forward.

"Is he also the one holding the Mind Flayer in captivity or did you pull the short straw on that one?" Steve spits out and his voice sounds fucking menacing.

_Fucking Christ, here we go._

Hopper turns around and motions for everyone to start going inside, frown on his face as he locks eyes with Steve.

"Explain what happened to me because I've only got part of the story" he says and everyone can't seem to get away quick enough, feeling the air in the room change just by hearing Steve's tone alone but Billy stays right where he is next to him, waiting, watching, getting himself ready for whatever this is about to turn into.

"It's funny you say that because I was going to say the exact same fucking thing" Steve says with all of the aggression he can muster, tilting his head to the side to stalk towards Hopper.

Billy's jaw clenches because he knows Steve is pissed but he's not in the right mindset to be doing this right now, he's going to do or say something stupid that he'll regret later.

Hopper sighs, clearly knowing what this is as he looks to Billy like suddenly he's the sensible one all of a sudden which yeah, for once he actually is.

So he grabs hold of Steve's arm, pulls him back, rubs at his shoulders gently to attempt to calm him down but Steve just pulls away, wrenches himself out of Billy's grasp, pushes at his chest and throws
his arms up, crossing them over his own chest instead.

Billy can't help but roll his eyes as he watches Steve take a few steps back, getting space between them so he's away from both him and Hopper, out of grabbing distance.

"Why don't we get inside and talk?" Hopper says but he doesn't wait for an answer, just walks away and goes inside.

Billy refuses to move until Steve does.

They stare at each other and Billy gives nothing away, just sits there cool as a cucumber because if he doesn't Steve will pounce because when Steve gets like this and smells weakness it becomes a fight, every time.

Billy doesn't want that just yet until they're inside and safe, the fighting can come afterwards and Billy can divert Steve's attention from everyone else and turn it around on himself because Billy can take it, can handle Steve at his worst, it's his responsibility because they'd done this together, he's just as much a part of Steve's impending break down as Steve himself is.

So, he waits him out.

He knows it pisses Steve off to no end too when Billy is the calm one, knows Steve will eventually give in because of it.

The guy always feels like he should be the one keeping the peace, being in control, being sensible, holding Billy back, being responsible for Billy's actions and making up for his lack of proper etiquette in certain social situations that call for being less crude.

Billy is fully aware that Steve prides himself on it.

Every time it's the other way around Steve gets downright adorable, he becomes more expressive, flails his hands around a lot more, gets super worked up but it's so non-threatening that it makes Billy even more calm and collected because he loves to just watch Steve lose his cool and get emotionally charged by it.

In this instance it's not as adorable, it's just concerning.

Eventually Steve averts his gaze, purses his lips, runs a hand through his hair and pulls at it harshly before finally stalking inside wordlessly and Billy can't help the quiet snort that comes out of himself.

Okay, so it's still kind of adorable.

When they get inside Steve does the predictable thing that he'd expected from him sooner.

He lunges for Hopper and Billy gets an arm around his neck, grips onto his upper arm as he holds him against his chest and locks eyes with the Chief who looks a bit shocked for a moment before he goes to move past them, a look of understanding on his face as he goes to bolt the door closed.

"Billy- get the fuck off-" Steve starts to say while struggling to get out of his grasp but Billy pushes him against the wall, Steve's cheek colliding to mush up against it as he still continues to fight him, to struggle.

Billy catches sight of Nancy and Jonathan further down the small hallway standing around a small dining room table in a tiny looking kitchen just looking at them in concern and Billy grunts when Steve gets an elbow into his side, knocking the air out of him for a moment and Billy just retaliates
by laying all of his weight onto Steve instead to keep him immobile.

"Motherfuck-" he hears Steve grunt out and Hopper walks down the hallway into the kitchen as Nancy and Jonathan move out of the way.

"Don't you dare walk away from me, after all you've done, after everything you've fucking done!" Steve yells out.

"There's a bunker at the end of hallway through this door, when you're ready to talk like an adult that's when we can talk" Hopper says looking right at Steve who Billy knows is just glaring daggers at him.

Billy waits for Steve to go boneless, for the fight to leave him and he knows it's when Nancy's eyes start to water that Steve sees her, probably looks into her eyes and feels like a douche, probably realizes he's acting like a crazed animal and Billy feels sympathy for the guy, he really does because usually that's how everyone looks at him instead.

It's kind of weird to see it from the other side for once.

He doesn't blame him by any means but he knows if Steve were in his right mind right now he wouldn't want to be doing this, wouldn't want to lose control and take it out on Hopper or the others.

So that's why Billy knows he had needed to step in, to get a handle on it, push the anger and aggression he feels right now for Hopper aside.

For Steve's sake.

When he knows he's a bit more calm, when the struggling dies down he puts his hand on the back of Steve's neck, grip threateningly tight on it while he pulls him off the wall by his upper arm so that Steve is moving ahead of him and he can bring him down to the ground if he tries anything stupid.

When they move past Hopper to the point of being within arms reach he feels Steve tense up, readying himself.

He obviously thinks about it, Billy can feel it in the way his muscles move under his tight grip, his posture changing ever so slightly with the half second resistance he gets.

Billy just grips even tighter and his finger pushes into the very obvious bruise Billy had given him a day prior on his neck, knows he'll feel it, lets him know he's got a battle ahead of him if he wants to go down this route.

Steve does the smart thing and keeps moving.

When he gets Steve inside of the bunker it's relatively small, there's a large bed on the right side of it pushed up against the wall and it clearly is just a simple sleeping quarters.

He locks the door and Steve is immediately on him, pushing him up against the door as the metal handle digs painfully into his back as he just looks at Steve, completely deadpan.

Steve's jaw clenches, there's a fire in his eyes, a chaotic one that promises nothing good as they stare each other down.

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" he hisses out, egging Billy on, getting ready to say something stupid that he doesn't even mean but Billy just ignores him, doesn't answer, doesn't rise to the bait.
Unfortunately for Steve he isn't getting what he wants which is a fight, wants Billy to get angry with him, wants him to scream, and yell.

He probably also wants him to put his hands on him, get violent because Steve is going to feel the self loathing, will want the pain because Billy had felt it too after his first kill but he won't, refuses, lets it all slam into Steve, continues to wait it out.

He sees the moment that it finally does, that it finally hits him.

The anger changes into sick realization, those beautiful brown eyes that had been dark like soil after a raging storm start to water, they go doe eyed, becoming molten with hints of copper, a soul deep sadness inside of them and Billy knows what's coming when the first tear falls.

"I- I killed him Billy" he chokes out, grip letting up as he goes to pull away, to get distance between them but Billy grips him gently by his elbows which seems to start a fire in Steve again as he pulls away, walks to the other side of the bunker in a few steps, leans himself against the wall beside the small side table next to the bed.

Billy's heart aches and he just stands there and waits.

"He had a family, people to go back to, you heard how he'd only been there for the money, what if he had children?" Steve cries out as he rubs his hands into his face and starts to sob, slowly moving down the wall to sit and curl in on himself.

Billy goes to sit next to him, their shoulders brushing but he doesn't touch because clearly that's not what Steve wants right now.

"I feel like I'm losing my mind, I don't know what's happening anymore" he says and it's muffled but Billy can still hear the words clear as day.

"I don't think any of us do" Billy replies because he feels the same way but his life has always been fucked up, he's used to it, used to things getting bad and staying bad.

Steve is different, comes from a different kind of household, he's been privileged his whole life, it was one of the reasons Billy had been so threatened by him when they'd first met.

Of course there's the flip side too, Steve's parents are pretty neglectful, making him feel unwanted, like nobody will ever truly love him and Nancy hadn't helped that growing insecurity that plagues the bond between them.

Billy can feel it when they meld together and become one sometimes, like a nagging in the back of his mind.

It's how he feels about Billy too, he catches glimpses of it sometimes, Steve thinks Billy doesn't truly love him and when he'd first felt it for certain he'd gotten so fucking pissed.

He'd started some stupid fight with Steve and they ended up not talking for a few days, he doesn't even remember what the fight had been about but he didn't want to call Steve out on the real reason he'd been so upset.

Who the fuck else is there?

The hell is wrong with this guy?

It just makes no sense.
Steve is still the only good thing he's ever had in his life other than his mother and he'll die before he lets what they have get torn away from him, refuses to let life fuck him again.

He won't be weak or unaware, refuses to let his guard down, he'll do anything to keep him alive, anything.

Billy can't go through that again, can't lose someone else like that, can't just have Steve suddenly ripped away to never be seen as he watches helplessly, powerless to do anything.

He doesn't know if he will ever handle feeling helpless in a productive manner, it's not a good look on him, he gets stupid when he starts to feel that way as he starts to lose himself and give up.

Steve has tried to tell him a couple of times he should work on it but it's not easy, it's a trauma he just can't seem to fully shake.

He tries not to think about it, any of it.

If anything he doesn't understand how after all they've been through Steve could ever even think Billy doesn't want him, doesn't even know what makes Steve come to a conclusion like that but they're not his feelings, they're Steve's so of course he won't understand it.

Billy also doesn't ask because Steve has it buried so deep down he probably doesn't even know the answer himself, or maybe he does and Billy is just afraid to bring it up, he's not really sure.

"At least it's not the Upside Down" Billy says with a shrug because it could always be worse.

Steve laughs, it actually sounds a bit genuine if a bit sad as he wipes the tears from his eyes, leaning his head on Billy's shoulder.

"Yeah, that's a good fuckin' point" he says and Billy smiles, leaning his cheek in to rest against his head.

They sit there for a while until Steve sighs deeply as he takes Billy's hand into his own, interlocking their fingers as he brings them up to kiss at Billy's knuckles one by one, the ones that were now scarred from when he'd killed Reece.

Billy lets out a sharp breath and clears his throat, taking his hand away as he goes to lift himself up and holds his hand back out to pull Steve up with him.

Steve gets a confused look on his face before taking it and getting up so they're standing face to face as he looks at Billy imploringly, searching.

"Why do you think I don't love you?" Billy suddenly blurts out like an idiot and he doesn't know why the fuck he just said that.

Holy shit, what is wrong with him.

He quickly wants to take it back and starts to mentally berate himself but he's already said it so he schools his emotions, doesn't want Steve to know that he knows he fucked up.

Internally he's freaking the fuck out though.

Way to go Hargrove, douche bag of the year award goes right over to you, congratulations.

What the hell is wrong with you, you haven't even told him you love him yet and you say that instead?
Steve has just killed a man and Billy wants to go and drop a fucking nuke on the guy out of nowhere.

He's always telling Steve to think before he speaks and here he goes like a damn hypocrite running his own mouth.

Steve inhales deeply through his nose as he takes a step back, sputtering nonsense under his breath clearly trying to catch up with the nonsense Billy has just said.

"I- what, I don't- why, why would you-" he starts to say and Billy thinks he may have broken him for a second until he gets an angry look on his face.

"What the fuck kind of question is that?!!" He finally yells out.

Yeah, Billy deserves that and he kind of expected that reaction if he's being honest but what's done is done, time to roll with it.

"Look, this is what you do, you sit there and convince yourself in some stupid convoluted way that I don't want you and it just goes round and round in a fucking circle" Billy tells him, wagging his index finger in a circular motion to emphasize his point.

He's ready to confront this issue head on now that he's gone a dug his own grave.

Bring it on.

"Wha- where is this even coming from right now Billy, what is even happening? You make no sense!" He says in exasperation, pulling at his own hair with both hands.

"I'm right though, aren't I?"

"I can't even fucking believe you right now, are you kidding me?!!" He screams out as he starts to pace frantically.

"Here's your problem, Nancy does some fucked up shit to you and suddenly you think you're everyone's second choice, it's ridiculous" Billy tells him, scoffing at the absurdity of it because he knows he's right.

Steve gets even more worked up upon hearing that, doesn't even look at him, just keeps pacing angrily as he starts shouting.

"Fuck you Billy, fuck you, how dare you pull this shit on me right now, you haven't even said it to me and you ask me why I don't love you instead?!" he says in exasperation as he laughs like some sort of maniac, balling his hands into fists as he brings them up to dig his palms into his eyes before putting them back at his sides to continue to pace around some more.

"Hey!" Billy barks out, pointing an angry finger at him but Steve just ignores him.

"You said it to me while you were shitfaced drunk off your ass, I'm entitled to a little room for error here" he states, giving himself an excuse.

A poor excuse but he thinks that maybe it'll throw Steve off a little bit.

Steve stops pacing upon hearing that and looks at him, eyes wide, mouth opening and closing like he's imitating a fish.

Billy tilts his head.
That's a look of guilt, not of confusion.

"You son of a bitch, you remember!" He says getting into Steve's face, using his finger to poke at his chest as Steve averts his eyes.

"I- I thought maybe I'd dreamed it, okay?" He says, slapping Billy's finger away before pulling at his own hair again with one hand while using the other to nervously tug at his own shirt.

"I figured if I did say it I'm an asshole, and if I didn't say it I'm still an asshole!" he tells him and Billy swears he hears him make a small wounded sound in the back of his throat.

"You're right, you are an asshole but I already knew that, you could've at least said something!" Billy hisses out after barking out a hollow, empty laugh as he rubs his hands over his face to turn away and start pacing the bunker himself.

Steve puts his arms over his chest like he's cold, giving him that kicked puppy look and it just makes Billy even more pissed off because he hates it when Steve tries to play the victim card like this.

"Now I really gotta hear this, what could possibly make you think I don't feel the same way about you Steve?!" He snarls out, stopping to face him again, waiting for whatever dumb shit is about to come out of his mouth.

Steve doesn't answer, just looks down at his feet and Billy can tell his eyes are watering.

Billy sighs, rubbing a hand through his hair as he just stares at him for a while, wanting to shake Steve but he knows that won't help as he tries to compose himself instead.

"What was that to you, the day I held you in my arms and carried you back to bed, the day I made love to you for the first time?" He asks quietly, feeling way too fucking vulnerable all of a sudden, hating Steve for letting it get to this point.

Steve's head shoots up lightning quick and after a moment of staring he starts to cry silently, tears streaming down his face looking more afraid than Billy has ever seen him.

It pulls at something inside of his chest and his mouth feels dry as he feel's a lump start to form in his throat.

"I- I dunno, I thought maybe it was a pity fuck or something" Steve chokes out and Billy's nostrils flare, the anger slamming back into him like it had never left in the first place.

He starts laughing hysterically and it goes on for a while, it's just so absurd and before he composes himself Steve starts to turn away like he's about to leave.

He gets to the door, gets his fingers around the handle and Billy boxes him in, gripping his wrist tight, forcing him to let go.

"You still haven't told me why you think I don't love you" He says trying to control his temper, trying to hold back but he's aware he's doing a really shitty job at it and Steve is not making this easy.

Except he's not sure what he'd expected, Steve never makes anything easy.

He hears Steve's soft hiccuping as he turns around to face him but still won't meet his eyes, just stands there crying, gripping a shaking hand into Billy's shirt, right at his waist like Billy's the one
that's going to bolt or something.

"I'm afraid the bond is what did this" he says so whisper quiet that Billy almost doesn't hear him.

"The bond- oh my god, that's what this has been about all this time?!” He yells out into his face, completely floored.

Billy can't help himself as he slams his hand into the metal of the door next to Steve's head, the sound reverberating through the room as Steve flinches.

"How do you even come up with this shit?!" Billy asks in complete and utter disbelief.

This imbecile thinks their love came to be born because of the bond? How stupid-

Steve looks up at him, finally meeting his eyes.

"It's ok, it's fine, I just- it hurts is all, I'll be ok just give me ti-"

Billy pulls him roughly, man handles him over to the bed and forces him to sit down and Billy thinks he might break something as he glares down at him.

Steve simply looks away, keeps his head down like he's spineless which Billy knows full well he's not.

He's pissed, so damn upset that this is what had been making Steve keep him at arms length, something so stupid and senseless, not even based in reality.

"Look at me" he demands but Steve doesn't listen.

"I SAID FUCKING LOOK AT ME!" he bellows and Steve looks up at him as he visibly starts to shake like he's expecting to hear the worst news in his life or something.

Always getting himself worked up over nothing.

Driving Billy to fucking insanity with it.

"Let me make this clear once and for all because I know you, this isn't me tricking you, this isn't some joke, I'm not fucking around do you understand?" " Billy asks him as he starts breathing hard through his nose.

Steve just stares up at him, through him, saying nothing, doing nothing.

"Look at me, look me in my eyes so I know you are really listening to what I'm about to say because apparently I have to fucking spell it out for you" Billy says, wanting to make damn sure Steve doesn't twist this shit around somehow.

"I- okay, I understand, I'm listening” he says, actually meeting his gaze this time while nodding his head as he grips his hands into his pants nervously.

"I've wanted you since the moment I met you" Billy tells him and Steve goes to open his mouth, goes to speak and he puts a finger up to stop him.

"Don't you dare say a fucking word until I'm done or I ask you a question" he growls out as Steve promptly shuts up, closes his mouth and just waits.
"I hated how much I wanted you, that night I tried to beat the shit out of you wasn't because of you, I was pissed at my dad" he tells him, wanting to get that straight and out of the way because they've never actually talked about it.

"It's not an excuse, I'm just telling you what it was" he clarifies, not wanting Steve to take it the wrong way.

"Everything about you- I hated how jealous I was, how threatened I felt by you but I still wanted you and I knew I couldn't have you, would never be able to have you" he gets out, taking a moment to pull in a deep breath before letting it out.

"Then we were gonna die, those fucking hell hounds were coming for us and you were right there and I didn't think, I just knew I could at least try to save you, try to do something to make up for every shit thing I've done in my life so I pulled you to the ground" he huffs out, snorting from the memory of it, from how long ago it feels, from how crazy it had all been.

"Why did you stay in that hole with me anyways?" He asks him because that part still genuinely boggles his mind.

Steve gulps and shakes his head like he doesn't know.

"I- I knew I couldn't leave you down there alone, couldn't just leave you to die like that, nobody deserves that and you'd tried to protect me and I just- I don't know Billy, I acted, I didn't think" he says shrugging.

"Exactly, we've been building something since before the bond, that's my point you dip shit" he tells him and Steve still doesn't look convinced.

Billy leans down, putting his hands onto Steve's knees, rubbing gently before bringing them up to cup his face with both hands gently.

"I sacrificed myself for you" he says quietly and Steve meets his gaze, whimpering like the breath has been knocked out of him as he puts a hand on his wrist, rubbing the pad of his thumb over it as he looks at Billy, unsure, uncertain.

"Steve, I wasn't even bonded to you yet, I was willing to die for you, I had intended to die when I made that thing come after me" he whispers out.

"It's not just because I've got a death wish either, I did not want to see you dead" he tells him, willing him to understand.

Steve gulps and just continues to stare at him, eyes watering again like he's going to cry.

Billy pulls Steve forward, resting their foreheads against each other as he goes to run his fingers through Steve's hair before gripping it gently as he forces them to lock eyes with one another.

"I love you, I am hopelessly, madly fucking in love with you to the point of absolute insanity" Steve chokes out a sob at that, grips his hands into Billy's shirt so tight his knuckles turn white as Billy pulls him in for a kiss.

"Stupid-" Billy gets out between kisses, between Steve's sobbing, "You're so fucking stupid-" he says after placing a kiss on the two moles placed perfectly on Steve's face, the ones he's come to fucking adore because he's a sap, Steve has turned him into a god damn mushy, romantic, sappy idiot.
It's insane, absolutely insane what this guy does to him, the way Steve makes him feel, like he can do anything, like even at his worst, in the deepest darkest depths of himself it doesn't even matter because he has Steve.

Steve pulls back, hiccuping a bit as he wipes at his own tears for a moment before coming back to cup Billy's face.

"I love you too, I really fucking do you insufferable asshole" he says breathlessly and Billy can't help the smile that plasters itself onto his face as he goes to kiss Steve again, pulling his mouth close before stopping him, letting their breaths mingle as he looks into his eyes.

"Yeah, I know" he says, tone smug and Steve snorts, goes to pull away but Billy doesn't let him, just kisses him again, and again, and again until he's drunk off of it, until it starts to get heated as Billy groans into his mouth, tilts his head up, deepens it, does it just the way Steve likes it, just the way he knows will get him all worked up.

He hears the telling moan coming from him as he eventually goes to reluctantly pull away and Steve chases after his mouth with his own before pouting when Billy doesn't let him resume their little make out session.

Billy knows that now is not the time but he just couldn't help himself, loves that he can get Steve hot and bothered so easily, it's one of his favorite things to do.

Steve gets a bit more distance between them as he clearly tries to get his breathing under control and Billy sees the moment reality comes crashing back into him causing it to crash right back into Billy as well.

"Shit" Steve says, exhaling a long pained groan.

Billy had tried to distract him but he knew it would only last so long.

"Yeah, I know" Billy grumbles out as he goes to sit beside him.

"We need to talk to Hopper" he says, closing his eyes for a long while.

"Yep" Billy says, not really knowing what else there is to say.

When Steve opens his eyes back up he turns to look over at Billy who just stares back at him imploringly.

"What?" he asks as Billy gets a smile on his face, taking Steve's hand into his own, pulling him in for another kiss, a chaste one this time and when Steve's eyes flutter open he whispers it to him like a secret.

"We'll figure it out"

Chapter End Notes

SO here we are.

It finally happened, our dum bois.
Funny story, I actually had the "I love you" scene written back in chapter 26, the original scene was going to be that they leave, the compulsion didn't even happen in the original draft yet and Billy takes Steve to a motel and tells him he loves him there and blah, blah, blah.

It ended up not feeling right and too soon and it seemed stupid that Steve's petty jealousy towards Karen ends up as the catalyst for such an emotional moment and I scrapped the whole thing and pushed the compulsion up to happen sooner and voila!

Here we are now.

I feel like this is far more like them, like it's a full circle sort of thing in an emotional sense, they only ever seem to move forward in their relationship when something traumatic happens that either pulls them apart or pulls them closer to one another.

So it felt fitting to put it here especially to add a little bit of stability to them and their relationship, to put them on the same page if only for a moment while being in a very unstable situation.

It seemed right to have that sort of contrast.

Also to have these repressed feelings and emotions to finally just explode in their faces felt right, to foreshadow their brief thoughts in regards to having that whole "I love you thing" being right there in the backs of their mind only to have one of them finally cave and bring it up, that was really fun to play around with.

I love you all <3
"Whatever you wanted to say to me, put a lid on it for now, we've got a problem" is the first thing they hear Hopper say when they come out of their bunker, ready to face him as they all cram inside of the small kitchen area.

Dottie walks into the room to go open the fridge only to close it like she had wanted something but now that she's there she realizes she doesn't as she glances at them, feels the mood turn to shit and promptly leaves.

Turns out everyone had made it here safely, Axel got shot in the arm and he's being patched up by Mick but other than that they'd all somehow survived.

It's literally the last thing Steve wants to hear right now but he's feeling so damn great he just rolls his eyes and allows Hopper to continue.

Billy had told him he loves him.

Billy Hargrove, love of his life.

His Billy, confessing that he'd always wanted him, that it wasn't the bond like Steve had thought, they'd both wanted each other even before the bond.

It's that thought in specific that makes him realize he hadn't even told Billy it was the same for him, hadn't clarified that he also had wanted Billy even before the bond had come to be, he'd been too floored by the whole situation to even think properly.

He thinks maybe Billy knows, the way he'd looked at him indicated that he has always known, other conversations had also implied he'd always known how Steve has felt about him.

"That's why I pulled away, your feelings for me, it was the most terrifying thing I'd ever experienced in my life and I've had quite a few terrifying experiences as you very well know, they're all nothing in comparison to feeling what you felt for me in that moment"

Steve doesn't really care, he wants Billy to know, doesn't want there to be a doubt in his mind, he'd opened up to him so beautifully in a way Steve will never forget, he understands that's not something easy for Billy to do.

It's almost hard to accept, makes him feel a bit inferior in a way but Steve hasn't ever been a quitter and he intends to let Billy know just how much he loves him and appreciates him, appreciates what Billy is willing to a sacrifice for him, what he already has sacrificed for him.

Unfortunately it'll have to be put on the back burner for now as he locks eyes with Hopper, stares him down.

Jim can only avoid answering for what he's done for so long but Steve can tell from his entire demeanor he's not just trying to distract them right now.

Hopper's got a crease in his brow, a hitch in his posture, there's evident stress but most of all he can see the bone deep chilling worry coming off of the man in waves which he usually has locked down
tight.

Whatever has come up is important.

"It's talking to Will now" he says and Steve almost takes a physical step back as Nancy and Jonathan share a look while Billy frowns.

"We need more than that" Billy says, needing clarification, they all need clarification on that.

"They were escaping some of Richard's men, another one of his agents tricked them into getting into a car, she was dressed as a civilian, that thing told Will there was a sedation gun in the middle compartment and Joyce took care of things but it's only because it started talking to him" Hopper says, sitting down to put his face in his hands.

"Jesus fucking Christ" Billy says in disbelief.

Jonathan shoots up from his seat and makes a grab for Hopper, slams him up against the wall and nobody stops him.

Why would they stop him?

"Are you kidding me?" Jonathan grinds out and Hopper just stands there, takes it, understanding in his eyes.

"This has gone too far, I know that but I was protecting El, you have to understand that all I've wanted to do is help her lead a normal life" he says, trying to explain himself.

"At the expense of my mom and Will, of all of us?!" Jonathan yells into his face.

"You know how much I care about your mother, how much I care about Will and even you, all of you, all I've wanted to do is protect all of you" Hopper tells them and Jonathan keeps his hold on him, pulls him forward and takes a step back before punching him in the face as Hopper slams into the wall behind him from the force of it.

Steve can't help it, he flinches.

"That's alright, that's okay, I deserved that" Hopper says, wiping at the blood coming from his nose now.

"You deserve worse" Jonathan says angrily as Nancy comes up behind him, pulls him away, starts whispering into his ear, soothing him.

Steve is jealous, he'd wanted to be the one to get a good one in on Hopper but he supposes if anyone deserved to be the one to do it, it would be Jonathan.

"What else did it say?" Steve asks, crossing his arms over his chest, getting back to the task at hand.

"Says it wants to protect him" Hopper replies, looking to be finally composing himself as he grabs a towel from the cabinet to wipe at his face with.

"It considers whatever host it attaches itself to as its child, it's probably telling the truth" Steve tells them, the way it had talked when he'd been in Dylan's body gave quite a bit away about its intentions.

"Will mentioned that, he said it called him his child" Hopper says, furrowing his brow.
"What about you Steve, what does it want with you?" Nancy asks after she gets Jonathan to sit back down.

"Trick me, end up killing me or something, that's what I've gathered" Steve says with a shrug.

"Why does it want you dead but not Billy or Will?" Jonathan asks, finally breaking his angry silence.

"I have no infection inside of me, it hasn't ever tethered itself to my soul" he tells them.

"What does that mean exactly?" Hopper asks.

"In short it has no influence over me, I'm a threat as long as it hasn't infected me and I get free access to it through Billy's soul because he's the one connected to it" he tells them as he looks over at Billy who has been uncharacteristically silent.

He's watching Steve in a way that makes him uneasy, like the wheels in his head are turning a certain way.

The chains being broken had done something to him, he's still not entirely sure all of which it entails but there are just things he suddenly knows and he'd been ignoring all of it because there's just too much going on in his head at once, had been getting a handle on it by not thinking about it at all, putting up whatever walls he needed to.

"You're certain?" Hopper asks.

"Yeah of course, why wouldn't I be?" he asks, raising his brow.

"Good, fuck Owen's, fuck all of it, we need to kill this thing" Hopper says and they all turn to look at him in disbelief, even Billy.

"The reason I went along with any of this is because of El, he helped me protect her" he admits to them once more.

"I scratch his back, he scratches mine but it's too risky now, if Owen's comes after us so be it, we can handle that afterwards but that thing can't be allowed to exist in this dimension anymore" he says and for once Steve believes him.

"What's the plan?" Billy finally says, there's just something in Billy's tone that Steve can't pinpoint though.

"Well, Steve-" Hopper goes to say as Billy puts up his hand to interrupt him.

"Choose your words carefully because if this is going where I think it's going we're going to have a fucking problem" Billy had told Hopper.

Hopper apparently already knows what's coming as he sighs deeply.

"Steve is the one that can-"

"Nope, nope, not an option, try again" Billy says, staring him down while shaking his head.

Oh, that's what that silence and strange staring had been, Billy had started to realize what road this was going down.

Figures.
Steve thinks as he rolls his eyes.

"You go to wherever you have it hiding and burn it out yourself, you fix this fuck up, this is on you" Billy goes on to say, pointing a finger at Hopper.

"Wow, this sounds really familiar" Steve says, scoffing.

Billy whips around all of a sudden, crowds him against the wall and Steve can't help it as he steps back and hits the wall pretty hard, banging the back of his head against it a bit, the look on Billy's face is murderous as Steve averts his gaze.

"Did you say something Harrington?" Billy asks him, voice threatening as fuck and he knows that this is one of those tipping points, if Steve pushes this, things might get really bad, really fast.

He stays silent, says nothing and Billy stares him down for a few more moments before turning has wrath back to Jim.

"This isn't complicated, we don't need to complicate it, you have it right where you want it, the ball is in our court, go burn it alive" Billy tells him and Hopper shakes his head.

"It's risky for all of us no matter who goes, that place we have it inside of will be swarming with Owen's men now, we can't get inside" Hopper says, trying to reason with him.

"That's not our problem, figure it out, use Kali to get inside" Billy hisses out.

Hopper actually stops at that and nods his head slightly, tilting it to the side.

"That's actually not a bad idea" Jim says and Steve rolls his eyes.

"It's fun, this is fun, when I tell you there are other options we don't listen, I'm just crazy, I'm just acting insane, fuck Steve right?" he says pushing himself off the wall to glare at Jim.

"When Billy suggests other options suddenly it's a good idea though, all of a sudden we're all fucking team Billy!" he yells out, laughing out loud and he knows it comes out sounding completely insane.

"That was different, Billy was the best option for that scenario and we proved that with the way it got handled" Hopper says, trying to defend himself really poorly.

"He got shot, Jim!" he screams out, motioning to Billy.

"I got shattered to pieces and thrown around his mind like a rag doll!" he follows up to say, pulling at his own hair in frustration.

"He had to kill two men, I could seriously go on, the list is longer but fuck me right?" he hisses out, slamming his hand down onto the table and the cheap thing almost breaks.

He sees Nancy flinch and Jonathan take a step back while Billy watches completely unconcerned, like he knows he's already won as Hopper purses his lips.

Hopper takes in a shaky breath, obvious guilt coming off of him in waves.

"I'm sorry, I truly am kid, I was never supposed to be there that day but I went anyway because I- I couldn't just leave Billy there without having done something" he says and it's genuine, it really is, Steve knows that but it doesn't mean anything.
Steve can't help it, he barks out a laugh as he looks at Billy with a look that says 'can you believe this guy right now?'

Billy stays strategically silent.

Steve suddenly understands why Billy hates hearing the word 'sorry' now because it's bullshit, everything is bullshit, in the words of Nancy Wheeler this is all 'bullshit'

"Shove that shit up your ass and you know what?" he says, knowing he's acting crazy as he turns to Billy and stalks up to him while he just raises his brow in response.

"Just to spite you I'm going to swap with Dylan and kill it myself" he hisses out.

Billy eyes widen and it takes not even three seconds before Billy's face hardens, before he decides to take everything they've been building up between the two of them for the past few months, the trust, the communication, wanting to be better for one another, all of that hard fucking work as Billy promptly decides to do the predictable thing.

In one fell swoop he throws it all straight into a fucking dumpster fire, there's barely a moment's hesitation.

"No, you won't" he says and it reverberates, is pulled from deep within Billy as it slams right into Steve.

Steve's eyes widen as his nostrils flare, the compulsion washing over him as he grits his teeth, tries to fight against it but he can't, there's nothing he can do.

The silence in this moment isn't something he'll ever forget.

"You- wow, so much for it being my call" Steve says, eyes watering as Billy just stands his ground completely unapologetic.

"I knew it was too good to be true, you're a fucking monster you know that?" he says, letting out a sorrowful laugh.

Billy falters, averting his gaze.

"Alright well I guess that's all then, figure it out yourselves" he says as he turns and walks away, stalking down the hall to lock himself inside one of the bunkers.

Nobody stops him.

As he goes to sit on the bed he has no idea what to do so he starts throwing up more walls than he ever has between himself and Billy, so many walls that the thrumming underneath his skin goes away, the thrumming that he'd gotten so used to.

It's like back before the bond had ever been strong, when they weren't even sure if it was still there.

The feeling of it breaks him, it's awful.

He feels nothing.

He's not sure how long he just lays there but Nancy and Billy try to get him to come out periodically
and he just ignores them.

Fuck that, fuck them.

He hates this, hates the bond, hates that he had to get stuck with someone like Billy because they’d been doing so fucking well, Billy had told him he loved him, it was all magnificent, everything had been going perfectly.

Then he goes and pulls some shit like this?

Now, of all times?

At some point he knows he needs to take a piss and of course Billy is walking down the hallway to get past him when he finally leaves the bunker, probably to get to the kitchen.

Steve doesn't even look at him but he does catch sight of the fact that Billy looks like total shit, they don't meet each other's gaze and as they walk past each other he hears Billy stop.

"Steve" he says and Steve stops but he doesn't turn around, just stands there with his back to him, refuses to give him the satisfaction of facing him.

"You need to eat" Billy says quietly and he's not sure why he does it but he just continues to ignores him, starts walking away like nothing had ever happened, like Billy hadn't even spoken.

It's agonizing to walk away, to say nothing and he doesn't know why.

Is it supposed to hurt this badly?

Nancy knocks on the metal of the door again, tells him he needs to eat and he ignores her too.

"You're being a child" he hears her say through the door and that gets a response out of him for some reason.

It's like an angry vengeful fire getting breathed back into him as he goes to unlock the door to wrench it open.

There's a plate of food in her hand and Steve takes it from her as they stare each other down for a few moments and eventually he turns away, scraping it into the small trash inside of his room.

He puts the plate onto the side table and goes to stand in front of her again, uncaring and emotionless.

The look she gives him is thunderous as she slaps him in the face.

The shock hits him hard.

She's never done that to him before.

It settles and she pushes him as he stumbles back a few steps.

Nancy comes into the room and locks them both inside and Steve is still honestly trying to recover from the fact that Nancy has just slapped him.
"Sit down" she says and he just glares at her in response, feeling defiant.

"Sit the fuck down Steve!" She yells and he can't help it as he obliges.

Angry Nancy has always freaked him out.

"Are you done yet?" She asks and he just looks up at her in confusion.

"With what?" He asks, with as much attitude as he can muster.

"With this whole shitty self sabotage 'woe is me' act" She says as he just blinks at her.

"Excuse me?" He says in disbelief.

"What Billy did was wrong, nobody disagrees with that but just because you're having a crisis after killing a man doesn't mean this is how you should be handling it" she says.

"Sorry, hold up, he forced his will onto me Nancy, this has nothing to do with any of that" he tells her, can't even believe that she's doing this right now, can't believe she has the audacity to say this shit to him.

"Bullshit, you goaded him into it, you straight up got into his face and backed him into a corner, told him you were doing it out of spite" she says, laughing like it's somehow a funny joke.

"Jonathan told me how mature Billy had been about the whole compulsion issue, how surprised he'd been by it and you've just been waiting for him to slip up" she says shaking her head.

"Wha- no I" he sputters out.

"I'm sorry Steve, I really am because I'm partially responsible for the fact that at the end of the day you think nobody will ever want you, I'm truly sorry for that but Billy loves you" she says apologetically.

"Did he tell you to say all of this?" Steve asks her, snorting.

"What do you take me for? It's obvious, clear as day, neither one of you is subtle about anything, I don't need either one of you to tell me anything" she says rolling her eyes like he's offending her intelligence.

"Just sounds like-" he goes to say before she interrupts him.

"Knock it off, if he's willing to sacrifice his happiness to keep you safe and alive and you want to try and hate him for it be my guest, it's your relationship" she tells him, picking at her nail.

"But if it were me?" She says, laughing a bit as she lets her hands rest at her sides again.

"If Jonathan wanted to force my hand on purpose just so he can try to sabotage himself like an idiot because he suddenly hates himself?" She says rhetorically, pausing to get her point across.

"I'd have done exactly what Billy had done, there's no point in you being self destructive and reckless like you're some petulant child just because you can't handle your own shit" she tells him, crossing her arms over her chest to glare at him.

"I can't believe you right now, he forced me Nancy" he says, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Again, I'm not saying he's right but don't you dare try to sit there on your high horse because you
aren't either" she spits out before turning around to leave as she angrily slams the door shut.

Steve gets up, throws the lamp against the wall as it shatters, takes the plate and throws that too just for good measure.

_Fuck._

Steve sits back down on the bed and buries his face in his hands.

It takes him a while because he's a stubborn asshole but he realizes Nancy's right, he's an absolute piece of shit.

He'd even called Billy a monster, had tried to hit him where it hurt.

_Why?_

Because she's right, he's angry at himself for everything.

It had all just spiraled out of control and he'd lashed out at Billy, had made Billy into a target and torn him down.

His stomach is in knots, he feels like he'll throw up and he knows that he needs to fix this, needs to fix the damage he's done.

When he gets out into the hall to finally leave his room he goes to where he knows Billy will be.

Steve takes a deep breath before opening the door and is grateful to find it unlocked, doesn't know what he'd do if it hadn't been.

His heart fucking breaks into pieces to see Billy sitting upright on the bed silently sobbing to himself as his head shoots up, eyes locking.

Steve turns around to lock the door quietly and he goes to Billy immediately after, doesn't care if he gets punched for it as he pulls Billy into a hug, runs his fingers through his hair, tries to soothe him but Billy is stalk still, probably surprised more than anything.

Steve brings his walls down without even thinking, can't handle having them up anymore, he feels completely fucking dead inside and touching Billy ignites something within him again.

The bond flares back to life like an exploding supernova and Billy let's out a pained and broken noise, clings to him and Steve needs to take a moment to breath deeply, in and out from the intensity of it.

He pulls away, wiping at Billy's tears with his thumb as he tries to keep himself from crying too.

"I'm sorry, I know you hate that word but I am, I'm so fucking sorry" he chokes out as Billy clutches onto his shirt like he's going to leave again.

"Me too, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have-" Billy says and Steve shakes his head.

"I backed you into a corner, I'm the fucking worst, I'm so sorry I called you a monster Billy, I'm the monster" he says, interrupting him.
"No, I am, it's fine, there's no excuse I shouldn't have used my compulsion on you" he says as he starts to cry again, even harder, sobs wracking his body.

"Let's just agree we're both stupid fucking idiots" he laughs out, kissing Billy's face gently over and over again.

Billy just sits there and cries in a way Steve has never seen before, all vulnerability, mask completely off and he feels like the worst person on earth for getting Billy to this point, for pushing too far because of his own stupidity.

Billy looks younger as per usual like he always does when he's like this and Steve wonders if there's something wrong with himself because Billy looks fucking beautiful when he cries, those crystal blue eyes glistening like an endless blue sky.

Steve can't handle it anymore as he unbuckles Billy's belt, needs to feel again, needs Billy inside of him as the bond curls inside of his gut like an itch needing to be scratched now that it's free to roam again.

He has no idea why he closed it off, had no idea it would hit them this hard when he allowed it back in, had no idea how much it would hurt to cut Billy out in the first place, it was stupid and now it's fogging up his brain.

Billy whines low in his throat and his hands come to life as he quickly seems to have the same desperate need inside of him that Steve does, moving his hands up his side, getting underneath his shirt to trail his nails down Steve's back, making him arch.

They don't even fully get their clothes off either before Steve is on top of him, pushing him down onto the bed, opening himself up quickly before easing himself down onto Billy, they're both already painfully hard as he uses Billy's precum as lube and not for the first time Steve wonders if there's something wrong with him.

The burn is good, it fucking hurts but he pushes through it, using it as an anchor, as a self inflicted punishment as Billy grips him by his hips, slows him down, having enough sense to get the lube from the side table obviously not wanting to hurt him even though Steve doesn't give a shit.

It's an easy slide after that and Steve can't help himself as they breathe into each other's mouths, breaths mingling, desperate for one another and Steve can't help the noises he's making.

"Fucking hell- Billy" he says breathlessly as he sets a decent pace.

"Please, Steve don't cut it off again- god fuck, please I can't-" Billy says, slamming up into him with a particularly hard thrust causing Steve to falter and when he falls forward, hand near Billy's head he tilts them up until Billy is sitting upright with Steve being forced to hold onto him by his shirt.

Steve wraps his arms around Billy's neck, elbows resting on his shoulders as he gets his fingers into Billy's hair and pulls, kisses him like he was made for it and the pace is so fucking desperate, everything is just desperate and messy, he can't stop himself.

"Can't, won't- hurt so fucking much" Steve tells him when he pulls away, resting their foreheads together and Billy starts to move more, starts to fuck up into him and Steve starts to get even louder, can't help himself.

"God, fuck- babe, you feel so fucking good" Billy tells him as he kisses up his throat, nips at his jaw and Steve can't help the whine that comes out of him now.
"I love you, I fucking love you, I've loved you since before the bond too" Steve tells him, admits to him because it's what he'd wanted to do originally until he'd gone and fucked everything up and Billy's breathing gets harder, his grip gets tighter and Steve can't help himself as he runs his hands down Billy's chest, nails scraping over his nipples and Billy shudders, flips them over, slams Steve down into the bed, makes him gasp as Billy brushes against his prostate for a moment.

"You think- I god, I fucking don't know that already?" Billy growls out, fucking into him harder, setting a far more brutal pace.

"I know, I know I just- shit, Billy right there- I needed you to know" he keens out, back arching as Billy starts hitting him right where he needs it.

Steve is close, impossibly close when all of a sudden Billy grips him at the base of his cock, stopping him from coming as he gets his face into the crook of Steve's neck, bites into his shoulder as Steve cries out from the frustration of it, from having been close and to have Billy stop him, it's fucking painful.

He goes wild, pulls at Billy's shoulders, starts cursing him out, feeling like he might cry and Billy gets to Steve's ear, bites it gently, slows his pace and then he's pushing his emotions onto Steve so he can feel everything, all of it, and if he'd been going wild before it's much worse now as he starts to mumble unintelligibly.

"I'm not done with you yet" Billy says, voice husky as he starts to fuck into Steve again brutally and Steve groans, gets impossibly loud and he's glad it's hard to hear through these bunkers because he refuses to stop himself, doesn't have enough sense to keep himself quiet.

Steve screams after his pace gets even faster, the feeling of it, of having his own feelings to deal with as well as Billy's increasing.

It's too much because Billy's still gripping him, won't let him come, just keeps building it up and Steve thinks this is what going insane must feel like.

"Still can't fucking- still can't believe you" Billy says and he's getting wild, starting to lose it, Steve can feel it through the bond and he urges him on, wants to tip Billy over that point of having no more control because Steve really wants to come right now, can barely even handle it, is teetering right on the edge of blacking out completely.

"Can't believe you'd think all of those things, I can't fucking live without you" he chokes out, gripping a hand onto Steve's waist and he knows it'll bruise.

"Ah, fu- Billy please, please" he says, can't take it anymore, can't hold on anymore, needs to come, needs it so much that he feels like he's going to burn up.

"Not yet love, need you to understand" Billy tells him and Steve's eyes roll into the back of his head as he starts to sob, it's too much, too much, too fucking much.

"No, no, no I understand please, Billy- need to come" he whines out, starts pulling at his own hair, starts trying to get more, starts trying to get Billy's hand to just let go but Billy bats it away and Steve grabs at his face, pulls at Billy's hair, tries to pull him in.

Billy still pulls away, starts to chuckle and Steve grabs at his shirt, feels helpless, can't get Billy to do anything, starts begging, can't help himself as he says whatever he can to just get Billy to let him come but none of it works, nothing works and he's sobbing, he's crying.

"It's alright love, let go for me, give over to me, let me take care of you" Billy says to him gently and
Steve listens almost immediately, would do anything, goes boneless, stops trying to fight him, lets Billy do as he pleases.

"That's right, so good for me, love you so much, you drive me fucking insane" Billy groans out and Steve grips his hands into the sheets and Billy lets go of his cock, grabs one of his hands, eases it off of the tight grip on the sheet, interlocks their fingers, pulls his hand up to his lips, brushes them against his knuckles gently before putting it back down next to his head as he starts to use his other hand to pump him.

It barely takes one tug before Steve is coming harder than he ever has in his life which is saying something because they've had a lot of sex, most of which has been fantastic but this.

This is something different, too many emotions, too many admissions of things they had needed to say to each other but had never said before until now, the bond coming back to life like an electric shock, accepting their love for each other, all of it feeling like open wounds suddenly being healed that they didn't even know they'd had.

They become one for a moment and he feels the shift, feels something change inside of them, between them, the bond is even stronger now, something Steve hadn't been aware was even possible as he sees white.

When they come back down from their high, which takes an impossibly long amount of time Billy is holding him from behind, running his hands all over, anywhere he can reach, being gentle with it as Steve grabs one of his hands, pulls it to his chest, just holds it there as they bask in the afterglow.

Eventually Billy finally breaks the silence.

"Hopper's going to take Kali, Funshine, and Mick and they're going to take care of things" Billy tells him and Steve sighs.

"Yeah, alright, do we stay here until then?" he asks, not really wanting to be stuck inside of this place longer than necessary.

"Aw, poor pretty boy, you miss your lavish house and bed?" Billy says, snorting at his own joke.

Steve can't help it as he laughs lightly, running his lips over Billy's hand again.

"Yeah of course, I bet you miss it too" he says.

Billy presses his lips onto the side of his face and smiles against his cheek.

"What can I say, you've spoiled me rotten in that castle of yours" he purrs out.

They stay silent for a little while after that and Steve turns over so they're face to face, starts trailing a hand down his chest, running his finger over it lightly and he doesn't know he's doing it until Billy goes completely still.

Steve's not sure why Billy goes still at first, wonders if he's done something wrong all of a sudden before he realizes what he'd been doing as he looks at Billy's face, an expression on it that Steve has never seen before as his own heart rate picks up and he feels like it's going to beat out of his chest.

He'd been humming under his breath softly, hadn't been paying attention to what he was doing, had just been laying there mindlessly happy.
He had started humming *that song*, the one from Billy's memory of his mother, one of his last good memories he'd ever gotten to have of her when they were in the kitchen and she'd told him the story of his birth.

"*I ever tell you the story about this song baby?*"

Steve hears her voice say, echoing in his head and he probably looks like an idiot as he gapes at Billy, trying to think of an excuse.

*Oh, I just really like that song.*

*What a coincidence, you know that song too?*

He knows there's nothing he can say though, Billy isn't stupid and he wonders if Billy will get upset because Steve knows how much of a sore spot anything involving his mother is, knows how much it hurts him to think about her and he'd just gone and wrenched that door wide open.

Steve doesn't know what to do, he isn't sure how to handle this situation, he's never asked Billy anything because he'd seen the memories himself, has always tried to give Billy that space and privacy to have it all to himself since he had seen some of it anyway, to allow Billy to talk when he's willing to talk, if he ever *is* willing to talk but those moments are always so few and far between.

Billy eventually looks like he recovers as he clears his throat, strokes his thumb over Steve's cheek softly and looks at him so openly that Steve feels his heart soar and it's so sappy he almost gets embarrassed by it, by his own reaction.

"You saw that memory?" Billy says softly, voice shaking a bit.

"Ah- uh, yeah, the story of your birth, you were in the kitchen with her" he says, voice cracking a bit, going high pitched as he swallows hard afterward.

Billy gets visibly choked up, eyes watering as he smiles and it's downright bittersweet, makes Steve want to just hide him away from the world, pull Billy into himself like he's done before and shield him, protect him from anything and everything, run away with him far away from all of this, all of the chaos so it's just *them*.

"She made me spaghetti that night" he says, chuckling lightly as he wipes a tear from his eye and Steve can't help it, he laughs too, cups Billy's face, pulls him forward and kisses him gently.

"I don't even like the Beatles, can't stand them, probably because it reminds me of her" he says, and it's a genuine laugh this time, a happy one.

"Aw come on, Come Together is amazing, they're total heart throbs" Steve says, pouting at him.

"Oh god, let me guess, you're a Mccartney fan?" Billy says rolling his eyes.

"Nah man, Lennon all the way, what a dream boat" Steve says, moaning jokingly as Billy snorts and gets on top of him again.

Billy kisses him lightly on his face before pulling away to sigh deeply, locking eyes with him.

"Every year on the anniversary of her death I drive out somewhere by myself and force myself to listen to it" he admits and Steve inhales sharply.

"I think part of it is because it's in remembrance but mostly to punish myself or something" he says
with a shrug.

"It wasn't your fault Billy, I know you won't ever think that way but it's true, things just happen" he says, running a hand through Billy's hair.

"I think about the things I could have done, if I'd just gone in with her in the first place instead of being such a wussy maybe I could have saved her" he says, getting a far off look in his eyes and Steve remembers it all so clearly, like it's a memory of his own.

"You can't think like that, you'd have probably been pulled in right along with her, nobody would have been able to save you" he tells Billy even though he knows there's nothing he can say.

"Sometimes I wish nobody had saved me, I wish I could have just floated away with her" he says and Steve feels the tears silently streaming down his own face as Billy just still gets that far off look in his eyes.

"I tried to drown myself after dad put me in the hospital, after I healed up, I went out to that beach one night because we still lived near it and I just." he stops and Steve feels Billy's tears hit his face as he lets out a shaky breath.

"I walked in, I'd started to drown, almost got away with it and everything, I saw her for a moment too" he says and Steve grips his hands into Billy's shirt and starts breathing heavily, remembering the first time he'd almost gotten swallowed whole by Billy's darkness, the first time he'd seen the beach.

He sees a woman, sleeping peacefully in front of him, mirroring him but her eyes are closed.

She's beautiful with long blonde curly hair down to her lower back and he wonders if this is Billy's mother.

He'd never heard Billy mention his real mother, couldn't remember seeing any pictures of her but then again he didn't actually know Billy that well in retrospect, they didn't exactly sit around telling each other stories and braiding each other's hair.

He reaches out to her, to go and touch her face because she looks so much like him.

Or rather, he looks so much like her and when he just barely gets close enough to touch she opens her eyes and grabs his wrist in a bruising grip, her expression is furious.

"I started hallucinating and she was so angry with me" he says, whisper quiet like it's getting harder and harder to say the words.

"You did this, you did this to me" he hears inside of his head angry and vengeful and he tries to pull away but can't, she won't let him.

"I'm dead because of you!" she screams and Steve can feel himself crying, not just in a physical sense but his soul is crying.

Why was this sort of guilt inside of Billy?

He's scared, he doesn't want to feel it anymore, it's awful to feel how much Billy hates himself for so
many things and he knows if he stays here it will drown him, consume him, he'll be lost inside of it.

"I'm sorry" he hears himself saying and repeating over and over again and he doesn't know if he's the one apologizing or if it's Billy, or maybe it's both of them.

He fights against it, tries to follow his way back to his side of the bond and it's nearly impossible at first until all of a sudden he's reached the shore of the beach again and he gasps out, breathing in air and spitting out water as the waves lick at him calmly instead of being a raging torrent like before.

"Somehow I'd gotten back to shore, I guess my body just moved without me thinking and I got carried back and I hadn't even realized it but that's when I knew I didn't really wanna die yet, I was so fucking scared and I felt so guilty for even wanting to be alive" he says, burying his face into the crook of Steve's neck as he just shakes and sobs, holding on for dear life.

Steve holds him tight, cries with him because he knows, he'd felt it, had experienced that residual memory in some strange dream like form, he just stays there with Billy, whispers into his ear how much he loves him and how much he wants him to be here, how he can't go on without him, how they're bonded so he can't leave without him just yet, how that would just be rude and eventually Billy laughs at that last part and composes himself.

"You still haven't eaten" Billy suddenly says, voice raspier than usual from all of the crying and Steve snorts.

"Yeah, true" he says, shrugging.

"Alright love, let's go see what this piece of shit place has" Billy says, getting off of him, pulling him up as they get themselves back together.

"We should probably shower first" Steve says with a smile, looking at how disheveled they look and how they must smell of sex.

"Yeah, alright" Billy says as he pulls him by his wrist and Steve falls forward, puts his hand against Billy's chest to right himself as he glares up at him.

Billy just smiles at him, blindly bright as he pulls him in for a long and languid kiss and when he pulls back and Steve's eyes flutter open he has a stupid smile on his face, can't help himself.

"I love you" he tells Billy, because he wants to create new memories for him, turn the bad ones into good ones, needs him to know that's the one thing Steve knows for certain in his life because no matter how bad it gets between them that one thing will never change.

He will always love Billy, no matter what.

Billy snorts, rests their foreheads together, closes his eyes and they just stand there, breathing each other in.

"I love you too"
Yeesh, this was hard to write, it took longer because of that fact alone.

I pulled on a lot of personal experience when it comes to being in a relationship with someone where there's just a lot of passion.

One second you're so deeply in love and then the next you want to wring their neck, emotions can be so fickle at times.

The high's are VERY high and the low's are VERY low, it's exhausting but it's pretty accurate for the kind of relationship these two have with each other.

They worked it out though and I wanted that to be an important point because at the very least they're evolving with one another, they work through their problems at the end of the day and I also wanted to keep touching on the fact that you start to mirror the person you're with and take on some of their attributes as your own.

Billy is learning to be more patient and holding himself back more while Steve is a basket case lashing out at everything and everyone, being sick of everyone's shit and finally getting tired of everyone trying to walk all over him while they try to use his compassion against him.

I didn't want to take the whole Steve killing a man thing lightly and just have it be a one off thing that I write and then discard, it's a work in progress, those aren't easy emotions to work through I would assume (I've never killed someone so I dunno for sure lololol)

Everyone's been sending me songs and I love every single one of them so I have a song for all of you this time that kind of broke me while I wrote this chapter.

Hold Me by The Sweeplings

I kind of just died when I heard it and now I can never unhear it.

<3
I've rewritten this chapter five times.

Kill me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Silence.

Kali hates silence.

Before they even get to the containment chamber she already has a bad feeling and judging from the look on Jim's face she clearly isn't the only one.

She takes Funshine inside with her, orders the rest of them to stay in the van, to keep watch because the less people she needs to worry about the better.

Funshine takes the lead and she expects to see Owen's men guarding it except immediately it's wrong, there's no one outside which means if they were here they'd now be inside.

It's a remote location some fifty miles from the cabin, away from the lab, away from Hawkin's and it's deep within the woods, hidden away, the path they had driven on was barely a path at all and the van will need to be cleaned, she'll certainly need new tires.

Mick will take care of that though, it's not really her concern.

Her concern is that the hatch is wide open, the metal grating bent in a way that no normal human is capable of.

There's not much Kali is afraid of, honestly she's not even afraid of this Mind Flayer but she is afraid for everyone else that crosses paths with it.

She knows her illusion's work on it, or at least it works on the host, she'd been the one to help Jim capture Dylan in the first place, it's why he had recognized her when the body swap had occurred.

Or maybe it wanted her to believe that her illusion's work, lure her into a false sense of security, she's starting to get the feeling that it's learning at a severely rapid pace if the broken hatch is anything to go by.

Does this mean the host is changing too?

If Steve can shatter her illusion's then why wouldn't the Mind Flayer be able to?

It's times like these she misses Jane, it's better to have back up especially when that back up is the only true threat to what they're tracking down in the first place.

Unfortunately all she has right now is herself and Funshine.

It's not that she's afraid, if anything wary would be a more correct term because whatever is inside
Her gut is screaming at her to walk away, it's clearly not here anymore, she just needs to warn Hopper that it got free, turn around and go back.

But she feels compelled to go inside, curiosity getting the better of her as she nods to Funshine to continue onward.

There were lights on the walls leading down the stairs but the crunch of glass beneath her feet indicates they're all shattered now.

Whatever they're about to find isn't going to be pretty.

It's only when they get halfway down, when the natural light from outside starts to not be enough anymore does she notice there's a very dim light coming from the bottom of the stairs leading down into the main room that goes toward the containment chamber.

They move slowly and when she finally sees over Funshine's shoulder who stops just before he reaches the last stair she gasps, clutching at the back of his shirt.

It's a massacre.

Five, no- seven dead bodies mutilated, thrown about every which way, the glass from the chamber broken, there's a body speared on top of a rather large and sharp broken piece of it and Kali feels sick.

She's seen plenty of dead bodies, killed plenty of men, tortured quite a few of them too but this is purely animalistic made worse by the fact that there's only one single light in the middle of the room at the top of the ceiling that seems to have survived the whole ordeal.

Everything else is cast in a dim darkness like they've just walked into a scene for a horror movie.

There's some sort of black sludge lining the walls as she moves past Funshine to get a good look at the damage and inside the chamber in the far left at the top of the ceiling in the corner is some sort of pulsating pod.

She doesn't go near it.

"Get the others" she tells Funshine and he happily obliges.

There's visible particles in the air but they're not overwhelming, she assumes it's the pod producing them but isn't sure.

When Jim comes down he immediately puts a cloth to his face as his eyes widen.

"Fucking shit!" He yells out.

"It's gone" she says.

"No, really?" Jim says sarcastically with a hefty amount of anger thrown in.

"Where would it go next?" She asks, it's all downhill from here.

"I- shit, I'm not sure, I'd say Will but he's with El, it won't want to go near him with her in the vicinity" Hopper says as he starts walking around to survey the place.
"These are Owen's men, I recognize a couple of them" he says.

"Sheldon must have finally caved" she says with a sigh.

"I need to warn Steve and Billy, I need to warn everyone" he says as he looks at the phone hanging off of the receiver against the wall.

He tentatively goes to pick it up and clearly hears a dial tone because he looks visibly relieved to hear that it still works.

She sees Hopper dial a number and with the absolute silence in the room she hears the audible click of someone answering on the other end of the line.

Steve is staring him down and he can't find it within himself to get defiant or defensive.

Things had been moderately resolved between the two of them, the bond was back in business and Billy's pretty sure he's still exhausted from how fucked everything had gotten there for a bit, he'd been destroyed and it had all felt hopeless, he'd ruined everything.

Yet Steve still somehow found it within himself to forgive.

They slept in each other's arms and when Billy had woken it had been to Steve giving him one of the best blow jobs of his life, morning sex was always a personal favorite for Billy.

It had been downright domestic, completely and utterly blissful and he'd even made breakfast for Steve afterwards as Steve proceeded to cling to him like an octopus which had been pretty fucking adorable like Steve couldn't keep his hands off of him.

Billy certainly isn't complaining.

But he's also not stupid.

Steve can forgive easily, has done it plenty of times and unfortunately Billy is aware that Steve puts up with a lot of his shit, forgives a lot of things that Billy has done but he doesn't forget, he never forgets.

Steve is the kind of guy that can differentiate situations, let himself get lost in a moment and put what needs to be addressed aside for a bit but when the dust settles and the smoke clears reality kicks back in.

The reality of what Billy had done.

He'd been expecting it and he'd been hoping to put it off a little while longer but ultimately he knew Steve would come back down like a child on a sugar high and he'd address the elephant in the room now that their emotions weren't so out of whack and the bond wasn't pounding between them like the best kind of pain.

Now, the bond seemed to feel content, sated, purring under his skin like a cat and Billy wonders when he'd started to see it as a separate entity.

"We need to talk" Steve says to him and he waits until he's fully dressed himself as Billy sits on the bed and just waits for him to continue.
"Billy, I-" he stops, worry all over his face as he rubs a hand over it to smooth it out but it doesn't work.

"I know, say what you need to say, I imprisoned you, I forced you against your will, I went back on my word and I broke my promise, the only promise that mattered" Billy says, helping him along.

"It's not just about that though, you'll do it again, if you feel like you need to then this is just going to happen again" Steve says, folding his arms over his chest.

"I- no, like I've told you before, it's not my choice-" Billy says as Steve's face goes from worry to anger within a millisecond.

"What the fuck does what you said before matter anymore now that you've gone and proven your word means absolutely jack shit?" Steve says in exasperation and it's not untrue, he has a point.

The trust isn't there anymore, they love each other sure but Billy had just gone and torn the trust he'd built with Steve into shreds.

"You'll do or say anything to lure me into a false sense of security and the moment you feel like you know what's best for me you'll just take it all away, all over again" Steve tells him and Billy's jaw clenches.

It's true, Billy can't even deny it, he'd panicked when Steve had told him he'd do the body swap again, if Billy is being totally honest with himself and he could do it all over again he'd change nothing.

That prospect scares him the most.

"You'd do it again, wouldn't you?" Steve says in disbelief, like he can somehow read Billy's mind all of a sudden as Billy looks up at him in surprise.

"You fucking asshole, you would!" he yells out this time, somehow seeing the answer in his eyes or his face, Billy isn't sure.

Billy gets up and rubs his hands over Steve's arms soothingly which doesn't seem to be helping as he takes a deep shaky breath.

"I panicked Steve, all I could think was what if you were going to do it right then, right there, what if within a single second I'd have lost you and Dylan would be staring me in the face not knowing who I was?" Billy tells him, trying to explain himself.

"You projecting your fears of losing your mother onto me is getting really fucking old Billy" Steve says mercilessly.

It hits Billy deep in his gut as he takes a physical step back, that is not what he'd expected Steve to say at all.

"Don't get me wrong, I understand it better than anyone in your life past, present, or future ever will but at some point you need to start taking responsibility for yourself, you can't keep letting the past dictate your actions" he goes on to say, not letting up one bit.

"You do not control me, I am not yours to control, my life is my own and this bond is a gift, a gift that you think you can take advantage of, that you see as an opportunity to force onto me whenever you see fit, whenever you somehow think you're right" Steve spits out.
Billy can feel his eyes start to water, doesn't even know what to say, is completely floored but Steve doesn't stop, just keeps twisting the knife.

"It doesn't matter if you're right, it doesn't matter if you're wrong because none of that is an excuse, there is no excuse for taking my free will away from me" Steve says, and this isn't a side of him Billy has ever encountered before, it scares the shit out of him.

"Just because you can, doesn't mean you should" he says pointedly, pausing to let that sink in.

Billy swallows and his mouth feels dry as he goes to speak but can't find the words so instead he just nods.

"All you've gotta do is talk to me, if I'm about to do something stupid or reckless just talk to me, don't turn it into something that you get to decide, don't jump the gun and even if I do end up being reckless so what?" Steve says, barking out a laugh.

"I might lose you though" Billy says and Steve just shakes his head and pinches the bridge of his nose.

"We're all gonna die one day Billy, everybody dies, it's probably one of those few things in life that's absolute, never changing, your fears are going to ruin us, you understand that right?" Steve asks him, a look of heartbreak on his face as Billy inhales sharply.

"Is it so bad, being afraid that I might lose you?" Billy tries to reason.

"No, but when you do it to this degree with the power you've been given, then it's bad, then it becomes a problem and I know I'm being slightly unfair, I used that fear against you and I am truly sorry" Steve says, scratching his head nervously.

"I can promise you though that I won't ever do that again, I won't ever use your fear against you no matter the reason, it was wrong and just fucking cruel and I hate myself for it but you still can't just control me" he clarifies as Billy goes to sit on the bed again, nodding in understanding.

"You know you can trust my word, I'm giving it to you but I can't trust yours, not anymore" Steve says honestly and it hurts, it fucking hurts but Billy knows there's nothing he can currently do about that right now.

"I hate this, I don't like having to go back to this like when we first met, not being able to trust you, not knowing if you'll fly off the handle, being afraid of you, I want to be able to trust you but I can't, I just can't" Steve says as he goes to sit next to him, taking Billy's hand into his own and gripping it tight.

"I will always love you, don't you ever doubt that but love can only get us so far, don't ruin this like your father ruined his relationship with you" Steve says as Billy looks at him in confusion, not understanding.

"Don't let it get to that point, don't make me resent you like you resent your father for all of the cruel things he's done to you, don't take advantage of my love for you, don't put me in that position of being incapable of forgiving you" Steve says and fuck, he's right.

"Because I can't keep giving you free passes, I can't keep forgiving you over and over again, at some point something will break, something that can't be fixed if you keep going down this road" he tells him, cupping Billy's face to turn it so they're looking into each other's eyes.

Steve's right, he's fucking right.
Billy will always love his father, there's always that part of him that holds some semblance of love because of course he will, it's his dad but it will never matter ever again, just because he loves him doesn't mean he forgives him, he's done too much, his relationship with Neil can never be mended, it's beyond repair.

This must be what Steve had meant all that time ago in the car after Billy had agreed to using himself as bait, tried to trick Steve, tried to destroy what they had built with one another at the time but Steve had called him on his bluff.

"That's so wrong on so many levels I have no idea where to start Billy, you can't just do that, you can't just keep doing this, one day you're going to push it too far and it's going to do irreparable damage to our relationship"

Fuck, shit, he's right.

Why does he have to be right?

He can't say sorry, it doesn't mean anything because Steve knows he's not, he's not sure what to say, what he can say.

It just is what it is for now and Billy has to live with that and start from the bottom again to work his way back up.

"Okay, I understand" is all he decides to say because at least he can give Steve that much.

At least he can let Steve know he understands what he's trying to tell him, understands the warnings now for what they were, for what they are.

Steve smiles and it's a sad smile, it's not a smile Billy wants to see on his face as he averts his gaze and Steve kisses him softly.

Billy doesn't want to lose this, doesn't want to lose Steve, he has to be better if they're going to make this work.

Nearly an entire day goes by and himself, Steve, Nancy and Jonathan are bored out of their minds playing cards when Billy gets a ringing in his ears and it's like the sound of static, like when your ears pick up on the frequency of a radio or something.

Suddenly he starts to hear the phone ring as he turns his head to look towards the room it's in.

Except something isn't right.

It's definitely a phone ringing but it's like he can hear it ringing from far away, like an echo in his head even though he knows the phone is just right there on the other side of the wall.

He turns his head to see Steve looking toward the room with a confused frown on his face.

Ok, so he's not the only one then?
"Do you hear that?" Billy asks him as Steve nods, not even looking at him, still looking at the door leading into the room.

"Hear what?" Nancy asks as Jonathan raises a brow at them, also indicating that he doesn't hear it either.

So just him and Steve, that can't be good.

He looks to Steve again and for some reason he has an awful feeling as they both get up at nearly the same moment and Billy makes it to the door first, when he opens it he sees the phone on the nightstand but it sends a chill down his spine.

It's not ringing.

But he can hear it.

"What the shit" he says under his breath as Steve brushes past him to pick it up without a second thought like an idiot, who even does that?

Billy makes a noise in the back of his throat before walking up to Steve to lean in so their heads are touching as they're almost cheek to cheek to listen in.

Creepy horror phantom phone starts ringing and Steve's first reaction is to pick up said phone like it ain't a big deal.

Billy is reminded of the balls this guy seems to have in the face of things that make absolutely no sense.

"Hello-" Steve says right as another voice speaks on the other line.

"Jim, I suppose I should have known"

Billy's heartbeat skyrockets as he locks eyes with Steve.

They hear Hopper's breathing, can hear the long breath he lets out.

That's definitely the Mind Flayer they just heard, there's no doubt in Billy's mind and the look on Steve's face just confirms that fear.

"I'd ask where you are but I doubt you're all that willing to tell me" they hear Hopper say after he seems to compose himself.

"This is good, if you're at the containment unit this means wherever you're hiding Steve and Billy is unprotected, that illusionist must be with you as well then?" it asks and Billy doesn't know if it's actually expecting an answer.

"You won't be able to find them so if I were you I'd give up now" Hopper hisses out, obviously trying to be intimidating.

"On the contrary, I have my ways" it says plainly.

Hopper seems to get ready to reply when suddenly the line goes dead and the ringing in Billy's ears and static in the air dissipates like he's been woken from a dream.

"Uh- what" Billy says, rocking back on his feet a bit, slightly disoriented as Steve stares at the phone
dumbly, putting it back on the receiver.

"What just happened?" Nancy asks and Billy realizes her and Jonathan had been standing in the doorway just staring at them this whole time.

"It's a warning, it wanted us to hear that, wants us to know it's coming for us" Steve says with a dark look on his face.

They all startle when the phone suddenly does actually ring and Billy leans over, putting his hands on his knees as he shakes his head.

"Fucking Christ, I'm gonna die of a heart attack before we die of anything else" he hisses out as Steve snorts, picking the phone up once more.

"Steve-"

It's Jim again but for real this time, Billy can barely hear his voice from where he's standing.

"Yeah we know, we heard" Steve says, interrupting him.

Billy goes to lean in again and he hears Hopper start to curse under his breath on the other end of the line.

"Do not leave, do you understand me?" Hopper says.

"Obviously, Will-" Steve says only to be interrupted.

"El is with him, you're both vulnerable, do not leave" Hopper says again and Billy sees the way Steve purses his lips in annoyance.

"Where's Axel and Dottie?" Jim suddenly asks.

"Oh- they got stir crazy, they left about a day ago" Steve says, he's not even sure where they went and he'd told them with Axel's injury it's a bad idea but they hadn't listened.

"It's only you four down there now?" Hopper asks.

"Yeah"

"We're coming back, I'm serious, whatever this thing was capable of before is nothing compared to what it can apparently do now" Hopper tells him.

Before Steve can say anything else or ask anything else Hopper rudely hangs up on him and Billy's brain goes into overdrive.

"Do you think it can find us?" Nancy asks.

"I don't know, I honestly have no clue" Steve says rubbing his hands over his face.

"How do we know it doesn't already know where we are?" Billy asks all of them.

"We don't but how could it?" Jonathan asks with a thoughtful look on his face.

"You swapped bodies, at the very least it saw the cabin right?" Billy says looking to Steve.

"I mean- maybe, Dylan saw the cabin so if anything he could easily lead it here" Steve says shaking
his head like he's unsure.

"If I were an inter dimensional being and I knew the vicinity of where my targets might be, what would I do?" Billy asks, it's partially a joke but he's also being serious.

Hopper said it's capable of things now.

What does that even mean?

"Do we have any weapons in this place?" Nancy asks out of the blue since nobody seems to know how to answer the question Billy has just asked.

"The guns, a couple of their guns are still here" Jonathan says as he gets up to walk down the hall.

"If we stay we're sitting ducks, if we leave we're out in the open and we still don't know if it can find us" Billy goes to say as Jonathan soon comes back with two guns, it's not much but it's still something.

Billy inspects them both to see how much ammo they have.

It's not much as he pinches the bridge of his nose, putting them in the middle of the table.

"So- Axel's blood is everywhere, it's not fresh but do you think it could still smell it?" Jonathan suddenly asks and they all go still because that's a real possibility.

"I don't know how this Mind Flayer thing works, does it smell blood?" Nancy asks.

"Don't know, it could-" Steve says and Billy stops listening to their talking as he cranes his head to look past them, behind them down the hall to where Axel's room is and almost as if on cue the lights above the room at the far end of the hall start to flicker.

"Guys" he says, going pale.

"Oh fuck me" Steve says under his breath as he turns to see where Billy is staring to see the lights flicker closer.

They all take small steps backward as it gets closer and closer until suddenly it just all stops.

"Stay completely still" Nancy says to them in a whisper and they all oblige.

It feels like an eternity, nothing happens, there's no flickering, nothing at all.

It comes out of the ceiling in the hallway and Billy is pretty sure he almost shits himself.

First they see the long grotesque arms reach out, clawing its way through into this dimension and that is not the Mind Flayer.

It falls onto the floor in a motionless heap for a long time like it's playing dead until the limbs start to move, it lifts itself up, flower mouth opening and closing like it's tasting the air as it turns its head every which way, listening, waiting.

He's never seen it before but recognition seems to dawn on the faces of everyone else around him.
Aw shit, it fits the description.

It's that fucking Demogorgon thing.

*There's more of them?!*

Steve had told him back when they'd gotten stuck in the Upside Down that they had only dealt with the one although it's probably stupid to have assumed there would have only been a single one in existence.

How had it found them?

If this thing is here, does that mean the Mind Flayer is too?

They continue to stay completely still as it starts walking towards them and Billy hopes to god they're not all about to die.

They obviously can't stay here with this slimy piece of shit walking around, it's like being stuck inside of a cage with a hungry lion that's just waiting to eat them alive.

If that thing walks past them, starts going towards the other hallway they'll have a straight shot to the exit except apparently luck is not on their side.

Apparently life has decided to give them a huge fucking middle finger, has thrown them aside completely because another one manifests itself, coming out of the wall on the far side of the room and Billy swears to fuck he can hear another one from behind them too.

Three.

They're trapped inside with three now.

No fucking way.

There's one behind for sure, he can hear it.

The first one is now within reaching distance of himself and Steve, off to their side, walking slowly and stopping and now the other one has started to walk down the hallway.

The one behind inching closer and closer.

"Okay, fuck this" Nancy says as she grabs one of the guns off the table and walks toward the one that's blocking their shot to the exit and everything divulges into absolute and utter chaos.

Billy grabs Steve by his arm as Jonathan freaks the fuck out and goes toward Nancy, Billy grabs the other gun off the table and the overgrown plant beside them turns quickly, reaches out, gets ready to grab Steve as Billy level's the gun into its face and waits for its head to open as he pulls Steve behind him.

He's just out of its grasp, missing him by a few inches as Billy shoots it right in the face and it recoils in pain, grabs at its face and screams.

The other ones scream too in response, like an alarm, like a warning.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.*

They see Nancy use the screaming as a good enough distraction, she darts past the one in the
hallway that has fallen to the floor and Jonathan follows after her but it grapples onto his ankle, causing him to topple over.

"Shit-" they hear Jonathan say as he falls, the wind being knocked out of him as Steve runs towards them and Billy follows right behind, keeping his back to them, leveling his gun at the other two Demogorgon's.

They stare for a moment, not moving, hesitating?

They can obviously hear them.

It's strange until they start making aborted spastic movements, clawing at the walls, bumping into each other to get to them.

It's creepy as shit, something out of a nightmare and Billy wants to wake up.

But he knows it's real, that's the worst part.

There's something not right but Billy can't quite put his finger on it because they're about to die.

Jonathan somehow gets free and he feels Steve pull him along by the back of his shirt, he'd heard a gunshot from behind him so Nancy must have shot it to get Jonathan free as they all start running.

Nancy and Billy are shoulder to shoulder, Steve behind them, guns at the ready to stall them when they get to the exit as Jonathan goes to unbolt and unlock the exit to get down into the basement so they can go unlock yet another door.

Billy is really starting to hate the fact that they're in this place, it's a fucking death trap.

"Now would be a really good time here Jonny boy!" Billy yells out to him, not taking his eyes off of the three grotesque monsters making their way towards them, crawling over each other.

"I'm fucking trying!" Jonathan yells in response.

"They're moving slow, they shouldn't be moving this slow" Nancy says and Billy knew there had been something not quite right going on.

"We're being lead somewhere" Steve says behind him.

Jesus Christ, why is this their life right now.

Jonathan gets the door open and they all go through it quickly, bolting it shut behind them.

Billy flips the safety on the gun he's holding, handing it to Steve as he fumbles around with it nervously like an idiot as him and Jonathan go to tip over one of the shelves inside of this creepy basement, why is every thing so creepy?

It tips over and glass shatters and nearly everything on the shelf breaks but it certainly makes it harder for the monsters to get through which is the obvious intent.

"They can travel through both dimensions you idiots!" Nancy says from across the room, already unbolting the other door.

"Well that uses energy or something right? Now they'll have no choice but to dematerialize, buys us time" Jonathan says and Billy can't argue with that logic.
Except they do start to try and break through the metal door, dents forming as the hinges start to give way, the shelf shifting a bit from the force of it as they take a step back.

"Yeah, you forget about their super strength?" Nancy hisses out as she gets the other door open and they don't waste their time, all of them running through it as quickly as they can as Steve shoves the gun back into Billy's hand.

He really needs to teach Steve how to use a gun.

They nearly kill themselves trying to get down the stairs as Steve is the last one down, closing the door behind them and Billy waits for Steve to run past him, wanting to take the rear as they haul ass back the way they came as quickly as they can.

"I saw two, I only saw two when they got through the other door!" Steve yells out as they continue to run for their lives.

It helps them to not be surprised as they see the third one, unaccounted for break through yet another dimensional portal in front of them and Billy is seriously tired of this shit as he moves past all of them.

He levels his gun, knowing it won't do much damage but it's really the only thing he has as he shoots it in the leg in rapid succession, hoping the force will cripple it for a moment and after the fourth shot it falters, falling to the ground.

Nobody pauses, they all run past it as the other two start coming at them from behind.

He's only got five bullets left, he can work with that.

Probably.

Probably not.

He hates this, hates this feeling that washes over him, he'd avoided it for so long, things had been going so well, they'd been healing and that hypertension from just needing to survive is not a welcome feeling.

It's like when they'd been trapped in that fucking place, when they needed to just stay alive.

There's no choice, every single second is precious and there's so much more to lose now.

It had been easier when he didn't know Steve as well, when they hadn't been as important to one another yet still didn't want to see each other die, there was still at least a decent separation that Billy had but now all he can think about is keeping Steve safe.

They make it back to the cabin and move quickly, grabbing whatever they can as Jonathan starts getting pissed off.

"Axel and Dottie stole my car!" he exclaims at one point.

Somehow Billy's car is pretty well off though, still able to be driven, only a few bullets seem to have hit the back doors, thank god.

"Fuck it, let's go" Billy hisses out as they load everything into his car and get the fuck out of dodge.

They drive for miles, they get as far away from Hawkin's as they can because none of them think
that going back towards Hawkin's would be a good idea, Jonathan fights them on it but ultimately the fact that Will is probably the most protected child on the planet with El around makes him feel much better.

No one knows what to do about the fact that there's only one more day of Spring Break because after that their family's will start to worry.

It's the least of their problems right now unfortunately.

They're the ones in danger right now, which is pretty clear as day if the Demogorgon's chasing them hadn't been enough of an indication.

They get far, further than expected.

Nancy eventually complains about how damn hungry she is and Billy doesn't blame her, she'd eaten nothing all day and they'd only had eggs from this morning, it's only about fifteen more miles to the next small town and he tells them they can eat there somewhere, get themselves together, get a game plan, find out what the fuck to do.

None of them speak when they get inside of the small diner, they haven't ordered yet but they do sit themselves down at a small booth near the middle of the diner next to the window.

There aren't that many people, a man in the back corner by himself, two at the main counter bar area sitting on stools talking to one another.

A female and male two booths down, clearly a couple and the decent looking female waitress.

Nancy is holding a glass of water in front of her with both hands like a life line and Jonathan looks dead inside while Steve is just straight up jumpy and everyone looks completely shaken up in general.

They're just still trying to process all of what has happened and Billy sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I think we're safe for the time being, none of us are bleeding, it's not like they can find us now" he says with a shrug, trying to make himself feel better.

"Something just- it's not right, there's something else going on here" Nancy says, shaking her head.

"Clearly, got an ideas?" he asks her because he'd been thinking the same thing.

"No, nothing, I've got nothing, there's not enough information, it's just a feeling" she admits with a grimace and Billy nods in agreement.

"You kids alright?" their waitress asks them as she walks up to their booth.

"We're good darlin' how's your day today?" Billy asks, shooting her a smile and he feels Steve's glare into the back of his head, trying to keep himself from snorting.

"Oh my, aren't you just sweet, I'm good, can't complain, what can I get started for you?" she asks with a slight blush on her face as she flips her hair over her shoulder.

Billy sees Steve's eye roll from his peripheral as Billy smirks in response.

Steve kicks his ankle under the table and Billy almost grunts in pain but is still just barely able to keep it together.
"I'd like to know what you like, what tickles your fancy?" he says in as much of a flirtatious manner as he can manage and Nancy covers her mouth to keep from laughing while Jonathan just glares at him, looking just as upset as Steve is.

"Oh- well, I think the biscuits and gravy are pretty good" she says, getting more and more flustered.

"Anything else that tastes good?" he asks her, looking back at his menu.

"Uhm, the- the pancakes, pancakes are good, they taste good" she says, clutching at her small notebook.

"Sounds wonderful, I'll get those then" he tells her as he goes to hand her his menu and when she goes to grab it he reaches up with his other hand to rest his hand against her wrist as she almost jolts away in surprise.

"Sorry beautiful, I'd also like a side of bacon if you don't mind" he says and she nods her head as she waits for everyone else to say their orders.

When they're all done she seems to have composed herself.

"Aren't you kids almost done with Spring Break?" She asks.

"Yes" Steve grunts out, glowering at her.

"Aw well that's fun, where you all from?" She asks, looking to Billy.

"Hawkin's" Nancy says.

"Hawkin's, how nice, I'll be back with your food soon" she says, smiling sweetly at them.

Billy waves to her as she walks away and Steve proceeds to move as far away from him as he possibly can.

"You're a fucking tool" Jonathan says and Nancy still can't seem to keep herself from wanting to laugh as she finally starts chuckling lightly.

"Oh come on, he was just having fun" she says, rolling her eyes.

"Fun-" Jonathan says, looking at her like suddenly she was going to incur his wrath all of a sudden as Billy snorts.

"You were all being total downers, I felt like I was about to jump out of my skin from how freaked out you guys were" he says with a shrug.

"So you flirt with the waitress, yeah okay, whatever" Steve says under his breath and Billy turns to him, goes to hold his hand but Steve swats him away.

"Aw, you are way prettier than she is, you know you're the only one for me" he coos.

"Yeah, you clearly say that to everyone who 'tickles your fancy'" he hisses out, crossing his arms over his chest to turn away and look out the window.

Billy rolls his eyes, can't help but want to get Steve all worked up, it's too fucking cute when he gets like this and he knows it's a dick move but he just wants some semblance of normalcy to settle back in.
It was starting to get him all freaked out, he needed to bring them all back into reality for a second.

Mostly he was just trying to be a dick though.

He sighs, knowing full well Steve is just going to continue to be pissed off as he scoots over and leans in to speak into Steve's ear to where nobody else can hear him.

"Come on love, you know I'm just joking"

Steve inhales sharply and Billy knows that's all it takes as he allows Steve to feel his emotions, to feel what he feels for Steve, to assure him it really was a joke.

The perks of having a bond with your lover, they get jealous and you allow them access to your emotions.

He's needed to do it with Steve a few times before, he gets incredibly aggressive when his jealousy sets in, pretends he doesn't care when every part of him screams otherwise.

Billy honestly isn't ever sure who he's trying to fool.

Himself maybe?

He gets so rude with whoever he thinks is flirting with Billy too, his usual grace with others goes out the window as he gets crass, short, and impatient.

He knows how easy it is to turn Steve pliant though, if he utters that one simple word usually that's all it takes.

Steve clears his throat and puts his hands down into his lap as Billy reaches underneath the table to grab hold of one of them, to run his fingers over Steve's open palm, feeling him shudder as he goes back to sitting normally.

He's lucky there's really no many others around.

To anyone looking it will just look like he's leaning in to talk to him quietly.

It all falls back into normalcy soon after that when he's certain Steve isn't still upset and he actually feels less jittery by the end of it.

When the waitress comes back she sets their food in front of them, brushes a hand over Billy's arm and he sees a paper tucked underneath his plate as she walks away.

Steve makes a noise in the back of his throat as Billy puts his hands up defensively as Steve takes the piece of paper and opens it, clearly getting ready to tear it into pieces.

He looks at what it says and goes completely still, turning pale.

Billy frowns.

"What?" Jonathan asks, seeing his reaction as he leans over to turn his head to see what it says as his eyes widen.

Billy takes it out of Steve's hands, looking at it himself as Nancy looks at them all completely confused and immediately his jaw clenches.

"We have the place surrounded, don't try anything stupid" he says out loud, reading from the paper,
They hear a gun cock, it's a fucking shot gun from someone over the counter, the waitress.

Billy sneers at her as she smiles sweetly, waving to him.

The other patrons in the diner get up from where they're sitting too and pull out their own guns.

What the fuck.

Son of a bitch.

"Seriously, you can't let us catch a break?" Billy growls out as they all get out of the booth with their hands up.

It can't possibly get worse though.

It does get worse, somehow everything gets impossibly worse.

A man steps out from the kitchen and Billy has to do a fucking double take.

"No fucking way, Richards?" Billy says incredulously.

"Of course it's you" Steve says like he has a bad taste in his mouth.

Billy's pretty sure he'll take this guy over demons any day though.

How the fuck had they found them?

"It's a little frightening how spot on my supplier was about the possible route you'd take" Richards says.

"Supplier?" Nancy asks.

"He told me you'd try to get away from Hawkins, the rest was left to me" he says, ignoring Nancy completely.

"Whatever, save the evil master plan shit for someone else, what happens now?" Billy asks, getting impatient.

Suddenly Billy stops, going still at first but it's like he can't help himself, it feels like a bad case of vertigo as he almost falls over and he sees Steve falter as well.

"We take care of the current problems"

Billy hears all of a sudden and when the spinning stops he looks up and standing next to Richards is a man he's never seen before.

The Mind Flayer.

This must be Dylan.

He feels it deep inside of himself, knows that this is that thing.

He'd brought the gun in with him, had it hiding at his side under his shirt, if anything it was to make himself feel better.
Billy doesn’t hesitate, he pulls the gun out.

He shoots.

Once, twice.

A third time.

He misses every shot, he's still way too disoriented, still shaking his head to clear up the fog.

Richards scrambles and everyone around him ducks down, they lift their guns to shoot him.

"Don't shoot, don't fucking shoot!" Richards screams, flailing on the ground like the cockroach he is.

"That's rude, you could have hit me Billy" it says, fake hurt in its tone, totally unbothered.

"Go fuck yourself" Steve spits out, holding at his own head.

Nancy and Jonathan are kneeling on the ground next to each other, looking on helplessly.

That's about how Billy feels too.

Apparently it can not only get worse but it can turn into a black hole of absolute shit.

"Steve, this will be fun, you know I can’t corrupt you from this side, not while I have a host at least, and we both know you won't give me Billy, how unfortunate for me" It says with a shrug.

Steve glowers at it.

"What a tragedy" he says sarcastically.

"It's amazing the things I seem to be able to get done if you give me a few months to get used to having a human conduit though" it tells them as it starts to straight up cackle, like a crazy fucking villain getting ready to dip them into a tank full of piranhas.

"Are we done?" Richards says, coming to stand beside Dylan again.

"You- you're working with it, why would you do that?!" Nancy says in disbelief.

"Plenty of reasons of course, Owen's is awful at keeping secrets, he's too nice" Richards says with a shrug.

"I have him and Jim to thank for all of this although if it makes any of you feel any better Jim wanted to kill me every step of the way" The Mind Flayer tells them.

It doesn't help at all, it is the opposite of what makes Billy feel better as he starts breathing deeply through his nose.

There's nothing they can do, they're completely fucking trapped, totally at their mercy.

The mercy of Richards and the Mind Flayer.

Steve wasn't joking, everybody eventually dies and that's obviously what they're about to do.

"Now if you don't mind I want what was promised to me" Richards says, turning to face Dylan.
A smile forms on its face, it's creepy and unnerving as it stares right at Billy and he has a really bad feeling all of a sudden.

"I change my mind" it says.

Richards takes a step back, glaring at it.

"Excuse me?" he sputters out.

"Just so you know the deal was that I give you over to them Billy, you upset them it seems, you killed two of their men, they didn't like that I guess, they wanted Steve too but I talked them down, I knew you'd be upset if they ever touched a single hair on his precious head" it says, tilting its head to the side to keep staring right at him imploringly.

Billy thinks he might throw up.

It turns to look at Richards.

"You really think I'd give you one of my children?" it growls out.

Richards eyes widen, betrayal in his eyes as he pulls out his gun but before he can shoot it the Mind Flayer grips him by his throat and promptly snaps his neck with one hand.

"Oh fuck-" Jonathan says.

Nancy's eyes widen.

Steve grips at his own hair.

Billy just stares, has no idea what the fuck is happening anymore as Richard's people turn to the Mind Flayer, train their guns on it.

It would be great except the three Demogorgons they'd encountered from before promptly decide to crawl out of the floor, one of them grabbing the ankle of the fake waitress, pulling her down onto it.

They panic and time goes in slow motion.

Nancy takes out her gun, apparently she'd brought hers as well as she trains it on the Mind Flayer, she shoots.

No hesitation.

It hits.

The bullet gets him right in the shoulder as he recoils backward, surprise evident on its face as it locks eyes with Nancy.

"Oh shit, oh shit" Billy says and he grabs Steve, lowers him to the ground, pulls him behind himself as he grabs Nancy by her arm and he can't hear anything, not even himself because people are shooting their guns at the Demogorgon's and there's screaming and yelling on top of everything else and his ears are ringing.

The Mind Flayer frowns, shakes its head and suddenly it turns around and walks through a portal of its own, dematerializing like he'd never even been there in the first place.

No fucking way.
How the fuck is that fair?!

It can teleport now?

Billy wastes no time, doesn't give two shits about the dying people in front of them. He hopes they get killed.

He motions for them to get the fuck out of dodge as one of the Demogorgon's make a grab for Steve. Billy pulls him back, he has two bullets left and he uses one, shoots the monstrosity as one of the fake civilian's stabs it in the shoulder with a large knife.

They run.

They run faster than they've ever run in their lives for the door.

Billy falters, the feeling of vertigo slamming into him once more as he feels Jonathan grab hold of him, helps get him through the door.

He hears Steve scream.

"Wait- DON'T!"

Wait for what?

Don't?

Don't what?

Who is he talking to?

They make it through the door and he feels a pull.

Billy feels himself fall to the ground, completely disoriented as Jonathan groans beside him, also having fallen.

Billy groans, lifting himself up and when he looks beneath him he makes a pained noise in the back of his throat as he turns his head up.

He turns every which way hoping it's an illusion except Steve is visibly shaking, Nancy is hyperventilating and Jonathan has his eyes squeezed shut as he puts his hands over his ears.

Like somehow that's going to help.

Billy turns around as he falls to his knees, looking at the now empty diner.

They're in the Upside Down.

Chapter End Notes

Again.
Tah-dah!

Looks like we're back in our favorite apocalyptic dimension gais and this time Steve and Billy brought their plus ones!

The amount of different versions I had of this chapter is seriously annoying, I'm talking like every scene went differently so many times and I finally decided to go with this.

I knew how I wanted it to end and I knew certain things that needed to happen but putting it all together had me arguing with myself which is why this took so long.

Also it's funny to me when I go through and read this as a reader and I laugh at how the Mind Flayer is just playin' everybody like a fiddle and I'm like "YA'LL DUMB, WHAT DID YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN?!?!?!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!!
They're going to die.

Or at the very least that's Steve's plan.

He never thought he'd see the day in which his endgame would end up being death, how somehow death would be the better option out of any other possible outcome that's staring them in the face right now.

Steve stares at Nancy's sleeping form curled around Jonathan as he sits side by side with Billy who also seems to be lost in his own mind.

Soon after they'd gotten pulled into the Upside Down, again.

It had divulged into an entire conversation of Nancy and Billy talking at each other to make sense of everything because they're both the same in that regard, they hate not understanding, not knowing, needing to make sense of anything.

They'd all concluded that everyone's been played by the Mind Flayer this whole time, it probably purposefully got itself captured and wanted to lay low.

It had mentioned as much to Steve regardless.

"It's amazing the things I seem to be able to get done if you give me a few months to get used to having a human conduit though"

That's what it had said, it pretty much admitted that the longer it inhabits a host the more it seems to be able to accomplish, the more powerful it becomes.

Owen's and Hopper had essentially put it into an incubation chamber and allowed it to cook which is ironic considering they should have seen that coming with the nature of their biology.

Even more frightening was the fact that they had proven time isn't standing still in this place anymore like it had been before, back when Eleven had closed the gate.

It had been Billy's theory, he'd been the first to bring it up, to ask Steve.

"Do you remember when we were first here, when we checked those newspapers?"

Of course he remembers, how could he not remember every agonizing second spent in this hell?

"Find a newspaper" Billy says.

"Newspa- why?" he questions.
"Because all of the clocks in that house, they were stuck on the same time and-" he stops, pointing up towards the clock hanging above them, the time reading 8:11 pm "this one has the same time too"

"Huh, well how bout' that" Steve says and they both start looking for a newspaper.

They'd checked, had gone into the diner and looked at one for themselves.

The date had changed, time was clearly flowing again, it wasn't stuck on the same date from before, the same date that Eleven closed the gate and time froze in this dimension.

Something new had happened too, Nancy mentioned it might be a vicinity thing, the dimension copies whatever is on the other side in a certain vicinity when a gate is opened nearby and depending on how long the gate is open and how large it is dictates the range of effect.

It's times like those ones that Steve found himself wishing Dustin and the kids were here with them, it was all starting to sound like some strange D&D stuff although he'd never wish for these kids to be here of course he just knows they always seem to have good ideas and laugh in the face of certain death, they always seem to have a pretty good attitude about everything.

Regardless this means Billy's car is actually on this side now too, all of their stuff in the car as well which had been a small miracle in and of itself.

A really small one.

They don't get followed, no Demogorgon's pop up on them, no Demo-dogs, not even that cricket thing and the Mind Flayer is nowhere to be found, there's just them and absolute silence.

Steve hates it, it's like a taunt, like the Mind Flayer doesn't need to waste the time, probably making them sweat it, making them wait, will strike on its own time.

Or maybe Nancy's shot into the host body had bought them time.

Probably not.

It was clearly already trying something though, nearly the moment Steve had gotten inside of this place he felt the beginnings of a headache coming on, it was getting worse and worse as time went by.

It took him a while to realize it's the Mind Flayer slamming itself against the walls he has up, the ones blocking it from entering the bond, protecting Billy from any mental influence.

It's wearing him down and Billy can tell, can clearly feel it to some degree, keeps casting him worried glances every now and again.

Steve wonders how long they can stay here, it's a small home across the street from the diner, they'd made it habitable, using clothing and other items they don't need to create a makeshift bed or as close to one as they could get.

The one himself and Billy should be on is empty as they continue to sit against the far wall, shoulder to shoulder next to each other in silence.

Steve continues to stare at Nancy, thinks of the time when he'd wanted her in his future.

He loves Nancy, cares for her deeply even though they're not as close as they used to be, even
though they very clearly think differently on nearly everything.

It had been so different before, he'd thought the world of her, had placed her on a pedestal, loved too much, smothered her with it.

He knows he's partially at fault but he wouldn't change a thing about it, not ever because it had all lead him to Billy at the end of it all.

Which seems to be coming for them much sooner than he'd thought.

But hey, what can you do?

Now it's all so different though in regards to Nancy, he downright doesn't like her sometimes but he still considers her family, still wants to protect her and Steve doesn't want her to die, not like this, not Jonathan either, poor unsuspecting Jonathan.

He wonders if he's thinking of his past because he knows this isn't going to end well, a precursor to his life flashing before his eyes.

Billy finally gets up and Steve looks up at him looking exhausted, there's a dead look in his eyes, the exhaustion obviously coming from somewhere soul deep.

He walks away, leaves the house to go stand outside and Steve follows.

He hadn't missed this, not one bit.

The dark sludge threatening to consume everything, the constant dark hue of everything around them, casting it all in an even more horrifically dimmed lighting, the particles in the toxic air, visible to the naked eye.

It just flat out fucking sucks.

Billy turns, looks toward-

Oh.

Hawkins.

The direction of Hawkins, he can see it from afar.

There's a storm coming.

"Should we be worried that the physical body is coming from Hawkins?" Steve asks out loud.

"Probably. Not much we can do about it though" Billy says with a shrug.

Steve walks up to Billy, bumping shoulders with him as Billy turns to look at him, small sad smile on his face.

"You and I clearly aren't making it out of this but Nance and Jon probably can, maybe" he tells Billy, wanting to get his opinion.

Billy takes a deep breath and turns to him so they're facing each other, he almost expects Billy to reach out and touch him, sees that he wants to but he doesn't, holds himself back.

Steve doesn't blame him, it's probably too much, this whole situation about as desolate as it can get.
"How do you suspect we do that?" Billy asks and he's not rude about it, seems genuinely curious and even sounds completely game for the idea.

"Dunno, you're the smart one" Steve tells him, tone tinged with amusement.

Billy snorts and puts his hands into his pockets, clearing his throat.

"No clue, I mean the Demogorgon's move between dimensions right?" he asks and Steve raises a brow.

"Yeah, why?" Steve asks not really understanding.

"If we trick one into opening a portal maybe we can get them through but the risk is high with something like that even if we do pull it off, you've still got a demon to deal with" he clarifies.

"We're also not in a position to be making deals with the Mind Flayer" Steve tells him, sighing.

Billy shakes his head like he can't believe they're even having this conversation.

"Hey" Steve says, wanting Billy to look at him.

Billy locks eyes with him, brows furrowed as he fidgets a bit.

"Hey" he says back.

"I don't want that thing using me for anything Billy" he tells him, better to talk about now.

"Oh yeah, fuck that shit" Billy says with a snort, clearly on the same page as he is.

"Is this where we make a death pact?" Steve asks, wanting to make sure.

Billy takes his hands out of his pockets, runs them over his own face, in his hair until he finally locks eyes with Steve again.

"You sure?" He asks, voice firm which Steve hadn't expected.

"That's one of the few things I'm sure about at this point, I will die before I let that thing take me, one bullet to the head is a far better fate" he says with a shrug as Billy just nods at him, jaw clenched.

"I actually agree with you for once Harrington, must be the end of the world" he says with a sad laugh.

"No, just the end of ours" he replies, sounding resigned.

Billy's eyes water as he wipes at his nose, clearing his throat.

There's silence for a while, so many things left unsaid, too many things left undone.

"It was good though, yeah?" Billy finally asks like somehow he doesn't know.

"Of course it was you idiot, you're the best and worst thing that's ever happened to me" Steve says, rolling his eyes.

Billy snorts and gets a genuine smile on his face, one that reaches his eyes.
"You have such a way with words, sweetheart"

"I'm serious, we did pretty good with the time we were given, I'm proud of us" Steve says with a resolute nod.

"I guess we should have known it was all going to catch up at some point" Billy says with an amused sigh.

"We're young and stupid, it's what we do, we take advantage of time" Steve says shooting him a smile.

"Woulda been nice though, growing old together, you losing all of your hair to become that nice old man that has hoards of children visit him on his patio" Billy says, shooting a smug smirk at him in response.

"I would not lose my hair you tool! You'd be the crotchety old geezer taking out a damn gun, threatening those poor children with it to get off your lawn" Steve says, pointing a finger at his chest as Billy genuinely laughs out loud.

"Ah man, you're probably right, except for the hair part" he says, wagging his eyebrows.

Steve pushes him lightly as Billy steps back, grabs him by his arm and then grabs him by the nape of his neck, pulling him forward so their foreheads are touching as Steve grips his hands into Billy's shirt.

"It was worth it, everything that has ever happened to me, all of that awful shit, my mom, Neil, if it all meant being with you, having those moments with you, it was all worth it in the end" Billy tells him, whisper quiet and Steve feels the lump in his throat form.

Steve can't seem to find the words because if he speaks he'll cry as he lets out shaky breaths.

"Even though you do drive me up the wall all the damn time" Billy chokes out and Steve can't help the laugh that gets punched out of him.

"Funny, I was thinking the same thing" he huffs out, trying to keep them from divulging into complete basket cases.

They just stand there, breathing each other in, holding tight and he can't bring himself to kiss Billy because he doesn't want their final kiss to be in this place, likes that their final intimate moment had been in that bunker, it was good, that's enough for him.

The only final moment Steve wants in this place is his own death.

"It's trying to get in Billy" Steve finally says pulling away slightly.

"I know, I can feel it, you ok?" he asks, running a hand over his cheek soothingly.

"Just hurts, so what's the game plan?" he asks, they need to come up with one.

They don't tell Nancy and Jonathan about their death pact, they leave that part out.

Saving Nancy and Jonathan is up in the air but they certainly keep the option open if the opportunity presents itself.

Himself, Jonathan and Billy try to salvage the car, make it driveable and it takes them longer than
they want it to but eventually they somehow manage to get it running.

"Huh, a working car in the Upside Down, who'd have thought" Steve says, snorting.

Nancy opens the driver's side door as Billy raises a brow, wondering why she's leaning down as he startles a bit to see her pull the lever to pop the hood of the trunk.

"Jesus, warn a guy, thought you were going to try and suck my dick or something" Billy says as Nancy goes to stand again with a look of disgust on her face.

"Gross, let's leave that undesirable task to Steve" she says to him as she turns to walk over to the trunk, probably to start loading things inside of it.

"Hey, wait a second!" Steve says, flailing his arms in the air as Billy and Jonathan choke on a laugh.

"Billy" Nancy says all of a sudden, tone a bit alarming as Steve goes to stand next to her, she's gone pale.

They all crowd around her and look inside of the trunk.

"Oh come on, again?!" Steve says, running a hand through his hair in exasperation.

It's not the original's, they're clearly replicas but there they are, the nail bat and crowbar, but there's two other weapons inside this time too.

An axe, and a-

"Is that a military grade rifle?" Billy asks in disbelief.

"Ok, now it's really fucking with us" Jonathan says.

"Probably giving us a false sense of hope" Steve says with a grimace.

"Toying with its food, that's what this is" Billy growls out.

Nancy shakes her head, looking pissed off as she goes to grab the rifle, figuring out pretty quickly how to use it.

"Fine, let's make it work for it" she hisses out, cocking the gun.

None of them disagree.

They load into the car and start driving away from the oncoming storm to buy themselves more time, it can only move so fast.

It'll eventually catch up to them but at this point they were going with making it as difficult as possible to get to them, they weren't going to go down easy.

"The fact that nothing has come after us is unnerving, like we're just playing into its hands still" Jonathan says.

"He's got a point, so far it's just sitting back and relaxing while we drive around like idiots" Billy says with a frown.

"Wait!" Nancy yelling out and the car swerves as Billy makes a noise in the back of his throat.
"What the fuck, don't do that!" he yells out, turning to glare at her for a moment before looking back at the road.

"Sorry, what if we drive to the lake?" she asks and they all look at her like she's insane.

"Ok sure, we're close but I don't have the gas" Billy says.

"Then we stop and get some, there has to be a store around" she tells him.

"Worst case we see about getting one of the gas stations up and running" Jonathan says, giving them alternatives.

"Yeah ok, like any of us know how to do that" Billy says rolling his eyes.

"Actually, that might be a good idea" Nancy says and Steve can tell she's got one of those ideas in her head all of a sudden.

Billy gets a crazy smile on his face as he starts drumming his hands on the steering wheel excitedly.

"I like the way you think Wheeler" he says, looking completely insane.

They lose a lot of time doing it but they figure out how to get the electricity going at the nearest gas station which had been the easiest part.

Getting gas to start pumping is what had taken the longest but eventually they get it done.

Nancy let's the spout go for a little longer, spraying it around on the ground after she's done filling the car and Steve leaves her to it as he goes inside of the small store to picks up a map, they might need it.

It's when they get to the third gas station that Steve's pounding headache has turned into a full blown migraine.

It fucking hurts and he knows Billy's starting to feel the residual effects of his own pain because every now and again he grimaces like he's the one in pain.

Billy feels it happening well before Steve does as they're walking to go back outside towards the car to move on to the next station.

Now that they know how to do it they're making great time on everything, getting good distance between themselves and the Mind Flayer especially with Billy's crazy driving.

Billy suddenly whips around right as he's about to go open the door to go outside and he turns to look at Steve, look of concern on his face.

"Steve-" he says and Steve feels his eyes flutter closed and he knows he starts to fall, he's pretty sure Jonathan grabs onto him and when he opens his eyes again he's sitting on the ground and Billy is touching his face all over, talking to him, running fingers through his hair but he can't make out what's being said.

His eyes close again.
He feels weak all of a sudden, every part of him breaking out into a cold sweat and he knows he's shaking, the waves of nausea rolling over him unbidden, it's pounding against the walls hard now, feels him breaking and he almost wants to give in, just wants the pain to be over, wants to give up.

"Steve, come on, look at me" he hears Billy say and when his eyes open again they lock eyes.

"Love, I need you to hold on a little longer, can you do that for me?" Billy asks, pushing his hair back, running a thumb over his lip lightly, his hands are everywhere.

"What the hell is going on?!" he hears Nancy yell out as she comes to sit down on Billy's left side as he realizes Jonathan is on his right, propped behind him holding Steve up into a sitting position.

"My connection with the Mind Flayer is stronger now that we're on this side, it's trying to get to my mind but Steve is walling it out and it keeps smashing itself into his walls like a fucking wrecking ball" Billy tells them as Steve feels his head loll to the side, he just wants to sleep.

"Don't fall asleep!" Billy yells out, slapping him in the face, not hard but definitely hard enough and that jolts him awake as he grabs onto Billy's upper arm.

"You with me, love?" he asks and Steve nods, swallowing thickly, mouth dry, feeling parched all of a sudden as his senses come slamming back into him.

"Just a while longer, fight it off for a little bit longer, alright?" Billy half asks, half tells him and he keeps nodding, using Billy's voice to ground himself as they start to try and lift him back up to stand.

"Maybe you should try to compel me" Steve chokes out, finding it hard to speak as he gets to a standing position, wobbling a bit as Billy and Jonathan keep him upright as Nancy looks at them with concern.

"What?" Billy asks.

"I'm serious, compel me to fight it, it might help" he says trying to shrug, they don't need to be taking any chances right now.

"I- no I can't-" Billy says and Steve frowns as he grabs onto Billy's shirt, moving them back until Billy slams against one of the small side counters as he hears things fall to the floor as one of the shelves get dislodged.

"Don't be- don't be a fucking pussy, I'm giving you permission you dip shit, compel me!" he yells out and he's breathing heavy, the Mind Flayer is much stronger than he is, they need to use what they have available to them.

"You're not in your right mind" Billy says, standing his ground and Steve laughs out.

"Literally this is the one time it could not be more important for you to do as you're fucking told for once in your damn life" Steve hisses out and Billy grimaces.

"Steve don't-" he goes to say and Steve shakes him.

"Just do it, I'm telling you to do it, I can't fight this thing by myself" he hisses out and Billy hold him up as he starts to falter.

"Ok, ok, both of you get in the car we'll be right out" Billy says and Jonathan and Nancy just stand there, completely concerned, unmoving.
"Fucking go!" Billy yells out and they finally oblige.

When they're gone Billy lowers Steve down so they're sitting again, probably being unable to keep him upright for much longer.

Billy pulls him close, kisses his face, his eyes, brushes their lips together lightly, presses a light kiss to one of the spots that Billy tells him he likes, always whispers to him so sweetly when they make love, the one where he has two moles right at the junction between his neck and jaw as he tilts his own head up, giving Billy access as he buries his face into the crook of his neck.

"Fight it, fight it for me, for us" he hears Billy say into his neck and the compulsion washes over him, making his eyes flutter shut as he rocks back and Billy keeps hold of him.

The migraine slowly dissipates back into a pounding headache and he wonders how long that's going to work, how long it's actually going to help.

"Ok, alright I think I'm good for the time being" Steve says, gathering his bearings as Billy looks at him like Steve's about to rip him a new asshole.

"Stop, it's different if I ask you to, stop freaking out" he tells him and Billy's jaw clenches.

"I know it's just- I don't want to cause more harm, not now, not when things are already complete shit" Billy huffs out as they get back up and start walking towards the car.

"Eh, don't worry too much, I don't think we have much longer to concern ourselves with much of anything so at least there's that" he says jokingly except he's actually pretty serious.

Billy snorts, shaking his head and they get back into the car to continue onward.

Things change when the lake finally comes into view, they're close and it all goes to absolute shit.

"Billy, tell me you see that" Jonathan says and they all look forward.

A horde of demo-dogs coming right for them in the distance.

"That must be a good sign, we're going somewhere we shouldn't be" Steve says.

"Alright, it's about to get bumpy" Billy says as he slams on the breaks as they all lurch forward, coming to a complete stop, letting the hell hounds get closer as he eventually turns the car around, makes them follow him instead.

Nancy swaps seats with Steve, rolls down the window and Steve hands her the rifle as she gets it ready.

"You think you can do this Wheeler?" Billy asks.

"Don't really have any other choice, do I?" she says as Billy snorts.

They get near the very first station and drive past it by a few miles.

The Mind Flayer is close, too close for comfort and it's moving faster, driving towards it puts a knot in Steve's stomach as he watches the storm clouds come at them faster, sees the Mind Flayer in the distance closing the gap between them.

He can hear the thunder roaring now.
Billy stalls the car, bides his time and it's probably the most tense he's ever felt in his life as it all closes in around them from both sides.

Demo-dogs in front, the Mind Flayer from behind.

They need to change the game, fuck falling into a trap, make this fucker work for it.

"You're really cutting this close Hargrove!" Jon yells out, gripping onto the arm of the passengers seat.

"If we can time this right we might be able to do so real damage" Billy says, totally calm and collected.

"At least one of us is sure" Steve says as he turns to look back at the Mind Flayer, breath quickening.

He's getting a migraine again, it's getting worse and Billy turns to look back at him as they lock eyes, his jaw clenching.

Billy turns back to look at the road, puts the car back into drive as he goes off the road, drawing the dogs, herding them like cattle so they're driving beside the Mind Flayer and it's really fucking close, way too close for comfort.

Steve looks out the window, looks up and he can see it hovering over them.

It chooses that moment to slam hard into his mind as he grunts in pain and he hears Billy grunt too, it just makes Billy press on the gas even harder.

"Billy!" Jonathan yells out as he eventually starts going back the way they'd come from, leading them back towards the lake.

Now, the dogs lead the chase, nothing coming towards them from the front.

"If Wheeler can do this and it buys us time I need you and her to take this over, you drive and she shoots from the passenger's seat" Billy tells them, clearly realizing they're about to have a problem on the mental side of things as Steve feels himself start to shake again.

"That's going to make the shots harder" she says with a grimace.

"Yeah well suck it up, those walls are about to come down and if it gets inside my head we don't want me to be the one driving" he hisses out and Nancy nods after a moment, taking a look at Steve who is now curling in on himself, holding his hands to his head.

He's trying to hold on, trying to buy them all time, it's pure willpower at this point and partially Billy's compulsion still helping him along.

They get back past the first gas station, lights blaring bright, severely contrasting against everything else that's just completely dark and desolate around them, a beacon, a challenge.

The storm rumbles ever closer.

"Now would be a great time!" Billy shouts.

"Shut up!" Nancy says, leveling the gun, looking through the scope, biding her time to wait for the right moment and Steve hopes to god she gets the shot off.

"Nancy!" Jonathan yells and soon after she shoots.
Once, one bullet, that's all it takes.

At first Steve wonders if it didn't work as he looks through the back window, watching the station but he sees it, sees the fire start, it starts to consume.

The flames lick around the metal pillars and the pumps and he almost wonders if they didn't take into account how long it might take to set fire fast enough for it to do what they need it to do except he doesn't need to worry for much longer.

He sees it explode before he hears it, the gas station goes up in flames as he covers his ears when the sound reaches them.

It's an explosion that hits everything dead on, more than half the demo-dogs burning alive.

It even hits the Mind Flayer and he sees it catch fire, it tilts to the side as if it's going to fall over slowly and he wonders if they've actually done it except it rights itself and the sound is fucking awful as they all close their eyes and put their hands over their ears other than Billy who keeps driving ahead, faltering a bit at first but recovering quickly.

It screams, it's unlike anything he's ever heard.

Steve screams too because it focuses all of its attention on breaking down his walls after that and he can feel the tears streaming down his face.

He thinks the car stops at some point, thinks that he can hear them all talking, doors opening and shutting and suddenly he feels Billy's hands on his face, feels Billy inside of his mind and he groans out.

It's second nature at this point as he pulls on them, on their souls, on both of them, pulling them in, pulling them under and they're suddenly standing across from each other inside of the bond.

They're standing on a dock, the ocean beneath them as the water sloshes around the beams holding the wood up and he hears the waves crash all around below but it's not raging, it's not consuming.

Not yet.

They just stare at each other.

There's a look on Billy's face like he's looking past him and he turns around to see Dylan at the end of the dock, standing on the beach for a moment, hands in his pockets just looking at them.

Eventually he starts walking on the sand, footprints indenting themselves into the wet slush below his feet only to be washed away by the water soon after as Steve hears the sound of boot against wood as it starts walking on the dock, getting closer and closer.

Steve takes a step back as it stops some twelve feet away from them and lifts its hand to rest it against some sort of glass.

Like the containment chamber, Steve's final wall.
When Steve blinks half of Dylan's body is burnt and his breathing quickens as Billy comes to stand next to him.

"That looks like it hurts" Billy says as Dylan smiles at them before lowering his hand to clasp them behind his back.

"It's never pleasant to burn but you both know exactly how that feels, you've both felt what it was like to burn, to have me burned out of Billy" it says.

"You've got absolutely no social skills, you know that?" Steve says with a snort as it tilts its head to the side in response.

"Is this you trying to get us to feel bad for you or something?" Billy asks, continuing for him.

When Steve blinks again suddenly Dylan has changed into Will and Billy takes a step forward as Steve continues to hold him back.

"I don't need you to feel bad, I don't need either one of you anymore if you're going to be difficult" it says and Steve grabs at his own hair.

"You're bluffing" he says, as Billy starts to struggle.

"You fucking son of a bitch" Billy spits out wrenching out of his grasp to stalk up to it, slamming his hands against the glass.

"Billy, El was protecting Will, this is a trick, it's tricking us" he says, trying to get Billy to calm down.

"It doesn't matter if you believe me or not" Will says and suddenly his face changes, becomes frightened and terrified as he locks eyes with Billy.

"Billy?" Will asks and Steve's eyes widen.

"Don't-" he says as Billy leans down, putting his hand against the glass as Will does the same.

"I- I tried to fight it but I- I wasn't strong enough" Will says, eyes watering as Billy rests his forehead against the glass.

"It's not real, Billy come on-" Steve says, walking towards him slowly, hand stretched out cautiously as Billy pounds his fists into the glass, causing Will to jump back.

He keeps pounding against it and eventually cracks start to form inside the glass.

"Billy stop!" He yells out to him but he knows it's no use.

The glass shatters and Billy doesn't see it but Steve does as Will gets a wicked smile on his face.

Billy gets up and turns around, looking at Steve, pure anger on his face.

"How do you know?!" he yells out.

Steve stops, going completely still and he's getting a really bad feeling all of a sudden as the waves start to pick up, the smell of water in the air getting stronger.

"Maybe that's why it was coming from Hawkins, maybe it got Will, we don't know anything for sure!" he screams out, pulling at his own hair.
"Billy, it's tricking you, it's corrupting you, you have to fight it" he tries to tell him calmly.

He already knows the truth though as he sees the black vines start to creep up onto the dock, black sludge beginning to consume everything as Billy falls to his knees screaming.

"Get out, get out, get out!" he says, thrashing and Steve feels helpless, his walls broken down, he's only human, he can only hold on for so long, he feels so fucking tired, doesn't know what else to do against a creature that is so much stronger than they are.

Will starts to scream behind him except it's not Will screaming, it's the creature screaming as it starts to become consumed in flames behind them and Steve watches Will burn alive.

Tears stream down his face as he holds his hands up to his ears, squeezes his eyes shut, he knows it's not real but he doesn't want to see this, he can't keep looking at that, can't keep seeing poor Will like that, the image forever burned into his mind of flesh burning down to the bone, the smell of it reaching his nose as he starts to sob.

Suddenly Billy is in front of him, pushing him down to the ground as he grips his hands around his neck, trying to choke the life out of him as Steve starts to struggle, pushing at Billy's face, tries to get him off but he can't as he greedily tries to get air into his lungs.

The vision around his eyes starts to darken and he can feel something wet falling onto his face.

Tears.

Billy's tears.

Steve's heart aches for him, he knows this isn't Billy, knows it isn't Billy doing this, knows he's being tempted, controlled, manipulated.

He pushes his feelings of forgiveness into Billy, wants him to know it's not his fault, doesn't want him to feel bad about this even though he knows it won't help until suddenly Billy falters, letting up just barely as Steve gets air back inside of himself as he uses the moment of distraction to use his lower body to turn himself, to turn Billy as he grabs him by his shirt.

Billy starts to fall off the dock except he holds tight and they both topple over into the water below.

Steve gasps awake to the car hitting the lake on impact as he slams into the side of the passengers seat hard, it disorients him for a moment and he scrambles to get his bearings as he's violently pulled back into reality as Billy groans beside him, starting to scream again, gripping his head, pulling at his own hair.

Nancy and Jonathan are at the front of the car as Nancy turns to look at him, fear in her eyes.

"They don't like the water, they won't come near it, not a single part of the lake has been touched by corruption, I'm sorry I don't want to die like that, I don't want it to get to us" she says and Steve nods in understanding.

"We die on our terms" Jonathan says as they hold out their scarred hands to one another.

Better to crash and drown than get torn apart by demon dogs or turned into an incubator, or worse.

Steve's glad he won't have to shoot himself now.
Water begins to fill the car quickly and before the car goes completely under Steve turns to see the Mind Flayer on fire, burning alive which means they must have gotten other explosions off onto it.

Good.

He thinks and Billy suddenly gets back up, reaches for Nancy's gun, goes to turn it on—

Jonathan.

Steve gets between them knowing full well he's probably about to get shot, adjusts the barrel as Billy pulls the trigger and Steve feels pain ripple all through him as the shot goes straight through his shoulder.

He grunts in pain and Billy screams again, dropping the gun as Nancy grabs it from him, getting it out of reach as Billy grabs Steve by his throat again, pulling him and slamming him into the back seat and Nancy and Jonathan fight to get him off, pulling at Billy while Jonathan gets Billy into a choke hold.

Steve wonders absently why it matters if they're all about to die anyway but he supposes if there is an afterlife Billy won't want to have died knowing he killed Steve.

Yeah, that would suck.

Nancy kicks out the windows, forcing water to come in faster, they clearly all have the same idea.

Billy isn't going to want to go out like this. better to just force them all to drown.

He hates this though, this isn't the way he'd have wanted Billy to die, it's fucking evil that life would do this to him.

Really?

Death by drowning?

It's just cruel.

It all happens fast, the water getting up to their waist as Billy continues to scream.

"No, no, no, stop!" he yells out, clearly trying to fight the influence of the Mind Flayer and Steve tries, tries to grapple onto the bond, tries to pull Billy inside of himself but there's tendrils holding fast so he tries something else instead.

He goes inside of Billy.

They're back inside, fighting against each other inside the water, inside of Billy's darkness that has been consumed by the Mind Flayer as Billy tries to get him under water, grabs hold, tries to choke the life out of him and they struggle against one another as the waves crash over him, pulling him under, pulling them both under and Steve starts to get disoriented flickering back and forth between the bond and reality.

The water in the lake getting into his lungs, drowning all of them as he sees Nancy and Jonathan clinging to one another as Billy fights to keep from drowning.

He goes back inside the bond and he's drowning in everything, in every single way possible, water
and emotions, fear, trauma, all of it reaching inside of him and eventually he stops fighting it, doesn't see the point.

They're dead anyway and he pulls Billy close, pushes one single thought into his head, the only thought that matters.

*I love you.*

Chapter End Notes

Oh man, I'm about to get yelled at so hardcore.
Again, sorry for freaking you all out, I couldn't help myself and my sister told me "Jokingly put your fic as complete"

I was like ohhhhh noooooooooooooooooooooo. I couldn't do that, that would just be evil as all hell and I'm pretty sure people would actually track me down or something!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Steve wakes and it's fucking awful as he gasps for breath, everything everywhere hurts, there's light coming into his eyes and he can't focus on anything.

It's a huge struggle to gain any semblance of stability.

If this is death he hates it, too much, too much pain.

Maybe he deserves this.

He hadn't been good enough, couldn't save anyone, not a single person, not even himself and when he finally gets his eyes to open it's to seeing Nancy above him crying, drenched to the bone and a man he's never met before.

"What-" he croaks out and he can barely speak.

"Oh my god, he's alive" Nancy cries out, cupping his face.

"I'm so sorry, you were going to die of blood loss we had to cauterize the wound" the man says.

He's so fucking confused as he tries to get up.

"I don't-"

I don't understand.

He tries to say but he can't get anything to work, no part of him wants to cooperate.

When he turns his head and sees Billy unconscious beside him his entire being comes to life, he gasps out like he's finally breathing, reaching for him involuntarily as he pulls himself over.

Nancy moves which he's grateful for as he pushes through the pain to essentially lay on top of him, touching him everywhere, resting his head on his chest to hear his heartbeat.

At first he thinks it's not beating for a moment and is about to lose his damn mind but eventually he finally hears it.

Thump-thump

Thump
"Thump-thump."

It's uneven and weak but he's breathing and Steve cries out, clutching at his chest.

Suddenly there are people he's never seen before all around him, grabbing him, pulling him away from Billy, picking him up and he panics.

"No, no, please don't, BILLY-!" He screams out, fighting weakly.

"Steve, don't fight them, they're helping us" says a familiar voice.

Nancy.

That's Nancy's voice telling him that as he sees two men go to pick Billy up too.

He doesn't care.

"DON'T TOUCH HIM!" He screams louder, thrashing harder in the grasp of whatever random man seems to be carrying him.

"You'll hurt yourself more, Steve-" He hears Jonathan say.

"BILLY!" He screams out, can't focus on anything, there's too much and the only thing he cares about is Billy, doesn't want to be torn from him, he doesn't understand why they're pulling them apart, doesn't want to be apart from him.

*Can't trust anyone, what if they're going to hurt Billy.*

No, no, NO!

He can't do that, can't handle it, something breaks inside of him.

Billy gasps awake and the men are so surprised they drop him.

He looks like he's gasping for breath, like he can't quite breath as he turns on his back, groaning as he eventually locks eyes with Steve.

The bond flares to life.

Angry, blaring, vicious, and upset, lashing out and Steve's eyes roll into the back of his head.

He feels a pull from within the bond except it's coming from Billy's side for once and not his own.

It feels strange.

Billy's *pulling* on something inside of him, it makes him feel lightheaded as he groans from the force of it.

It's like energy expanding itself outward, he feels out of control with it as Billy pulls harder, grounding him, becoming a conduit for Steve to curl around protectively as he answers the call willingly.

Call, what call?
He doesn't know, doesn't care, needs to be near Billy, can't let anyone take Billy away from him. Billy holds him fast and it feels *right*, he feels less out of control, less like a ticking time bomb.

It's like the only thing keeping him from exploding is Billy.

*Let go.*

He can hear confused yelling all around him and he knows he gets dropped at some point because the wind gets knocked out of his lungs as he struggles to breath but it's an out of body experience, too many senses at once.

"Oh fuck, holy shit" he thinks he hears Jonathan say at some point through the haze.

His nose is bleeding, he can feel it and his head hurts *so fucking much.*

Steve feels like a rubber band that's being stretched taunt.

Billy lets go all of a sudden and Steve *snaps* back into himself.

It's violently painful, it's all foreign and it feels like an electric shock not just all over his body but inside of himself too.

When he turns to look at Billy again there's blood coming down his nose too as he gets up and wobbles over to Steve gracelessly, falling to his knees beside him.

Billy grabs him, pulls him close to his chest as sobs wrack his body and Steve is really not up for this right now, he feels like death warmed over but he let's Billy hold him because he's in pain regardless so fuck it, that clearly ain't changing anytime soon.

"Steve- oh god I thought I *killed you-*" Billy cries out, clutching him tighter as Steve grunts in pain.

Billy let's up, looks down at him as he maneuvers Steve to rest his head in Billy's lap as he just cries more.

"You look- I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, so sorry, sorry"

Billy goes on like that, keeps saying it like a mantra and Steve pushes his emotions into him, helps calm him down, let's him know it's okay.

There's suddenly a dart poking out of the side of Billy's neck and Steve grabs at his arm as his eyes widen.

*No, oh no, no, no, no.*

"Billy- no, no, don't-*" he says out loud, reaching up, grabbing at his face.

Billy's eyes turn glassy as he grabs at the dart, taking it out to look at it curiously.

It takes about two more seconds until he passes out as the men are back and grabbing at him again.

Someone starts putting their hands on him now too, pulling him up again.
Not Billy, it's not Billy.

That's all he knows as he panics and he looks up into the face of an older man that injects some sort of syringe into him.

He passes out within mere seconds.

One second Jonathan is clinging onto Nancy, drowning in the car ready to die and the very next he's gasping for breath on the shore of Lake Michigan.

There's an obvious loss of time he can't seem to get back, he's not sure how he came to be here as he groans and props himself up and when he looks to his left Nancy is alive.

He gasps out and reaches for her as she looks at him, realizing he's alive too as they embrace each other, he grabs her face and pushes wet hair out of it and he kisses her over and over again until she pulls away and looks past him.

Jonathan turns around and Billy is carrying an unconscious Steve as he falls to his knees, holds Steve close to his chest and starts to sob like a child, starts stroking Steve's face, looks to be mumbling something but Jonathan can't hear him as they get up and go over to them.

Steve is pale, his skin is cold to the touch and he doesn't seem to be breathing and Billy is making pained noises in the back of his throat as Jonathan takes Steve out of his grasp.

"No, don't, no, don't take him from me- please don't, don't" Billy starts to say as Nancy tries to soothe him.

"He's not breathing, we need to get him breathing" she tells him and he just looks like he's completely lost his fucking mind, he's totally out of it, he's just not even there with them anymore, his eyes glossy and he's got a far off look in them.

Jonathan wastes no time as he starts trying to resuscitate Steve.

It's not working.

Suddenly a truck pulls up near them and men pile out of it and Jonathan panics as two of them throw him aside and one man with a large bag gets on his knees next to Steve, starts recusitating him instead.

Nancy gets up and goes to Steve's side as the man starts speaking low to her, instructing her to take things out of the bag.

Billy is walking like a zombie towards Steve all of a sudden but he doesn't get far as he falls over, passes out and Jonathan thinks that's probably for the best.

Seeing Billy absolutely out of his mind is fucking freaky in and of itself.

Steve suddenly starts sputtering out water, starts breathing again and Jonathan breathes out a sigh of relief.

The men who had thrown him aside help him up so he's standing as they give him a towel as they start watching Nancy and the man silently.

He has no idea who these people are but thank god they're here.
They shouldn't be alive right now.

Steve looks like he's conscious except his eyes flutter and he's back out for the count again soon after and Jonathan gets closer, unsure of what's happening.

"That's good, he doesn't need to be conscious for this" the man says as Nancy hands him the tools to-

Oh, they're going to cauterize the bullet wound.

There's blood everywhere, he's lost so much blood.

He looks like shit too, the bruises mottling his neck make Jonathan want to cringe, you can tell someone had tried to strangle him to death and had almost gotten away with it, it's fucking awful.

Please live, please live.

Jonathan thinks, prays, sends up anywhere, any place that could possibly be listening right now.

When Steve wakes again he's inside of a room he doesn't recognize and immediately his first thought is to reach out for Billy.

He feels him, he's nearby but he can't see him.

The bond is livid.

Steve panics.

Billy jolts awake and they start seeing through each other's eyes.

He's in a room similar to his own but they're not together.

Billy-

Steve-

The panic from both of them kick starts a chain reaction and Steve feels the energy building up inside of himself again.

He screams.

Billy screams.

They become one.

He sees the bulbs all around them glow bright before he squeezes his eyes shut, the light blinding behind his eyelids.

Glass shatters all around them, the energy needing an outlet, he can't keep it in, Billy can't help him keep it in as it releases and lashes out and Billy doesn't care, doesn't try to stop it, lets it rage free.

I'll burn it, I'll burn everything to get to you.

He hears Billy say, hears himself say.

There are men holding them down, trying to inject them again.
"Please, need to see him, please, please, please" he hears himself and Billy say.

Steve screams and Billy does something and it's another tug, a hard pull.

"Get your fucking hands off" he hears them both say in tandem.

The men all step back, all of them, the ones holding Billy and the ones holding Steve and they just stand there motionless.

Like a compulsion.

No.

Not like one.

It was a compulsion.

Nancy bursts into Steve's room as she looks frantic, two other men walking in behind her.

"Please, don't keep us apart, please" Steve says, snapping back into himself as he sobs.

It hurts.

It hurts so much to not be near him.

Why won't it stop hurting?

What's happening?

"Why are they just standing there?" a man asks, gesturing towards the men that had been trying to hold him down.

"Please, just do as he says" he hears Nancy say, ignoring his question and the drugs start to take effect as he feels himself start to fall under again.

His eyes flutter shut.

Steve wakes for a third time but this time he doesn't feel like he's losing his mind, feels far more stable as he opens his eyes.

He's not in a hospital, that much is clear, it's a normal looking room except he's in a hospital bed, he's attached to an IV.

The room is just your normal average looking place, they're in a house, mostly made of wood.

Where the hell are they right now?

He turns his head and sees Billy in a bed much like his own next to him and he breathes a sigh of relief.

Steve still has no clue why he's alive, why any of them are alive.

None of it makes sense.
One second they'd been drowning and the next Steve is-

He doesn't know what is happening to him, what's happening to Billy, what's happening to them.

The bond isn't raging and vengeful anymore but it is cautious and on edge, ready to lash out yet again at a moment's notice.

How had it gotten to this?

When had the bond gotten to this point?

When had it gotten so far out of control?

Probably somewhere between them admitting their love for each other and the Mind Flayer fucking them in the ass.

Steve should have known, should have seen this coming, it had been changing and evolving ever since the bond had formed, had grown and morphed along with them, getting weaker, getting stronger, becoming whatever it needed to be.

The evolution of it isn't lost on him, the things they'd been slowly capable of doing was bound to transfer over at some point.

It was bound to change into something defensive, something to be used against others instead of just themselves.

That's what it feels like, a defense mechanism locking into place, their lives had been threatened and Steve had been on the verge of death, one half of the bond in danger and it had done what it's clearly meant to do, had evolved and changed to protect and defend.

Perhaps they'd been looking at it all wrong, perhaps all along it had been this separate entity inside of them to some degree.

Because as things are right now?

He's completely positive it has a mind of its own, laying dormant, waiting, watching, pushing them closer together, knowing when to push and when to pull.

More and more he's becoming certain of this fact.

How are they supposed to differentiate themselves from this?

In what way are they going to grow together if the bond does everything for them?

This invisible force taking over for them when they're both too fucked up to be in their right minds?

They need to control it, it's out of control, this isn't just their own safety to keep in mind anymore, the safety of others is now at stake and who knows what else they can suddenly do?

*For fuck's sake.*

Billy can compel *other people* now, can *use Steve* to compel others.

He feels like a battery running on overdrive, all pent up energy for Billy to use as he pleases and the prospect frightens the shit out of him now that he's in his right mind, now that he's gathered his bearings a little bit.
That's what had happened, he has all of this energy built up inside of him, wanting to be released.

He hadn't known.

It's like he's lightning striking everywhere and Billy is the rod, pulling him in, absorbing it, using it, directing it.

Why couldn't it have been the other way around?

He believes in Billy but the biggest problem has always been Billy not believing in himself and if things get out of hand he's not sure how to bring Billy back in, to keep them both on a decent path.

Not even a good one, they're so far past that it's not even funny but at least they can try for the next best thing.

Steve feels exhausted as he watches Billy sleep.

There wasn't a plan for this, he hadn't expected to survive and he has no idea how he's going to help Billy get through this.

Billy is broken from it, Steve had felt it for himself.

Billy is off his fucking rocker right now in a way that Steve has never seen and he's the one that has to pick up the broken pieces and put him back together again, somehow.

He's not sure how he'll do that, Billy's going to be even more overbearing, all of his fears are amplified and he's going to lash out at everyone like a wild animal, new fears have crept up and Steve has no idea how to deal with them.

Steve isn't qualified for this shit, he doesn't want to do this wrong, doesn't want to somehow do more damage than good in trying to help Billy because he knows he's young and stupid, he doesn't have all of the answers.

This isn't even being back at square one, this is them being thrown into a completely different ball game and nobody is telling them how to play or what the rules are, they've just got to somehow figure it out.

The whole situation is going to haunt them for years and Steve feels completely out of his depth in the face of it.

First and foremost though he doesn't even get to think about it, can't even get together his own game plan.

They need to figure out if they've been spit out of one shitty situation to fall right into another one.

It's disconcerting, the whole thing is just weird, who are these people and why did they show up?

What do they want?

How are Nancy and Jonathan?

Are they even alive anymore?

Eventually Steve thinks himself into exhaustion as he falls back to sleep.
Steve wakes again but this time it's to Billy curled around him on the small bed, holding him close as he breathes him in, the scent of him, all of it, pulling the warmth greedily and Steve chuckles.

"Can't seem to keep your hands off, can you?" he says and he sounds hoarse, he realizes he's really fucking thirsty.

Billy hugs him tighter and Steve turns his head so they're eye to eye, breaths close enough to mingle as Steve smiles at him.

"I feel like shit" he says honestly, like he's been run over by multiple different trucks but he has Billy next to him so he really doesn't care about any of that right now.

"Do you need water?" Billy asks as Steve nods and he reaches over behind himself to get the glass, bringing it to his lips as he drinks it down, it definitely helps.

Billy puts it back down as he just stares and Steve eventually realizes Billy's staring at his neck.

"Hey big guy, it wasn't you" he says, figures this won't be the last time he has to say it.

"I could have fought harder, I shot you Steve, I fucking shot you" he says, eyes watering as he starts to choke out sobs.

"We're back on this side again, it can't get to us now, we're safe" Steve tells him, tries to explain to him but he knows it's useless.

They're safe for now.

How long until it finds them again and pulls them back inside?

Billy needs to go through whatever he needs to go through and there really isn't anything Steve can do or say to make it better.

What if it had been him?

What if he'd been the one corrupted by the Mind Flayer, being forced to kill the love of his life?

His stomach churns and he feels sick, feels like he's going to throw up as he starts taking shaky breaths in, letting them out to get himself back under control.

"I'm sorry" Billy says, starts to say it over and over again.

His heart is broken for Billy, it hurts so fucking much as he instinctually pulls him inside of himself as Billy's eyes flutter shut.

He keeps him there, pushes soothing thoughts and memories into him, lets him have a bit if reprieve from the awful toxicity of his own guilt ridden mind.

Steve isn't sure how long he keeps Billy there but eventually the door to their room opens and Nancy and Jonathan walk in cautiously.

They seem relieved to see Steve look back at them, awake, but there's something different there, something in their eyes.

Fear.
They're afraid of them.

He slowly eases Billy back into reality, not wanting to jolt him out of it because it hurts like a bitch as he slowly feels him come back to himself.

Nancy and Jonathan come around over to Steve's side of the bed and Nancy lays a hand on top of Steve's as Billy looks completely out of it, ignoring them, hugging Steve closer.

"Hello" Steve says to break the awkward silence.

"Hey, so- I'm glad you're awake and alive, both of you" she says as Jonathan nods in agreement.

"You too, was pretty fucking sure we'd died there, I'm pretty fuzzy about the details" Steve says with a grimace.

"Uh yeah, so it turns out Lake Michigan is a portal because it lingers on the edge of both of the dimensions because it's uncorrupted" Nancy says with a shrug while Jonathan gives them a look indicating something akin to a 'who knew?' gesture.

Steve's head immediately begins to hurt as he sighs deeply.

"Yeah ok, sure" he says, because of course?

How could he have not known Lake Michigan is a fixed temporal point, how could he have not known bodies of water in general are probably all one way doors out of the Upside Down?

Sure, excuse the fuck out of Steve because somehow that's supposed to be obvious or some shit?

What the actual fuck?

"Wait, ok so it's one way out but you can't use it to get in, my brain hurts" he says rubbing at his temple.

"They tried explaining it to us, it barely makes sense to us either" Jonathan says with a sigh.

"Explain these people, where are we, who are they?" Steve asks as Nancy and Jonathan look to keep eyeballing Billy suspiciously who is still off in his own world.

"Don't mind him, he's a little bit- out of commission for the moment" Steve says waving his hand in the air, trying to make light of all of it.

Nancy grimaces as she wrings her hands together.

"Is he alright?" she asks quietly, like she doesn't want to startle him.

"Gee Nance, he was controlled to try and kill us against his will, what do you think?" Steve says rhetorically with a snort.

"I know but- what- what's going on, the two of you- there's something different" she says, like she can't explain the things she probably saw.

"How about you run it by me from your point of view and I fill in the gaps?" Steve asks of her as she nods, ignoring her question because he's not sure how to answer.
It turns out when they'd been pulling them apart, when they were trying to pick them up to load them into the truck they'd about lost their damn minds.

That's when Billy had compelled them to step away, couldn't even bring themselves to be near either one of them anymore so they'd needed to knock them out.

When they'd gone under the compulsion had finally broken and they transferred all of them to a house nearby.

"Who are they?" Steve asks.

"They said they're part of a freelance agency, they've been placed here to extract anyone that may come through what they call 'The Michigan portal'" she tells him and he can't help but frown.

"No fucking way" he says, feeling like he's in a really bad movie.

"Yeah, they seem nice enough, they're a debrief team, meant to extract and access the situation, I'm not sure if that means they're going to move us somewhere else" Nancy says, rubbing her hands over her face.

"No, nope, not happening, fuck these people and fuck this place, we didn't somehow leave the Upside Down to get taken by someone else, that's not happening and it won't happen to Billy again, I refuse, they could have been working for Richards" Steve says as Billy frowns, pulls him closer, clearly feeling the same in that regard.

He'll let Billy use his compulsion on every single one of these motherfuckers before he lets them be taken, before he lets Billy go through that again.

"We thought the same thing, we accused them of it too but they said they were one of the groups trying to take him down" Jonathan interjects to say.

"I wouldn't worry too much, we have no intention of turning you into lab rats if that's your concern" A man behind them says as he comes into view.

"And you are?" Jonathan asks, stepping forward to block his way to Steve and Billy.

The man raises his brow, putting his hands up.

He looks to be a few years older than Steve, at least twenty two or twenty three, he's not old like the other men they'd seen and he holds himself differently than the others, there's something different about him as Steve frowns.

The amount of distrust he feels towards the guy is coming off of him in waves as the man turns to lock eyes with him, waving in a friendly manner with a dorky fucking smile on his face.

"I'm Alex, I've been told we have a couple of numbers here with us today" he says, trialing off as he purses his lips, putting his hands in his pockets.
awkwardly.

"Uh ok so~" he says, interrupting himself to walk over to Steve as he pulls a hand out of his pocket to go and grab onto Steve's wrist.

Billy is somehow already up and out of the bed, coming around it to grab onto the back of Alex's shirt as he topples backward to fall flat on his ass.

"Fuck off" Billy growls out, standing over him like an angry guard dog.

"Whoaaaaaa, can we not piss off the crazy people that sorta saved us just yet?" Steve asks, trying to get up but having a seriously painful time in doing so as Billy whips back around to keep him down with a firm hand to his chest.

"Billy, seriously, knock it off" he says glaring up at him as Billy visibly deflates.

"Yeesh, you gotta be careful of the overbearingly possessive ones. I'm one of you, I'm like you guys" he says, getting up to dust himself off.

"What does that mean?" Nancy asks.

Alex shrugs as he holds out his hand face up.

Suddenly there's fire on his open palm out of nowhere and Steve's eyes widen as everyone else looks just as shocked as he does.

"Pyromancy, that's my gift" he says excitedly as he holds up his wrist, there's a small tattoo on it that says 004 and Steve puts his face in his hands and groans.

"Whaaat the fuuuuuuuuck" he breathes out and when he puts his hands back down he holds his own wrists up to the guy.

"We're not one of you, we weren't ever part of Brenner's experiments" Steve tells him as Alex gets a confused look on his face looking at Billy who holds his own wrists up to prove Steve's point.

"Huh, so where did you come from then? You've obviously got a gift from what they described" he says, pointing a thumb back towards the open door.

"We got trapped in the Upside Down and the big black smokey demon piece of shit in the sky bonded us together" Billy says and it's the first real sentence he's heard Billy finally put together.

Progress.

"So wait, you're a freelance group that extracts people who somehow make it out of the Upside Down?" Nancy asks as Alex scratches his head.

"Is that what you all call it?" he asks as they nod their heads.

"Our people call it hell most of the time" Alex says, tone becoming impossibly serious.

"Yeah, that's pretty fucking accurate" Billy says with a snort.

"Anyway, how our group came to be is a bit complicated, that's a discussion for another time, you are not here against your will, you are free to come and go as you please, we're simply here to help the poor wandering souls that somehow survive that god awful place" he tells them and Steve doesn't trust that one bit.
"Last time I had one of you people tell me we're free to come and go as we please we were held against our will" Steve says, remembering Kali's illusion.

Alex gets a confused look on his face that turns into a thoughtful one.

"You know others like me?" he asks and Steve's jaw clenches.

"That's not any of your business" Jonathan says, trying to squash where this was all starting to go as quickly as possible.

"It is if it involves my brother's and sister's, if there are others I need to know about them, we all need to know about each other, we're family" he says, face changing completely, like he's a totally different person all of sudden.

Steve isn't really sure what to say to that, he doesn't trust this guy and clearly nobody else does either because they all stay silent.

"Fine, I get it, you don't trust me, you don't trust us, I don't expect you to, stay as long as you'd all like and let that guy heal up" he says, pointing to Steve.

"Our families, everyone we know probably thinks we're dead or worse" Nancy says with a look of concern on her face.

"Yeah, shit we've been missing for a whole week" Jonathan says pinching the bridge of his nose.

"How did you all find us so quick when we washed ashore?" Billy suddenly asks, crossing his arms over his chest, interrupting all of them to glare at Alex.

"You're a seriously mean looking motherfucker, you know that?" Alex says as Billy just raises a brow at him.

"Alright, they've got this little device thingy that beeps when a lot of energy piles up in one place, it's how we know the portal has opened and something has come from the other side" he says, gesturing with his hands to try and describe the device and judging from his expressive hands it's about the size of a walkie-talkie, whatever it is.

"How many of you are there, users I mean?" Billy asks next.

"You're just rapid firing these questions at me aren't you, my guy?" Alex says, barking out a laugh.

"Alright well I clearly don't have the answer to that since you're hiding some of my own from me, so next?" Alex asks, voice laced in sarcasm.

"Are you leaving or staying?" Billy asks next.

"I'll be staying to help you all get situated and back to your homes or wherever it is you need to go, as well as answer all of your questions as best as I can" he says with a shrug.

"Will you be making us sign papers?" Nancy interjects suddenly.

"Wow, ok so you've had to deal with the government, that sucks. No, keep in mind things don't usually come out of the portal's, it's really fucking rare and the fact that four of you made it out alive with two of you being users is a miracle in and of itself" Alex tells them.

There's silence for a moment as they all take that information in.
"You don't work for the government at all?" Steve asks.

"Absolutely not, keep in mind we were all from the Brenner era, none of us would ever want the government knowing about us, it's suicide" he says and Steve knows he's being honest in that moment.

"You were going after Richards too, why?" Billy asks, changing the subject.

"Ah yeah, well that piece of shit took one of my brother's and we're still trying to find him, you're absolutely certain Richards is dead?" Alex asks, look of concern on his face.

"We saw the Mind Flayer snap his neck with our own eyes" Nancy says and Alex looks at her like she's insane.

"Sorry, a what flayer?" he asks.

"The smoke demon thing, that thing from hell" she clarifies.

"Oh, one of the hive mothers?" he says as they all shrug and nod.

"Wait, there's more of them?!!" Jonathan asks as they all turn to look at each other.

"The world is a big place, you think Indiana is the only place affected by that dimension?" Alex asks with a laugh.

"How many other places have they?!!" Nancy asks, putting a hand to her head in disbelief as she looks down at the floor.

"Ah well, there are currently forty two known active hive mother's all over the world, a small number in comparison to what it could be, the number has gone down over the years, five of them have been exterminated" he tells them and Steve feels like he's about to be fucking sick.

"No fucking way" Billy says, voicing what they're all thinking.

"Yeah, that's how the corruption starts, we don't know where they come from or how they're made but a hive mother injects itself into the surrounding area on their side and the corruption process begins, there are completely unaffected areas of the world so at least there's that" he says like this is no big deal at all.

Like somehow Steve's entire life isn't somehow a fucking lie.

Like he somehow doesn't feel like the most minuscule unimportant being in the universe.

"Yep and when the corruption is spread far enough it sends out the re-directional sentry units, they move through time and space, protect and contain certain areas and pull things from our side to bring it to their own and that's how they feed, that's like the absolute nutshell version" he says, laughing nervously.

"The sentry- what, like the Demogorgon's?" Nancy says, like she's about to lose her mind.

"This is some serious D&D shit. The big humanoid seven foot looking things with the flower mouth" Alex says, raising his hand up high to indicate their height.

"Yeah, yes that thing, it's a sentry?" she says in disbelief.

"Yeah, they're like guardians and I'm sorry you've had to deal with them, they're a fucking bitch to
"kill" he says, nodding his head.

"No shit" Jonathan says.

"What about the overgrown flying crickets?" Steve asks, genuinely curious.

"Scouts, they get sent by the hive mother to scout an area for it, it's why they have wings" he tells them.

"What about when the Mind Flayer corrupts a human and gains a host on this side?" Billy asks, a question Steve is honestly afraid to hear the answer to.

"Ah yeah, turns into a priority one, like an all hands on deck kind of situation- oh fuck me you- wait, you guys were just talking about- there's one here, in Indiana?" Alex asks, taking a step back to run a hand through his hair.

"Obviously, we're pretty sure it's still alive too, still inhabiting the host" Nancy tells him.

Alex just looks at her with a look of disbelief.

"How long?" he finally asks.

"Uh- wait" Jonathan says as they all look at each other, trying to think of about how many month's its been.

"Wait, stop, we talking days or weeks?" he asks, breathing heavily.

They all shake their heads no slowly.

"Wha- months?!" he says in exasperation.

"Yeah, quite a few months" Billy says with a grimace.

"Did you people do this?!" he yells out, pointing an accusing finger at them.

"No, we didn't fucking do it!" Billy growls out.

"Fuck me, I need to make some phone calls" Alex says as he pinches the bridge of his nose, turning to leave as they all just look at one another completely dumb founded.

__________________________

"Billy, you're pacing and it's annoying the shit out of me" Steve says with a frown.

"Fuck off, I'm allowed to pace" he says and Steve can't help but smile because Billy's starting to get back to normal a little bit.

It's been three days since they talked to Alex who is somehow nowhere to be found, he'd kept his word though, everyone else here had been kind and accommodating, helping them in any way they need, they'd even asked about their well being a few times.

"Come here" Steve says, happy that he's not hooked up to anything anymore but still feeling quite a bit of pain.

"No, besides you stink" Billy says wrinkling his nose.

"Well I think- I think I can get to the bathroom and get myself a shower, I'd probably need your help
though” he says, his legs work fine he just hasn't gotten up and walked in days, he'd tried yesterday and he'd just gotten dizzy.

He thinks his lethargy also has something to do with their recent bonded escapades, the adventures in compulsion.

Billy finally stops pacing and looks at him as he starts to try and get up, immediately coming to his side.

It's a fucking mess and Steve almost falls flat on his face but they make it to the bathroom and Billy gets him into the tub.

"A shower, I wanna stand, no more laying down, just help hold me up” he tells Billy who nods and starts the water, letting it get hot before turning the shower head on.

It feels glorious, like this was all he'd needed, he's never been so happy to be inside of a fucking bathroom before as he moans.

"Hey now pretty boy, don't get too excited on me" Billy says seductively, clothes getting wet as Steve turns to raise an eyebrow at him.

"You can get in with me you freak” he tells him, not waiting for a response as he goes to help pull Billy's shirt off.

"Whoa there, is that all I am to you, a piece of meat?” Billy says with a soft chuckle as he lets Steve do his thing.

"Mm, only some of the time, baby” Steve coos as Billy lets out a genuine laugh, a laugh Steve hasn't heard in forever.

Eventually Billy gets into the shower with him and Steve's movements are still slow but he is certainly capable of holding himself up now.

They don't do anything, just touch and hold each other, enjoying the closeness until he hears Billy eventually start to breath heavy.

He'd been leaning his head on Billy's shoulder when he pulls away and looks up, Billy's crying.

"Hey, whoa, what's going on?” Steve asks, grabbing his face, pulling him in to kiss him gently on his lips as Billy chases after him when he pulls back.

So he kisses him more until Billy makes a broken sound in the back of his throat.

"I'm just- your neck” he whispers.

Oh.

He'd caught sight of himself in the mirror for a split second, had avoided looking for too long.

So yeah, he looks pretty fucked up, his entire neck is nothing but splotches of every color other than his own skin tone and he feels bad that Billy has to keep seeing it.

"Wasn't you, I guess we know why it kept trying to make you go for me even though we thought we were dead anyway” Steve says with a snort.

"What do you mean?” Billy asks.
"Well it knew we were about to survive and go back through to the other side, wanted to kill me before that could happen" he says with a shrug.

"Oh, yeah" Billy says quietly.

They stand there in silence and Steve doesn't know what to say to make him feel better so he just strokes his face, kisses him gently on his shoulder, moving up his neck as Billy sighs into it.

"Do you think Will's ok?" he finally asks all of a sudden.

"I think it was tricking us Billy, I think Will is completely fine or as fine as he can be" Steve says, believing that with all his heart.

A flash of Will burning plays through his mind and he hopes to god he's right.

Chapter End Notes

I've hit the point where I can't keep avoiding the numbered power users that are clearly all over the world so we've just taken a complete left turn and this is probably nothing like how S3 is EVER going to be.

But yeah, Steve and Billy are finally utilizing the bond!

Happy days!

Maybe? ;)


God this took forever mostly because I was busy all day yesterday and I had written scene's out of order and written other scenes only to completely scrap them and ugh.

I'm done though, yay!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mike had known something was up when Will never showed up to the D&D session.

The next day after having looked everywhere and seeing both Byers cars gone Mike knew the next best option would be going to El.

Needless to say when they all get to the shack they hadn't expected the door to open and for them to see Will and Joyce inside.

"Will?" Mike asks in disbelief as the others run past him and tackle Will to the ground.

"Come on, everyone inside" Ms. Byers says as Mike stops standing and staring dumbly from the patio.

"Why are all of you here?" Will's mom asks as she closes the door while El bolts and locks it.

"Will was missing, we were going to have El find him" Lucas says breathlessly after laughing from happiness so hard at seeing Will okay.

"Man I told you all he was fine, didn't I say that?" Dustin says as Lucas rolls his eyes.

"We needed to be sure" Mike says as he walks up to Will, pulling him into a hug.

Max takes her turn after as he mumbles about being crushed.

They're all considering constant surveillance at all times on him at this point, their hearts can't handle all of this.

A few days later Hopper shows up to the door with Kali in tow with the rest of her group and the kids have already gone home, periodically coming back to visit when they can.

They all look like shit when Joyce opens the door though.

"Oh my god Hopper, are you alright?" Joyce asks because Hopper has bags under his eyes and the rest of them look absolutely awful.

"I lost them Joyce, they're gone" Hopper chokes out clearly not knowing what to do.
Joyce takes a step back shaking her head.

"I don't understand"

Hopper tells them the story, of the attack on the cabin, of the bunker, of going to the containment chamber and finding it gone.

He tells them that when they got back to the bunker they'd disappeared and Hopper had been able to track them down to a diner in a small town not too far from them by making some phone calls.

When Hopper had gotten there it was to seeing Richards dead body as well as the dead bodies of others and it sure as hell hadn't been the police taking care of the clean up.

Through phone calls and confirmations Hopper finds out Owen's had gotten to it first and wanted to contain and investigate it, push it under the rug but it's out of Hopper's jurisdiction so Owen's had to pull from resources elsewhere.

Owen's thinks they're on the other side, said there was a huge amount of residual energy in the vicinity, similar to when someone passes over into the Upside Down.

It's the only thing they've got and it becomes chaos when Hopper says he thinks they're probably good as dead but they're still trying.

Joyce takes Hopper's gun and points it at his head and Kali looks at him in a way Joyce doesn't understand but Hopper shakes his head at her.

"Joyce, come on now, it's ok but don't do this in front of the kids" he says, putting his hands up as he eyes Will and El.

"My baby isn't dead, he's alive and I can feel it, they're all alive and this is Owen's fault but it's yours as well" she cries out, hands shaking.

"I know it is, I know" he whispers.

"We should have killed it when we had the chance!" She screams.

"I know" he keeps saying and she can't take it anymore as she lowers the gun, shoulders shaking as she starts to cry.

Her Jonathan, stuck inside of that place.

It's too awful to even think about.

Anyone being in that place is awful, those poor kids.

Hopper takes the gun back and she whips around and leans down to talk to El.

"Sweetie, do you think you can find them?" she asks and El nods as she immediately goes to grab her blindfold.

It takes longer than usual and they all sit around, waiting, watching.

At one point Kali takes her hand into her own, they're not sure what it means but nearly five minutes later she finally takes the blindfold off, her expression is deadpan, they can't garner anything from it as she looks up at them.
"They're alive"

Everyone gasps a sigh of relief and Hopper looks like he almost falls over.

"They're in the Upside Down" she goes on to say, clarifying Owen's theory and Hopper groans as Joyce frowns while Will starts wringing his hands nervously.

Suddenly there's a secret knock at the door as El opens it and the kids all file in, having come from school immediately after and Will informs them of everything Hopper has told them.

"The host is still at large and if it has thrown them into the Upside Down we can probably guarantee it's coming right for us" Hopper tells them.

"You mean it's coming for Will" Joyce clarifies.

"Yes, most likely that's exactly right. Has it talked to you again?" Hopper asks him, turning to look at Will who shakes his head.

"Nothing, it hasn't said anything" he says with a shrug and shake of his head as Mike smiles sadly at him.

"Getting El to open the gate again is dangerous, we all know what happened last time" Hopper goes to say when suddenly they hear a loud screech from outside.

They all go still as El gets a look on her face.

"It's here" she says and Hopper gets out his gun as he motions for El to follow him.

When they open the door he sees Dylan outside except he isn't looking too hot, there's blood staining his shirt and if anything the host is probably not being well taken care of as Hopper goes to stand outside on the patio, holding his gun up to the man turned monster.

He'll kill Dylan if he has to but where is Sheldon?

"You're not looking too good there, having some issues?" Hopper asks, taunting it because he can as it eyes El warily.

"Getting shot hurts but I have things to do, I'm on a time frame" it says honestly.

"Well it won't do you any good if the host dies, then where will you be?" Hopper asks, wants to keep it talking.

"I'm well aware of my host's capabilities, give me Will and I'll give you back the four you're missing, it's more than a fair trade" it says and Hopper barks out a laugh.

"You think I'm going to be making deals with your demonic ass?" Hopper asks rhetorically.

"You know where they are, they're in my domain and I can kill them whenever I please" it says and suddenly the air shifts as two Demogorgon's manifest themselves beside him, like they're guarding him or something and Hopper frowns as Joyce gets the kids inside, Kali ready to help protect them as they close the cabin door and lock it shut.
That just leaves himself and El to deal with this, they've dealt with worse.

"I'll kill you" El says suddenly and Hopper watches its reaction, it's afraid of her, there's fear in its eyes at her words.

"Death cannot stop me" it says as the Demogorgon's suddenly come at them and El holds them still with her powers, holding her hands out as they start to struggle hopelessly, limbs straining to move but she holds strong.

*That's my girl.*

He thinks absently.

They hear more screeches from all around as Demo-dog's surround the cabin and Hopper sees exactly what's happening.

They're being corralled, it's going to throw everything at them and exhaust El and then make its move, Hopper isn't stupid, it's what he would do.

He grabs El which makes her become distracted as the Demogorgon's sprint for them and Hopper bangs on the door as El unlocks it and swings it open as they stumble inside.

"Bar the fuck out of this place, we're surrounded and keep Will safe!" Hopper yells out as everyone sprints into action.

Nothing happens, there's complete silence for the longest time.

It's like it's waiting them out until finally three Demogorgon's fall from the ceiling, pushing their way through dimensional portals and they're all surrounded, it's a small cabin and they're within reaching distance on top of all of them being in one place at once, it's all way too close for comfort and Hopper is really starting to wonder how they're going to get out of this.

Kali learns that her illusion's work on the creatures as one of them starts holding at its head, screeching as her and El keep them busy while Hopper gets everyone into El's room, locking them inside as he starts shooting behind him.

The less ways inside, the better for them to defend.

He swings the door closed and lets Kali's people do the rest, they've got enough issues with these humanoid flower headed freaks as it is trying to barrel their way inside.

---

They huddle into El's room but Mike isn't worried, he trusts El but all of a sudden through all of the chaos they hear a familiar scream, it's like the scream from when Will was possessed when Hawkin's Lab had set the Mind Flayer on fire.

He hears Dylan's screams and he sees Will cover his own ears.
That can't be good.

A demo-dog breaks through the window on the side of the room and Kali's group has their own weapons as they make a human wall around all of them.

A larger man El has told him about goes into action but immediately gets bitten, it latches onto his arm, digging in and he thinks his name is Funshine as Axel beats it down, breaks its neck and gets it off.

Funshine's arm is all kinds of messed up.

"Oh Jesus, what the fuck!" Dustin screams as Lucas groans while Max gasps and they all crowd closer into the corner with Will and Ms. Byers.

More of the demon dogs start coming through the window and it's complete insanity as Ms. Byers holds Will in her arms except all of a sudden Will starts mumbling as Mike leans down to try and hear what he's saying.

"Not me- it's not me, it's a trick" he hears Will mumbling as he goes pale.

"Something's wrong, something's wrong!" Mike says as Dustin, Lucas, and Max crowd around him closer to hear what Will is saying.

Will gets pulled into the darkness again, the glass wall separating him yet again except this time what he sees on the other side makes him immediately panic.

He sees Steve and Billy, they're on some sort of beach, standing at the edge of a dock and the Mind Flayer is walking towards them as he starts banging on the glass.

"Steve, Billy!" he screams but he knows they can't hear him.

"I don't need you to feel bad, I don't need either one of you anymore if you're going to be difficult" it says and Will panics even more, bangs on the glass harder to the point of it hurting.

It's taking his form, it looks like him but it's not, that's not him at all.

"You're bluffing" Steve says, as Billy looks to be visibly struggling against the hold Steve has on him and Will can't help it as he starts to cry, screaming, hoping they'll hear him as his voice gets hoarse from it.

"You fucking son of a bitch" Billy spits out wrenching out of Steve's grasp as he starts banging on a glass that seems to be separating them from the Mind Flayer too.

"Billy, El was protecting Will, this is a trick, it's tricking us" Steve says, trying to get Billy to calm down.

"Yes, yes, it's a trick, it's a trick!" Will screams, becoming hopeful that they can see through whatever illusion it's using on them.

"It doesn't matter if you believe me or not" the creature says.
"Billy?" it says in his voice and Will falls to his knees sobbing.

"No, no, no" he chokes out.

Will sees Billy lean down, putting his hand against the glass as his fake self does the same.

"I- I tried to fight it but I- I wasn't strong enough" Will says, eyes watering as Billy rests his forehead against the glass.

"NO IT'S LYING, IT'S LYING!" Will screams as he pulls at his own hair, squeezing his eyes shut.

Billy starts banging against the glass and when Will open's his eyes he sees it shatter as he gasps, not knowing what that means, not liking what that implies.

Will sees Billy tackle Steve to the ground, trying to choke the life out of him and Will can't watch this, he can't see this, it's too much.

Soon after that the demon taking his form bursts into flames, starts screaming and it makes Will become disoriented as he gets pulled back into reality from it, the illusion breaking.

*It's in pain.*

*It's burning.*

His mom is holding him, whispering soothingly into his ear and he hears Mike beside him trying to talk to him as he pulls away and they can all hearing the pained screaming of the Mind Flayer from outside loud and clear.

The Demo-dogs trying to get through stop and start to scream as well as they start moving backwards, bashing their own faces into the walls and Will can't help but cringe at the sight when the door suddenly swings open.

"Something's happening, it's hurt and distracted or something, we need to go now, everyone out the window!" Hopper says as he comes through as him Mom picks him up and carries him out, handing him to Funshine on the other side of the window who looks to be in some serious pain as Will feels his blood seep into his shirt but he doesn't really care at this point.

Everything is way too surreal right now.

Funshine smiles down at him reassuringly "It's ok, we'll be alright little man" he says as they all run away as fast as they can.

Will looks over the large mans shoulder to see Hopper grabbing El by her arm.

"This is our chance, we need to stop it here and now, we gotta kill it" Hopper says as he pulls her around the house.

Hopper isn't one to pass up a good opportunity, he'll kill Dylan himself if he has to but having El as backup is something he needs and he notices Kali following behind them.

*Good.*

He knows she's a tough kid and he doesn't want to have to make El do anything she's uncomfortable with, it's nice to have someone around like Kali to balance things out.
When they get around the house Dylan's on his hands and knees screaming with tears rolling down his face and it looks up to see them as it growls and snarls.

It's unnatural looking on the face of a human.

"I'LL KILL ALL OF YOU, EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU!" it screams and right when Hopper goes to shoot Dylan pulls himself through a dimensional portal but that doesn't stop Hopper as he unloads the clip in his gun at it, hoping to have at least hit him once as he disappears, probably to crawl back into whatever hole he's come out of.

There's silence and they don't even hear anything for the longest time.

Not even anything that had been inside of the cabin can be heard anymore as Hopper holsters his gun, running his hands over his face.

"Why did it stop, what happened?" Kali asks.

"That's a good question kid" Hopper says, feeling even more confused than he'd been before.

Steve isn't exactly smart but he is when it comes to Billy and he knows something is coming, knows it in the way Billy starts to talk to him.

He knows it in the way Billy starts interacting with him or rather the lack of interaction, in the way he starts pulling away, starts touching him less, starts curling into himself and shutting Steve out.

In the way he used to when they'd first known each other, back when Billy was terrified of his feelings.

Granted this isn't the same, this is Billy dealing with a lot of emotions and it being too much all at once and it doesn't take long for Billy to break and do something stupid, they'd been on the cusp of something and it all finally comes to a head two days later.

"I was thinking we need to do the distance exercise" Billy says to him as Steve gets up to stretch his legs.

Steve just blinks, staring at Billy for a long time.

He's feeling much better and he'd just mentioned how he can't wait until he can get into one of the rooms with a *real* bed that they can both sleep in.

*That's* Billy's response?

Steve tilts his head to look at Billy, wondering what he's getting at with this.

"Like, we break up or something?" Steve asks, not knowing what he means in this particular situation and mostly because Steve doesn't like Billy's tone nor does he like the way he won't look him in the eyes.

They'd done the distance exercise only a couple of times, it had been something Owen's had
recommended to them during one of their earlier sessions for when things were getting too out of hand.

Steve is honestly surprised Billy is even bringing it up, things are pretty sour in regards to anything Owen's and anything to do with therapy probably for the rest of their lives and Steve has absently wondered before how he's ever going to get Billy to agree to anything like it ever again.

It's one of those hopeless situations he's chosen not to think about because it's too depressing to even address and he still feels like a piece of shit, feels like it's his fault.

The exercise stated that they avoid one another for a period of time of their choosing, to get distance, to allow the bond to mellow out after they've gotten too heated in some way or another during big fights.

It had been good for teaching them stability and control, to not get so dependent on one another, to be able to live their lives as separate entities, to keep a sense of separation.

They'd done it twice, it worked well both times but the bond hadn't been as strong and overbearing as it is now and it was easy to pull it off as a result.

The times they'd done it were also simpler because they didn't live together and they still don't so it's not like they had to come home to one another at the end of a day.

It was also easy to avoid one another at school, it had been so simple and the make up sex was always worth it in the end.

But this?

Now?

"I don't understand what you mean" Steve says, trying to wrap his head around what Billy is implying.

"No, I don't mean break up, what does that even mean anyway in regards to you and I?" Billy says with a snort.

"I'm just not sure what context we're speaking of in regards to distance, it's not like we've got anywhere to go" Steve says in the tone he knows Billy hates as he gestures all around them.

It's not a tiny house but it's definitely not the place to be doing a distance exercise in.

"I mean in general, we need to step away from this, from us, the bond" he says and Steve gets a look on his face like Billy is an idiot.

"Where is this coming from right now? I don't know what you're trying to say to me, you're making no sense" Steve says rubbing at his temple.

"I'm saying separate rooms, taking a step back to- to reevaluate our new situation with the bond" Billy says, motioning between them and Steve is slowly starting to get what he means.

"Like- like our sexual relationship?" Steve asks in disbelief.

Billy steps into his space all of a sudden, grabbing him by his elbows as he rubs his arms soothingly up and down.

"Look at me love" Billy says as Steve looks up to lock eyes with him because he's too easy.
"I almost killed you, I don't even know what the fuck is going on with the bond anymore and I feel like I'm losing my mind" he says and Steve's face contorts.

"So yes, you want to stop the sex, you want to cut out the intimate part of our relationship until further notice and push me away?" Steve clarifies as he wrenches away from Billy, not wanting this fucking tool to even touch him right now.

"I'm just saying let's sleep in separate rooms and take it from there" Billy says as Steve barks out a laugh.

"I can read between the lines asshole" he says, crossing his arms over his chest, tapping his foot on the ground.

"Steve, that's not- you're taking this wrong, it's not you, this is me and it's also the bond" Billy says rubbing his hands over his face.

"Oh, it's not me it's you, really?" Steve snorts out.

"Yes that's exactly correct, you know I want you and that you're the only thing I genuinely want in my life forever, always, don't be an idiot" Billy says pointedly.

"Oh yes please call me an idiot. Take your shit and get the fuck out too. I'm liking this idea more and more actually" Steve snarls out as he throws his arms into the air in anger as he starts to pace.

"This is what you always do, you get it into your head that I don't want you and that couldn't be further from the truth" Billy says in exasperation as he watches Steve pace while he throws glares at him periodically.

"Mn no, you've made it perfectly clear you want me but only on your terms, fuck what I want" Steve says with a deadened laugh as he finally stops to face him again, still totally closed off from Billy.

"Now you're just being a selfish prick, I- Steve I can't give you what you want right now and I'm not going to sit here and pretend that I can" Billy says pleadingly.

"What does that even mean?!" He screams at him.

"All I want is you, I just want to help you, be here for you, that's all!" Steve goes on to say hysterically, not understanding what the hell Billy is trying to get at anymore.

"I just- every time I touch you, every time I even think of wanting to touch you I-" Billy chokes out, interrupting himself because he can't seem to find the words as he rubs his hands over his face.

"You get guilty, you feel like I deserve better, you see the things that thing made you do to me and you shut down" Steve finishes for him because Billy is a stupid idiot who has no idea how to talk and communicate like a normal person.

Not that Steve is saying he's any better of course but still.

Billy gapes for a moment clearly not expecting Steve to have gotten it completely on the nose before he nods slowly.

"Yeah, I am bonded to you Billy in case you'd forgotten, we were one with each other a few days ago and I felt everything" Steve says with a scoff, shaking his head at the fact that the guy he's so deeply in love with is so fucking dense sometimes.
"Then why are you fighting me on this?" Billy asks like Steve is being the crazy one.

"Because you're stupid and you think I need certain things and when you feel like you're lacking in any department you get insecure and push me away, like right now" Steve says completely deadpan.

"Billy, we don't need to have sex, we don't need to be touchy, it can all be on your terms but don't shut me out, not like this, you're not helping me and you're certainly not helping yourself" Steve tells him.

"I don't want to hurt you, I already hurt you when I wasn't up to cuddling last night, when I turned away from you" Billy says as Steve grimaces.

"Don't tell me otherwise because I saw it in your face" Billy goes on to say.

"I- it's ok, I was just being stupid. I just needed time to adjust that's all" Steve says nervously, averting his gaze.

It *had* hurt but he understands that Billy just needs his space, it had been a knee jerk reaction but he'd recovered quickly because he knows it's not because of *him*.

"You really underestimate just how much of a fucking sap you are, I don't want to keep telling you no and you just sit there working yourself up over nothing until you explode at me" Billy says with a snort.

"Oh so now I'm just too needy"

"Holy shit, just stop please I need you to just stop, that's obviously not what I'm saying and you know it" Billy says in annoyance.

Steve sighs, can feel his eyes watering and he knows he's being stupid and petulant.

He just hates that there isn't anything he can do for Billy, he feels helpless because he knows this is a personal battle that only Billy can fight and that when Billy is ready he'll let Steve knows.

Doesn't stop it from hurting.

Which is stupid because now that means Billy is right and he's wrong and that Billy's point is valid and now Steve feels like a pathetic idiot.

There's no reason for Steve to be upset by this, it's just Billy needing to get his shit straight and he's right, everything is different now and they *should* take a step back to figure out how to adjust themselves to the bond now that the game has changed completely.

Also he has no clue how he'd feel after what happened, he's not even fully certain he can understand what it had been like for Billy to try and fight the influence of the Mind Flayer and to remember every agonizing second of it, to be totally helpless.

Well, he *can* understand but only on a much smaller scale from when Billy had used his compulsion but it's not even on the same level, not even close and he'd never victimize himself *that* much.

Steve also isn't stupid, he really *had* almost died, it has been the closest call he's ever had in his life.

He can't even begin to understand all of what must be going on in Billy's head and that's excluding all of the new shit with the bond that Billy must be dealing with.

Steve is also pretty sure he's repressing his own side of the trauma he himself had to endure because
he's probably being a bit too calm and collected but mostly he's doing it for Billy's sake.

He just wants to be able to help Billy when he breaks down or when things become too much, like right now except Steve is just being superficial and he's not taking Billy's feelings into consideration at all.

_Goddammit_, why is he such an asshole sometimes?

"No, it's fine you're right we need space I know I'm acting crazy just- I'm being stupid, ignore me" Steve says rubbing his hands over his face.

Billy looks at him suspiciously before sighing as he starts to walk towards him.

Steve shakes his head, taking a step back as Billy stops, a look of concern on his face.

"Don't- it's fine Billy really, this is good we should do this, we really should" he says quietly mostly to convince himself and he sees Billy clench his fist at his side.

"Are you sure?" He asks and Steve can't help the snort that comes out of him.

"Billy just go" he says as he goes to walk past him to go into the bathroom.

He needs a shower anyway and he certainly doesn't need to stand here and let it get awkward nor does he need to stick around to say anything else stupid because he's already still failing horribly at this whole being understanding thing.

If anything he's probably just making Billy feel even more guilty but he can't help that pang of pain inside of his heart that he can't make go away because he's just _that_ pathetic.

His mind knows better but his heart is a needy little shit, he is needy, he hates that about himself and it makes him want to pull his own hair out.

He doesn't wait for Billy to respond as he closes the door behind him, locking it and the sound of it feels like a finality.

Steve isn't even sure what Billy expects, they just avoid each other now?

Go back to being friends?

Steve already knows that's not going to happen.

Honestly the best thing Steve thinks he can do is to just let Billy come to him, the ball is in his court now and Steve wills himself to be on his best behavior for the sake of Billy, for the sake of helping him through all of this bullshit they've suddenly found themselves trying to dig their way through.

For now, he'll keep his distance.

When he feels the hot water hit his face he tries not to think of the heat thrumming underneath his skin that inevitably leads to his other half.

The next day he's downstairs with Nancy asking one of the men more questions about the Upside Down.
Turns out his name is Lee and he's the one mostly responsible for keeping track of the energy readings surrounding the lake.

Steve is particularly interested in the numbers other than Alex and when he goes to finally interject and change the topic a shorter looking man comes into the room looking serious.

"What?" Lee asks him.

"Alex got a hold of some guy named Jim Hopper, he's on the phone" he says and Nancy bolts out of her chair while Steve almost topples over as they rush to the phone he's talking about.

Nancy gets there before he can.

"Hopper!" She says when she gets the phone to her ear and Steve realizes he should probably go and tell Billy and Jonathan.

As he goes to turn around he almost barrels right into Billy as Jonathan pokes his head over his shoulder and Steve sputters nonsense, looking down at the floor not wanting to see Billy's face as he moves aside to let them through.

"Is it really him?" Billy asks as they all file in and stare at Nancy expectantly as she nods to them indicating that yes, it is indeed Jim on the phone.

Steve immediately feels worry, feels like he's going to throw up because he thinks of Will as Nancy furrows her brows, handing the phone out to Billy.

"He said he wants to talk to you" she says as Billy raises a brow and takes the phone as Nancy gets up to go stand beside Jonathan.

"Chief-" Billy says before stopping, Hopper probably interrupting him.

Billy gets a frown on his face as he raises a brow, looking at everyone else.

"Yeah, they're here but wait- chief stop- seriously listen to me!" Billy yells out, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"Do you have updates on Will, is he alright?" Billy asks and Steve crosses his arms over his chest, digging his fingers into his arms to the point that it hurts.

"Oh thank god" Billy says, breathing out a sigh of relief, leaning over to rest his hand on the small table to keep himself upright, locking eyes with Steve.

Steve let's out a breath he hadn't known he'd been holding in as Billy covers the phone with his hand.

"It was a trick, you were right, Will is fine" Billy clarifies with him as Jonathan looks between them with a confused look on his face.

Steve gets a smile on his face because more than anything he's just glad Will is fine.

"Uh- ok" Billy says over the phone in confusion at one point.

"He wants to speak with me alone" Billy tells them and Steve frowns as they all look at each other, not knowing what that means as Billy shrugs, also not understanding.
They don’t seem to have a choice as they leave, closing the door behind them and Steve has a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach.

They go sit down in the other room to talk about what they've all learned and it's over an hour later when Billy finally comes out of the room.

They look at him expectantly but he looks-

Steve doesn't know, he looks like he's in shock as he walks away frantically running fingers through his own hair as he proceeds to not look at any of them to go into his room and slam the door shut behind him.

"Uh, what?" Jonathan asks, scratching his head as Nancy looks at Steve who can only shrug.

"I dunno" he says, suddenly incredibly worried.

They both look at him expectantly as he sighs.

"Alright, I'll go" he says as he gets up, knowing full well nobody else will.

Steve doesn't bother knocking, just walks right in simply because he can and his worry increases ten fold.

Billy is sprawled out on the bed like a starfish staring up at the ceiling with an empty look in his eyes. His mind goes through so many different scenario's it's not even funny.

Steve slowly closes the door and still Billy doesn't stir, even when Steve goes to sit at the edge of the bed he doesn't do anything.

"Hey big guy" Steve finally says, breaking the silence.

It takes a moment but Billy finally turns his head to look at him as he moves his hand to take one of Steve's into his own as he rubs slow lazy patterns into it with his thumb.

Steve let's him.

"Everything ok?" He asks this time after Billy still says nothing.

"Neil's dead" he says in a matter of fact tone.

It feels like a punch to the gut as Steve inhales deeply.

"Wha- what happened?" He asks not knowing what else to say.

"Car accident but apparently it was suicide, he left a note at the house" Billy says, completely monotone.

Steve blinks, not even knowing what to think as he stares at the light brown wall across from him.

"Why would he do that...what the fuck- was anyone else hurt?" He asks, worrying for Susan and Max.

"Nope" Billy says, making a popping sound after enunciating the 'p' in a nonchalant manner.
"It was just him, drove himself right off a cliff" Billy says as he divulges into a fit of laughter, taking his hand away from Steve's to grab at his side's as he curls up in the middle of the bed and just lays there after he calms down again.

The look in his eyes is empty and dead, Steve fucking hates it.

Steve still isn't sure what to do, how to help so he just waits Billy out, waits to see if he'll be told to leave or stay, to be told what to do next.

Eventually Billy looks back up at Steve, scoots himself closer while taking his hand back into his own as he rests his head on Steve's lap as he runs his free hand through Billy's hair gently.

"It's funny" Billy says, huffing out a laugh.

Steve frowns, pausing for a moment before going back to running his fingers gently over his scalp.

"I try to commit suicide and fail every time, he tries it and succeeds, that's fucked up" Billy says, clutching Steve's hand to his chest, moving it to his lips to let it rest there.

Steve definitely stops what he's doing this time, placing his free hand down next to his side on the bed as he leans over to look down at Billy as Billy looks up at him, brow raised in confusion.

"You've tried more than once?" Steve whispers, thinking of the different ways he can lock Billy away to keep him from hurting himself.

"Calm down princess, I was young and I don't plan on dying anytime soon now. I feel like it's a challenge at this point with all the shit we've been through, it'd be a waste to take my own life at this point" Billy says as he pulls Steve's hand back down to rest against his chest, rubbing it soothingly.

Steve eye's him suspiciously before nodding, content with that answer.

He's not wrong, surviving certainly has seemed like a damn challenge as of late.

"I'm sorry I got tricked by that demon" Billy suddenly says, changing the subject.

Steve sighs as he strokes Billy's face, pushing a curl of hair out of it.

"No apology necessary, I wasn't even close to sure, I saw Will burn but I guess that was a trick too but that's why the wall broke, I wasn't sure of myself, wasn't your fault" Steve says with a shrug.

"I'm so fucked up Steve, I'm so fucking broken" Billy says, laying an arm over his face to block Steve from being able to see it.

"We both are, don't sweat it" Steve reassures him as Billy moves his arm to lay it across his chest instead to glare up at him.

"Fuck off, you've got your shit together and I've got no idea what the fuck to do anymore" he says.

"Hell no I don't, I'm just trying to be strong for you, I'm pretty sure I'm like one moment away from a mental breakdown" Steve says with a snort as Billy smiles up at him.

Suddenly the smile disappears soon after as he gets a sad look on his face.

"I'm relieved that he's dead, is that bad?" Billy asks, obviously talking about Neil again.

"No of course not Billy, he was awful" Steve tells him honestly.
"I'm also sad, is that bad?" Billy asks next.

"He was your father, it's to be expected" Steve reassures him.

"He wasn't awful all the time, he had his moments" Billy tells him and Steve believes that, knows it to be true.

"I saw a couple of them for myself, almost had me convinced that he- sorry, ignore me" Steve says, cringing because it's not good to speak ill of the dead.

"It's fine, don't worry about it" Billy says, waving an uncaring hand in the air.

They sit there in silence until Billy speaks again.

"Do you think it was my fault, do you think I killed him?" Billy asks and Steve's heart aches.

"He killed himself" Steve says simply because no matter what the note says Neil had taken his own life, that's all that matters.

Steve just hates that he'd chosen the cowards way out, that the timing is so fucking bad.

This isn't something Billy needs to deal with right now, he's already got enough going on.

"Are you going to read the note when you get a chance?" Steve asks him.

"Honestly, I probably will because I'm a masochist" Billy says after sighing.

Sounds about right, Steve would probably do the same and it's good that Billy's being honest with himself.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" Steve asks, practicing what he'd been preaching to himself like a mantra, wanting to be here for Billy, wanting to help instead of being a little bitch about it.

*Don't be a dick, don't be a dick, don't mess this up.*

Billy just sighs, moving to sit up so they're facing each other as Billy gets an apologetic look on his face.

"I'm sorry, I told us to get distance and I'm sending out some seriously fucked up mixed signals right now" Billy says scratching the back of his head.

It takes every ounce of Steve's willpower to not say something rude.

So they're still at this, he still wants to go through with this, he's actually doing this.

*Steve, calm down.*

He tells himself.

*We are way up here and we need to be way down here, take it down a notch, don't do this.*

At the end of the day he likes to think Billy is his friend, it's never a word he's used in regards to Billy but they'd done it before even though Billy is an incredibly abrasive friend, he's definitely a far better lover which is strange because most people are the exact opposite.
Tough luck Harrington, suck it up and deal, if he wants to be friends then be the best damn friend he's ever had.

He thinks to himself as he takes a deep breath.

"It's fine, what did Hopper say?" he asks, changing the topic so Billy doesn't have to keep coddling him because he doesn't need that shit, he really does not need Billy to sit there with those blue eyes looking at him like that.

He's eighteen for fucks sake, he's legally an adult at this point, the fuck is wrong with him right now?

Billy gets a strange look on his face, jaw clenching and Steve is pretty sure Billy can see right through him but he has always believed in the term 'fake it till you make it' so he says nothing and Billy doesn't either.

"Come on, I'll update all of you" he says as he gets off the bed and they leave the room together.

Hopper had told Billy what had happened, how the Mind Flayer had tried to get Will but it had gotten distracted somehow and Billy had told him it was probably because they'd lit the fucker up like the fourth of July back in the upside down.

Alex is apparently there in Hawkin's with them and Steve isn't sure how to feel about that, he still isn't sure if he trusts them and apparently they're getting a car ready for them so they can get back to Hawkins so everyone can reunite with one another but it will still be a few days because Hopper needs to do damage control and figure out where to go from here.

It's a small relief that things seem to be settling down but it doesn't make him feel better than the Mind Flayer is still out there, on this side of the dimension with the host body probably getting stronger and stronger and they have no idea where it is.

It puts Steve on edge and he feels himself get irritable, he really wants all of this to be over, he wants to be able to go back to his normal life, he's starting to wish the bond had never existed because it's pulling himself and Billy apart which is not something he thought he'd ever say.

It's strange to him the the bond is thrumming quietly, hasn't acted up or interjected on their behalf in any way because he's starting to differentiate when it's himself or the bond pushing him a certain way.

He'd been thinking of it more and more lately, it's almost like the bond is the equivalent of their white blood cells, protecting them from infection and adjusting itself to defend when needed except in a far less literal sense.

Or in regards to the Mind Flayer it is a more literal sense he supposes.

When Billy is done filling them all in Steve can't bring himself to sit around here anymore, there's too much going on in his head and he wants so badly to ask Billy if he needs anything but he knows if he did need anything he would say something.

So he gets up and starts walking back down the hall into his room when Billy grabs him by his arm before he gets to his door and Steve isn't expecting it as he almost falls over.

"Hey, let's take a walk" he says, still holding onto Steve's wrist and he can't help but gulp nervously.
"Uh- yeah ok sure" he says as he mentally berates himself.

**Wow Steve, you're really this easy?**

*The guy just found out he lost his father, don't be such a primadonna.*

Steve is aware the only person Billy knows he can talk to is him, who is he to deny him that comfort?

Billy just looks him in the eyes like he's searching for something before finally letting go to put his hands in his pockets.

"Alright, let's go" he says turning around and it's nice to get out, to finally truly stretch his legs.

They walk down further to Lake Michigan and Steve says nothing, just lets Billy do whatever it is he needs to do, lets him be the one to break the silence and when they get the shoreline it's beautiful to him but he wonders if Billy hates it as they stand side by side and just watch the water.

"I do like the ocean you know" Billy finally says.

"Really?" Steve says, because he'd have assumed the exact opposite.

"Yep, she liked it and we'd go down to that beach so often I don't think I ever had a pair of shoes that didn't have sand in them" he says with a snort as Steve turns to look at him with a small smile.

"It was just one bad memory but all of the other ones were so good, it was the only time I really got to spend with her without my dad being around" he says with a shrug as he turns to look at Steve as they face one another.

He can't help it as he reaches out to touch Billy before remembering that they're not doing that stuff right now as he goes to put his hand back down in an aborted half gesture, Billy barely catches sight of it and Steve feels embarrassed all of a sudden as Billy gets a frown on his face.

"You can touch me you know, I'm not gonna break" Billy says and Steve shakes his head.

"No it's not that- I just, I'm trying to give you distance is all" he says honestly.

"Oh, yeah- right of course" Billy says like he'd somehow forgotten they were even doing that in the first place.

It kind of annoys the shit out of Steve but he doesn't say anything because he's pretty sure Billy's head is a jumbled up mess right now.

"You hungry?" Billy asks and Steve shrugs.

"I could eat" he tells him as Billy nods.

"Come on, I'll make us something to eat, that place is fucking loaded with food" he says with a snort and Steve can't help the smile he gets on his face.

He thinks he might be able to do this.

The next day Billy stomps out of the kitchen because Steve is pissing him the fuck off, he's acting fake and being fake, every fucking thing about him is fake and it's all because he doesn't know how to act like a normal fucking person.
Billy asks for space?

Guess that means it's over, they're broken up, may as well be dead in the dirt, everything is over, woe is me, time to play the victim card.

It's no wonder he calls him princess, he's so fucking dramatic about everything it makes Billy want to shake him.

All he'd said was they sleep in separate rooms, let the bond settle because it had worked the other two times they'd done it yet Steve seems to take that as a fucking nail in a coffin.

Steve's the love of his life which is never going to change and Steve is acting like a touch starved child constantly needing validation and he seems to think he's hiding it except he's really not.

Like, at all.

Billy knows it's just one of those flaws Steve has always had, that whole sense of neglect, feeling unloved, thinking everyone will leave him in the end and Billy is no exception even though he thinks he should be.

But of course, Steve is an idiot and he lets his emotions get to his head at times, not that Billy doesn't either.

It's just that this is Steve's big flaw much like Billy's issues with his mom so he knows he isn't one to talk because he's got so many other fucking issues he could fill a journal.

But Steve is perfect, he's empathetic, compassionate, he's everything Billy can never be so when he does have a flaw it's all consuming and makes Billy want to bash his face against a wall.

Billy doesn't know how to help him, doesn't know what to do when Steve gets this way, when he goes into this mode where every little thing sets him off.

He'd come up behind Steve to wrap his arms around him after waking up from his nap and Steve had flipped his shit out of nowhere, pushing him away, pointing a wet towel at him.

Dishes, he's been cleaning dishes and Billy wonders why Steve has taken it upon himself to be the resident housewife of this huge ass house all of a sudden when it's filled with plenty of other people to do it for them.

"What the hell are you doing?" Steve had asked as the water from the towel had started to drip onto the ground.

"I just wanted to touch you-" he goes to say as Steve barks out a laugh.

"Nope, don't you even start that with me, you get one or the other but you can't have both" Steve had told him as Billy's face contorts into a frown.

"What the hell does that mean?" Billy asks, not knowing what the fuck he's talking about.

"You wanna do this whole distance and friends only shit then keep your damn hands to yourself" Steve tells him and Billy gives him a look like he's the biggest idiot in the fucking world.

"You're joking" Billy says, wondering if this is actually all some sort of joke and he's just being pranked.
"Why the fuck would I be joking?" Steve says with a scoff as he rolls his eyes and turns back around to continue washing the dishes.

"I said let's just sleep in separate rooms- just friends. Where did you even get that into your head?" Billy asks as he groans, rubbing his eyes with his hands.

And now here they are, Steve in his face yelling obscenity's at him and Billy has no idea how it had even divulged into this as he just stares at Steve blankly, waiting for him to finish.

"You know what, you don't even fucking care, look at you. That's fine, that's completely okay just fuck off" Steve tells him as he turns back around, yet again.

It's annoying to watch Steve mentally spin his wheels and work himself up into hysteria and it's just getting worse, this is what he'd tried to avoid except it only seemed to be making things worse and now there wasn't any going back because he knows he still needs his space, it'll just get even worse if he caves because he'll just hurt Steve more.

He doesn't even say anything as he walks out of the kitchen because he knows if he says anything it'll just get worse and it'll turn into a full blown fight.

This isn't what he'd wanted, he didn't want to hurt Steve, he didn't want any of this and he thinks that all he's doing is making Steve resent him more than anything.

With that thought in mind he spins on his heel and walks back into the kitchen to a stone faced Steve who hears him walk back in, already turns to frown at him as he leans up against the counter with his arms across his chest.

"I need you to help me here, how do I help you so you feel ok about this?" Billy asks, trying the whole 'communication' method instead.

"I am ok, seriously I'm just saying-" he goes to say as Billy groans.

"Cut the shit and stop lying to me, do I need to tell you I love you over and over until it gets through your thick skull that I'm not going anywhere? Because I will, if that's what it takes I'll do it right here, right now" Billy says, fully intending to do just that because honestly, he doesn't know any of these people and he really doesn't care about their opinions of him.

Nancy and Jonathan already know anyway too so who gives a shit?

Steve flushes as he darts his head to look around nervously.

"I- no, I'm not a fucking child Billy, it's fine!" Steve finally yells out, a look of anger on his face as he slaps the wet towel onto the counter.

"Then stop acting like one!" Billy yells back.

"I'm not acting like one you fucking prick, go hole yourself inside of your room or something my patience is wearing really fucking thin with you right now" Steve growls out as he runs his hands over his face to groan into them.

"Fine, fuck you too" he snarls out before turning around and stomping out yet again as he walks past an incredibly amused looking Nancy.
It just pisses him off more, her smug little fucking face as he turns to stalk towards her as the smirk drops, realizing she's drawn his ire as she takes a step back.

"The fuck is so funny?" Billy asks darkly as her eyes dart to look behind him.

Steve is on him within seconds, spinning him around, looking murderous as he grips a hand into his shirt before letting go.

"Fuck. Off." Steve tells him as Billy shakes his head and rolls his eyes, bumping into his shoulder to move past him as Steve grunts from the force of it.

When he gets into his room he slams the door shut and starts throwing shit around, anything he can find because he's so fucking angry.

Why does Steve need to be like this?

Why does he always fight him on everything?

He's so fucking stupid.

Steve starts pounding on his door and Billy can't help but groan as he turns to look at it in disgust.

"Don't throw their stuff around and break it you fucking crazy piece of shit, the hell is wrong with you?!" Steve screams through the door as he tries to open it to no avail.

Billy snorts, saying nothing, wanting to get Steve all riled up because fuck him.

Steve of course gets more upset because Billy refuses to talk back and finally Billy hears him stop, wondering if he's just given up to walk away.

Billy's about to turn around and start throwing more shit when he hears Steve's voice again except this time it's controlled, apologetic, and quiet.

"Billy, come on please open the door"

The eye roll he gives the door is one for the ages and he feels annoyed that nobody is here to see it as he begrudgingly goes to open it and Steve's face goes from fake sincerity to full blown anger within seconds as he pushes Billy hard, making him stumble backwards as he slams the door shut behind himself, locking it before turning to get into Billy's face.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Steve hisses out and Billy can't believe the audacity of this guy.

"You little shit, you tricked me!" he exclaims, stepping back and away from Steve.

"Wow no shit sherlock. Why are you like this, why do you feel the need to be so destructive?" Steve asks him in exasperation.

"Because you sit here all self righteous telling me I need to communicate and when I do, when I actually try? You act like a little bitch!" Billy spits out at him.

"I- I do not!" Steve yells out while scoffing, looking accused.

"That's exactly what you just did, I asked what I can do to help you and you shut me down, you lied to my face" Billy gets out through clenched teeth, getting up close and personal into Steve's face.

"What, you gonna hit me?" Steve taunts.
Billy steps back like the air has been punched out of his lungs as he sees himself over Steve, choking the life out of him, the bruises still healing on his neck and for a moment he can't tell what's real and what's not because he just keeps seeing them in the water, keeps seeing himself trying to kill Steve.

He feels Steve's cold wet skin beneath his fingertips, motionless, not breathing as he feels himself fall.

When he comes back to himself he's on his knees and Steve is cupping his face, tears streaming down his face all of a sudden and Billy doesn't know if he's done something, if he actually did something as he panics and grabs him, starts touching him everywhere.

"Are you alright?" he asks and Steve just looks at him in confusion, hiccuping a bit as he wipes one side of his face.

"Wh- Billy yes, I'm fine what you are talking about? You're the one that started freaking out, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry" Steve starts to say as Billy shakes his head.

"I didn't hurt you?" he asks, not believing Steve.

"God Jesus Billy- no, no you didn't hurt me you just stood there for a long time like you were going to have a panic attack and then fell to your knees" Steve tells him as Billy grabs him by his shoulders and pulls him in, starts holding him, stroking the back of his head, crushing Steve against his chest.

Billy sobs.

"Billy- hey, it's ok we're good, you're ok it's fine" Steve says and it's muffled because he's pretty much got the poor guy's face crushed into his chest.

He lets go after a bit and Steve just looks at him for a long time.

"I'm so sorry, I don't know why I said that, that was so fucked up, I know you wouldn't hit me, I know you weren't going to hit me Billy I was just being an asshole" Steve says, grabbing one of his hands to bring it up to his face as Billy cups it and Steve leans into it, kissing his palm.

"No I know, it was just a stupid fight, it was so stupid I just saw- I got lost for a second" he admits, feeling weak and pathetic.

"It was me, I'm being a child, you're right I did lie to you and I don't know why I'm like this" Steve says breathlessly as he pulls away from him, getting distance and all Billy wants to do is pull him back in.

"I don't know how to make you feel better Steve" Billy tells him, still at a loss.

"You don't need to, take all the time you need I'm serious, I think maybe I just wasn't taking it seriously or something but it really fucked you up didn't it?" Steve asks and Billy looks down at his hands.

"I just- I dunno, I don't fully trust myself around you I think" Billy admits and he knows it's stupid, knows that the Mind Flayer can't control him but whenever he thinks about it he gets shaky, he shuts down, starts to lose his damn mind.

"Don't worry about it just do what you need to do, I'll be here for whatever you need- do you, did you wanna try taking another walk?" Steve asks and Billy gives him a small smile as Steve gets up
and holds his hand out to him.

Billy takes it as Steve lifts him up so they're standing face to face.

"Yeah, that sounds nice" he says, just wishing things weren't so damn complicated.

Chapter End Notes

Man, poor fucking Billy like seriously this poor guy first the shit with the Mind Flayer, then the bond and now his dad?

I feel like such an asshole but hey, the show must go on.

I'm pretty sure I wrote at LEAST eight other scenes of Steve and Billy fighting, the first one had been just totally awful and Steve was completely hysterical but I hated it so I scrapped it.

I think my kink is Billy and Steve fighting tho? Even if it is pain?
Chapter Notes

Ah, so much plot to cover lol.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It takes nearly a week until they're able to finally go back to Hawkins and he's still doing this whole distance thing with Billy.

There haven't been any other compulsion incidents and Steve hasn't felt that strange feeling when the energy building inside of him seems to try and expand itself outward needing release.

Whatever they're doing it seems to be working.

Part of Steve is glad but mostly he misses the fuck out of Billy although they did have a rather tender moment this morning.

Steve is dreaming and he dreams that his door opens slowly as Billy comes into his room and sits down on the bed next to him.

"Hey- sorry to wake you" Billy whispers.

Steve's dream induced brain assumes he's coming back from the bathroom or something as he waves his hand absently in the air.

"'S'fine, come to bed" he says as he closes his eyes again, tucking himself further into the warmth of the blankets as he turns over.

It takes a while but eventually he feels Billy slide in under the covers beside him, wrapping a hand around his waist and pulling him firmly against his chest and it feels amazing, he loves how warm Billy feels as he sighs, completely content.

He hears Billy mumble something under his breath and is only able to get out the words 'dream' and 'morning' so Steve pays it no mind as he quickly falls back to sleep.

When he wakes up the next morning he's gotten better sleep than he has in what feels like forever as he opens his eyes and is greeted with Billy staring back at him, his arm around Steve's waist, holding him close and Steve is about as confused as he can be.

Billy sees the expression on his face and snorts.

"Good morning sunshine" he says and Steve frowns.

"Uhhhhh- no offense but I don't remember going to bed with you" Steve tells him honestly but he doesn't make a move to get up, he feels way too comfortable.
"I figured, I told you last night you'd probably wake up in the morning thinking this was a dream" Billy says, amusement in his tone.

"Wha- pft, taking advantage of me in my sleep Hargrove? Come on, you can do better than that" Steve says wagging his eyebrows as Billy gives him a small smile.

"Sorry, I missed you and I couldn't sleep- I was hoping maybe you were at least aware enough that if you really wanted me to leave you'd tell me but I should have known" Billy says, looking guilty.

"Don't sweat it, what do you mean you should have known?" Steve asks, raising a brow as Billy rubs a hand up his side.

"You've done it to me a few times, you talk in your sleep and have full blown conversations, you usually think I'm Dustin" Billy says with a shit eating grin on his face.

Steve bolts upright and flushes red, sputtering a bit.

"Wha- no way, I do not- I do not do that!" he exclaims.

"Yep, last time it happened you started telling me I need to return the books that are overdue to that nice librarian and to stop being such a smart ass because she's just trying to do her job" Billy coos at him as he breaks into a fit of laughter from the look of horror on Steve's face.

"Whaaaaaat, no way" Steve says in disbelief, Billy has got to be fucking with him.

"I'm dead serious love, you totally talk in your sleep" Billy tells him and Steve groans, putting his hands into his face.

"Don't worry, it's adorable and you haven't said anything too incriminating yet" Billy says with a wink when Steve turns his head to look at him.

Steve rolls his eyes and gets up out of the bed and picks up one of the pillows to throw at Billy's face as he catches it gracefully.

"Whatever, get out of my room you jerk, I need a bath" Steve says with a snort.

A look passes over Billy's face and Steve wonder's if he's said something wrong but it's gone almost as fast as it had come and Steve wonders if he'd just imagined it as Billy gets a smile back on his face, shaking his head as he gets up to leave.

He's not sure why he'd told Billy to leave, it had just been an automatic reaction because he's gotten pretty good at having the whole separation thing laid out clearly in his mind, setting rules mostly for himself because if he doesn't he'll fuck it up and probably hurt Billy in some way.

He has no intentions of doing that again, he never wants to see Billy like that again.

Seeing him manic and thinking he'd hurt Steve when he hadn't even touched him because he really had lost himself worries Steve and he's not sure what to do at this point.

Needless to say they're doing as well as they can be, Steve isn't being crazy like he had been before and he feels like he's managed the whole being as understanding as possible and respecting Billy's boundaries while being open to when Billy has his moments of weakness like the one from this morning.

He's fully starting to take on the mindset of letting Billy come to him when he feels ready and he
doesn't feel the same pain from before, if anything he just feels worried, he wishes he could do something to help.

They all load into the large van as Lee takes the driver's seat, they'd kind of been assuming they'd just drive it themselves although Steve supposes that would be a strange thing to assume if they're the ones getting them the transportation in the first place.

He ends up in the back with Billy who seems to be staring at him strangely but Steve just makes it a point to avoid his gaze as he starts getting into a conversation with Nancy about everything they've learned so far.

It turns out Nancy had gotten herself a notebook and filled it to the brim and Steve can't help but laugh at her, it's certainly not a bad idea, at least they'll have a good reference point if they need to know anything.

He hopes they won't need to know anything because he wants to stay as far away as possible from anything to do with this supernatural shit.

Steve has hit his quota, his threshold, he's quickly getting to that point where he's looking forward to actually going back to school and forgetting any of this ever happened, of going back to a normal life except he knows Hopper had to do so much damage control he wonders how any of it had gotten managed, they haven't talked to Hopper since the last phone call with Billy and they'd all been informed they'd be debriefed when they get to some sort of undisclosed location.

It worries Steve.

Is this where everything goes to shit again?

Had this all been a trick and now they're back into a fucking meat grinder?

He doesn't notice he's tapping his foot until Billy reaches over and takes Steve's hand into his own, it almost startles him as he turns to look at Billy.

"You good?" he asks and Steve smiles.

"Yeah, just got a lot going on in my head" he admits as Billy gives him a look that he knows means 'you have no idea'.

When they get to a rest stop to all take a piss Billy takes him aside where no one can see them off into some dark corner.

"If this turns to shit do you think we can do that- thing?" Billy asks, waving his fingers in the air.

"The compulsion?" Steve asks, to clarify as Billy nods.

"I have no idea Billy, maybe we should have been trying to see how it works" Steve says with a grimace.

They'd been so focused on not destroying their relationship completely they hadn't thought about the
fact that they might need to use it because they might be walking right into another trap.

Billy scratches the back of his head as they both stand there in silence and Billy looks like he wants to say something more as Steve waits him out.

"Yes?" Steve finally asks since Billy seems to have it stuck in his throat or something.

"It's nothing- I just, I have no idea what's going to happen when we get back to Hawkins, do you think they did the memorial service?" Billy asks him and Steve's expression softens.

"Oh- I dunno, probably not if we're being honest unless they think you're dead, it's hard to know" Steve says honestly, not wanting to get some sort of false idea into his head but still keeping an open mind.

"I can't go, I can't go to a memorial, those things are fucking awful" Billy says and Steve sees his eyes start to water.

Oh, his mother's memorial service, that's probably the last one he'd gone to.

"You don't have to Billy, you don't have to-" Steve says as he cups Billy's face only to have Billy pull away from him.

Ah, there's that hurt he feels again.

He'd been hoping he wouldn't feel it again, had thought he'd been doing pretty well.

"You don't understand, I'm his son and it's my obligation to go, none of my family knows how shitty he was" Billy says as he puts his hands in his pockets.

"Billy-

"I haven't even read his stupid fucking note yet, I bet it's just him telling me how it's my fault mom's dead and how now it's my fault he's dead too" Billy says, voice raising and Steve knows he's about to start crying.

Steve doesn't even care anymore as he pulls Billy into a hug and starts running his fingers through Billy's hair.

Billy's still for a long while, not even breathing until Steve feels his shoulders drop, hears the breath get exhaled slowly as he takes his hands out of his pockets to put his hands around Steve's waist, resting them there gently.

It doesn't take long for Billy to start shaking as he just cries and Steve lets him, they just stand there for as long as Billy needs.

"What if it's apologies, what if he writes some dumb guilty shit about how he's sorry for everything he's done?" Billy chokes out and it's a bit muffled from where he's got his face buried in the crook of Steve's neck.

"You don't have to read it Billy" Steve tells him because that is a third option, no matter what it says it's going to cause Billy distress.

"They're his dying words, I'm supposed to just throw it in a fire?" Billy asks, pulling away so they're looking at each other, breaths mingling.

"Maybe you can wait a year, give yourself time to mourn first and then read it later when you're
"ready" Steve tells him, trying to help him and Billy actually seems to take that to heart as he starts composing himself.

"Yeah ok, that's actually a good idea there pretty boy, I'm impressed" he says as Steve snorts.

"I have my moments" he says as Billy cups his face and stares at him in a way that Steve can't handle as he goes to pull away but Billy holds him fast.

"You put up with a lot of my shit" Billy whispers and Steve can feel his heart rate skyrocket.

"Ah- yeah well you put up with a lot of my shit too, so we're even" Steve says as he clears his throat, not looking Billy in the eyes even though it's hard when Billy's face is so close to his own and his fingers are splayed out along the back of his neck.

"It's nothing compared to what you've gotta deal with from me, you really do deserve better Steve" Billy says and Steve's eyes immediately water as he pulls away, he can't do this, he can't listen to Billy saying that shit, doesn't want to hear what stupid shit is going to come out of his mouth next.

"Whatever man, come on they're going to think we've been kidnapped or something" Steve says as he brushes past a concerned looking Billy.

The rest of the drive is awkward between them, they don't even speak to one another and when they finally make it to a small looking warehouse Steve immediately thinks they're going to die or something and judging from the reactions of Nancy, Jonathan and Billy he's not the only one.

Lee takes one glance back at them and seems to see their trepidation.

"Oh, don't worry I swear we're not going to kill you or anything it's just easier to meet in places likes these, here I'll have them come to us" Lee says as he honks the horn and Steve can't help but startle.

Soon after one of the large rolling doors gets lifted up and he sees Alex and a dark skinned older woman who looks to be in her mid to early thirties next to him with Hopper on the other side as he lets out a sigh of relief.

Thank god, things are finally starting to look up for them.

They get out quickly and Hopper's face immediately lights up upon seeing them as they shake hands and Nancy hugs him.

Obviously their relationship is still strained with Hopper but Steve is still happy to see him all the same, almost dying puts certain things into perspective.

The woman next to Alex is looking intently between himself and Billy and he suddenly feels like he's under a microscope as she tilts her head to the side and holds out her hand to him all of a sudden.

Steve doesn't want to be rude so he takes her hand and shakes it.

"Hello Steve, I'm Maggie" she says and he just barely catches sight of her wrist.

001

Holy shit, she's number one.

"I- oh wow, hello what's your gift?" Steve asks dumbly out of nowhere because he has no brain to
mouth filter.

Geez Steve, just jump right on into it.

She smiles at him and her face is soft, he feels like he can trust her and wonders if it has something to do with her ability.

"Mind reader" she says with a hint of an accent, tapping her head as Steve's eyes widen and Billy whips around.

"No way" Billy says and suddenly he looks uncomfortable as Steve snorts.

God forbid anyone other than Steve can see right through him, better call the damn police.

Maggie covers her mouth to muffle a laugh while looking at him, clearly having heard his thought as he blushes, letting go of her hand as Billy sends him a glare probably picking up on the fact that he's just thought something sassy in regards to him.

"Why don't we all go inside?" Alex says as they all file in to the small warehouse they later find out is one of the many safe houses all over the world they have set up for their network of whoever the fuck they are.

"Alex is going to be staying in Hawkins with you for a while until we find the Mind Flayer" Maggie tells them.

If anything she seems to be the one calling the shots not that it shocks Steve.

He's also surprised she's calling it a Mind Flayer, maybe because it's the term they're more familiar with.

"Any help you can give is greatly appreciated" Hopper says as she nods.

"Of course the trade off is allowing for me to meet Jane and Kali" she says as Hopper nods begrudgingly.

"Wait, Eleven's name is Jane? That's Jane?" Billy says like he's just now putting something together from long ago.

Actually, Steve had no clue that was her real name either.

"As for the two of you I know you're not like us but you're family all the same, if there is anything either one of you needs I'd like to give you something to help with that" she says as Alex pulls out a small box from his pocket.

When he opens it they're two necklaces, both the exact same.

It's of a small gold hand with an eye in the middle of the palm, the size of a quarter and they take them with looks of confusion on their faces.

"These are hamsa symbols and they represent many things such as good fortune and health, I won't bore you with the specifics" Maggie says as they take them in their hands to inspect them closer.

It's definitely a strange symbol but when he touches it a pleasant feeling washes over him.
"These particular necklaces have been warded by one of our sisters, she can push her will into an object and it becomes a reality" she tells them.

"So she enchants it?" Billy asks as he turns it over in his hand.

"Yes, it will protect you from the mental influence of a hive mother, as long as you wear it they cannot influence you" she says as they both gape at her.

"No way, you're joking" Steve says.

"I am not, we chose this symbol because it is meant to protect you from the evil eye, in this case a Mind Flayer" she says as she folds her hands in front of her.

"Holy shit" Billy whispers out breathlessly.

This would have been really useful to have forever ago.

"Apologies, I wish I'd have met you both sooner" she says in response to his obvious thought as he looks at her sheepishly.

"Wait, what about Will, could we get one for him too?" Billy asks.

That's actually a good idea.

Maggie looks to be searching their minds to find out who Will is and finally she smiles and nods as she turns to look at Alex.

"Yes of course, we'll have one made and sent to him" she says as Alex nods in understanding.

"Actually I'll give this one to Will, send a new one to me I'm not as susceptible to it's influence as they are" Steve says as he hangs it around his neck.

"Yes of course" she says, nodding.

"Shouldn't take me too long to get one to you, I'll keep in touch" Alex tells him as Steve nods.

"Alright, now to the unfortunate part, your families" Hopper says, interjecting and Steve can't help the grimace he gets on his face.

"Obviously Billy's situation is- well you already know. Susan knows everything, I had to tell her the truth" he tells them as he looks right at Billy who looks incredibly uncomfortable.

"Yeah well at least Neil isn't a problem anymore" he says, voice devoid of emotion as Steve cringes.

Hopper gets a hardened look on his face as he purses his lips.

"Right, the memorial is in a few days I'll let Susan handle all of that" Hopper says turning to look at Steve as Billy sighs.

"As for your family it's a bit more complicated, they started poking around in the wrong places and the government had no choice but to intervene and keep them quiet, they know you're alive but they're signed to not ask questions" Hopper says as he pinches the bridge of his nose.

"Your whole house is under surveillance, they are under a microscope right now and you will be too, with Richards dead it's not as big of a deal but- it's definitely unsettling" he grumbles.
"Fucking fantastic, he's a sitting duck is basically what you're saying" Billy hisses out.

"I'm seeing what strings I can pull to get them off the list, it'll take time" Jim says as Billy rolls his eyes.

"Yeah well let's not pull too many fucking strings this time and unleash more hell upon the world" Billy says with as much malice as he can muster.

"Duly noted" Hopper grumbles out.

They get told a few other tidbits of information and when they’re all about ready to finally take off Maggie takes Steve and Billy aside.

"I just wanted to let you both know that when the time is right I have a degree in psychology" She says as Steve's eyes widen as he suddenly get uncomfortable, stealing a glance at Billy who looks like he's been sucking on a lemon.

"I was a therapist for a few years before Brenner became the man he is today" she tells them as Steve frowns.

She must pick up on their thoughts because she tilts her head.

"You're certain he's dead?" She asks as Billy and Steve share a look.

"It's best to ask Hopper, we only know second hand stories" Steve tells her as she nods.

"Regardless you are under no obligation to assist us but you'd both be invaluable assets to our cause when you're older" Maggie says with a smile.

"What do you mean?" Billy asks raising a brow.

"We travel the world eradicating the continued threat of the hive mothers, find displaced children with latent psychic abilities, we do many things and there's an entire network of us" she says softly.

"Whoa, yeah oh- wow ok, that's a lot" Steve says as Billy looks overwhelmed.

"At the very least you can still come to me when you're ready for any personal help, I can assist you both in matters such as when you find yourself bonded to one another" she tells them.

"There are others like us?" Billy asks and Steve had no idea either.

"Yes but certainly not in the same way, I have twins that Brenner found a way to connect mentally, they read each other's minds among other things, it can be difficult to find a sense of self" she says with a sad smile on her face.

"Huh- well...thank you, we'll keep it in mind" Steve tells her.

"Hey so, your real name isn't Maggie right?" Billy asks.

Steve looks at Billy like he's insane, wondering what he's getting at.

Maggie merely smiles, completely unbothered.

"It is now, picked up on my accent I see" she says, chuckling lightly.
"Well I don't know much about this hamsa thing, my mom told me about it mostly when I was a child but I know it shows up in different religions and you don't seem Christian" he says.

"Your mother was?" She asks.

"Mm, raised Catholic on one side and Christian on the other, became far more spiritual later on in life" he says with a shrug.

Steve can't help the smile he gets on his face, he loves hearing about Billy's mother, she was so lovely and he never goes into detail about her very often.

Maggie shoots him a smile as he gets another sheepish look on his face.

"She sounded like a wonderful woman. Please don't hesitate to contact me, should you ever need anything clutch the amulet tight and think of me, I will hear your call" she tells them.

"Fancy trick" Billy says with a snort.

"With so many of us around the world we do what we must" she says with a laugh.

"Of course you're both free to ask Alex any questions you may have, he is an invaluable well of information" she says as they nod to her.

They drop off Billy first and Steve goes inside with him to see Susan and Max as he tells the others to wait in the car for him.

When the door opens Susan immediately starts to cry, she doesn't look as well kept as she usually is as she pulls them both in for a crushing hug.

Steve sees Max come out of her room as she also starts to cry and when Susan moves aside she runs at them full speed as they both catch her.

Billy seems surprised by her show of affection but Steve isn't, it had been so long and they had probably thought it was all hopeless, she probably thought they were dead for good this time, not to mention Max being here alone to have to deal with the whole Neil thing must have been awful.

They say absence makes the heart grow fond.

Before Billy goes inside he turns to Steve, a look of longing in his eyes.

"Did you want me to come?" Billy asks as Steve grimaces.

"God no, you heard Hopper my whole place is under surveillance, you'd just become a basket case on me" he says with a snort.

"I can still come, I should go with you" Billy says as Steve just shakes his head.

"Don't worry about it, I'll see you at school yeah?" Steve says, big smile on his face now.

"There's words I never thought we'd hear again" Billy says with a snort.

"Right? I can't believe I actually want to go to school" Steve says with a shake of his head.
Billy gives him a small smile as they just stand there in silence and Steve has no idea what to say, there's so many things they still need to talk about, so many things that need to be done and that's not even including their relationship.

When Steve is pretty certain Billy won't say anything he goes to turn away as Billy grabs him, pulling him inside to look around, seeing that neither Susan nor Max are in the vicinity.

"I love you" Billy says and Steve sighs, getting a soft look in his eyes as Billy goes to kiss him gently, Steve falls into it and it feels so warm and welcoming, like coming home.

"I love you too" Steve says as they pull away far too quick for his liking.

"There's a lot- we've both got a lot to deal with right now, is it ok if we talk about us after everything has calmed down?" Billy asks and Steve appreciates the gesture, appreciates that Billy is asking instead of telling for once.

"Of course, if you need anything-" Steve says, grabbing his arm.

"I know, don't worry you're the only person I'd go to anyway" Billy says as he chuckles lightly.

Steve hates being at home, it's awkward with his parents not being able to ask him anything and they all have to skirt around questions and answers about certain things.

They actually eat dinners together for a couple of nights until Steve has to go back to school again because they go back to being exactly how they usually are, distant, detached, cold.

It's the most attention he's ever gotten from his parents though which is interesting.

His home life has always been an enigma, his parents allow him to do whatever he wants and have always allowed him to since he can remember and his younger years showed them to be a bit more engaged but it quickly changed when Steve was able to take care of himself.

It's probably why he'd been such an ass for so long because mommy and daddy never loved him enough, the usual cliche bullshit.

It doesn't help that his dad thinks he'll never amount to anything, just accepts that Steve isn't some sort of genius and works around it, offering him that job instead of trying to push him.

"It's not like you're very smart anyway son, this will be a good option for you" his dad has told him.

Yeah, Steve is aware of all of this but it doesn't mean he's gotta rub it in every damn chance he gets.

His mom is the type of woman to roll over and die, she just lets his dad get away with doing and saying anything he wants, she's a fucking doorknob and while he loves her dearly it gets more annoying as he gets older, to see her be so docile and just take his dad's shit all the time.

Must be where he gets it in regards to Billy, he always rolls over for Billy at the end of the day so he supposes he's not one to talk.

It's a relief when he finally gets to go back to school a couple days later.

Somehow Hopper gets Billy's car back to him, he'd even gotten the bullet holes repaired and he'd
been so damn confused until he remembered that the one from the other dimension was just a mirrored version of his real car.

He's really fucking sick and tired of all of this Upside Down, topsy turvy shit. He's ready to be done with it at this point and never look back.

He's grateful of course considering Neil went and totaled his own car by killing himself and Billy would have had nothing to drive.

Susan gives him the note and says nothing, apparently he'd written multiple notes, one to Susan, one to Max and one to him.

His envelope is unopened.

He takes a shoe box out from under his bed that still has sand in it, it holds little trinkets and pictures he has of his mom, the last living memories he has of her as he places the envelope inside.

Just yet another memory of another dead parent.

Go figure.

At least there won't be more.

He's decided to take Steve's advice, he'll open it when he's ready and he doesn't know if he ever will be as he tucks it back underneath his bed gently.

When he goes into the kitchen to grab himself something to eat Max comes in through the front door and she stops for a moment and just looks at him as he looks back at her.

"It's so weird seeing you back" she says as she realizes how that sounds, trying to backtrack.

"No- what I mean is that it's not bad it's just- so much has happened" she says as Billy snorts.

"It's alright kid, I know I've never been your favorite" he says in a light tone. It really doesn't bother him, he's been an ass to Max since he's known her, he'd been decent while they'd been in Cali for a bit but he still wasn't great, he'd just been too caught up in his own life to get the chance to be an ass.

"Nah but you can be alright at times" she says with a snort as he just smiles back at her.

"You hungry? I'll make you something" he says as her eyes light up as she nods.

"Wow, you really are different, you haven't cooked for me since we were in California" she says as she puts her skateboard down next to the door.

"Hey, put that shit in your room, Susan won't want to see it just laying around" he says with a raised brow as she rolls her eyes, begrudgingly obliging.

When Max comes back out she plops herself into the dining room chair, resting her elbows on the table with her chin on her hands as she just stares.

"Grilled cheese?" he asks as she nods excitedly.

"I heard you guys were the reason we survived the Mind Flayer" she says suddenly as he turns to look at her with concern.

He hadn't known she was there when it had happened, he'd only heard bits and pieces of the story.
"Mostly Wheeler, she caught it on fire" he says, not really wanting to go into detail.

"How's Steve?" she asks as he groans, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I remember when you didn't ask questions" he says as he rubs butter over the pan.

"So, not good" she says as Billy rolls his eyes.

"Not really any of your business" he tells her honestly because it really isn't.

"Sorry it's just he's the best thing that has ever happened to you, would be a waste to see you mess it up" she says as he turns around and looks at her with a look that must clearly be menacing as she averts her gaze.

"You're like nine Max, I don't need you telling me what's good for me and what isn't" he says, still glaring at her as she frowns at him.

"Rude" she says under her breath as he goes back to cooking and she thankfully shuts the fuck up.

"I'm just saying if you two break up we both know who's fault it's going to be" Max says, clearly not being able to handle the blissful silence they'd had going.

Billy slams the spatula down on the counter as he turns around to walk up to the table as Max sits there calm as can be.

"You have no idea what the fuck him and I have been through, you don't really have a right to be sitting here and talking out your ass like you know shit" he says, tone dark and voice low.

"You're right but I've seen you when you're like this. This whole kicked puppy dog look and I know Neil is dead and you've been through a lot but that's not an excuse because at some point you've gotta stop feeling sorry for yourself" she says as she stares him down.

"The one person who has been there for you this whole time through every second of it has been Steve and you have a track record of hating yourself so much you push everyone that cares about you away" she goes on to say as Billy looks at her like she's insane.

"Again, you're a kid so where is all this coming from right now?" he asks, seriously confused.

"Hopper talks, a lot and he feels guilty that with everything that has happened it's his fault that you two are struggling so much. Also he found out from Nancy and basically we all talk" she says with a shrug.

Billy rubs his hands into his eyes and groans.

"I've been back for like a day and you people are already meddling in my business?" he hisses out.

He's seriously going to hit Nancy one day, she has no right to be talking to anyone about anything, that little bitch.

"We're just worried about you Billy, you've been through a lot. Have you thought about getting help-" she goes to say as he slams his hands onto the table, making Max startle.

"I'm so fucking sick and tired of hearing you people ask me if I'm getting help. Here's a thought Max, rise above this bullshit and keep your nose out of a person's business, be better than Nancy fucking Wheeler because she has no idea what she's talking about and neither do you so stay out of it" he tells her, voice laced with frustration and anger.
Max looks down at her hands as Billy turns around to go back to his pan, almost burning the damn toast.

They sit there in silence for a long while and when he's finished he takes the over cooked one for himself as he sets the better made one down in front of Max.

When she looks back up she doesn't seem to be expecting it and Billy doesn't really care as he starts walking out of the kitchen.

"I'm sorry Billy, you're right" she says quietly as he sighs, turning back to look at her.

"Don't sweat it kid, I'm taking you to school tomorrow so you can sleep in a bit longer if you want" he says as he walks out, not waiting for a response.

Billy gets in Nancy's face the next day after school next to Jonathan's car.

"Keep your fucking mouth shut Wheeler" he says as she glares at him, arms crossed.

It's just them, Jonathan and Steve haven't shown up yet.

"The hell are you talking about Billy?" she asks like she really has no clue.

"I'm talking about the fact that you wanna sit here and talk about my personal life to whoever you want" Billy whispers out angrily, not wanting anyone to over hear.

Understanding dawns on her face as she averts her gaze suddenly looking apologetic.

"Look Billy, Hopper asked me and the kids happened to be there too, I'm sorry-" she says as he scoffs.

"Is there really an excuse?" he asks her.

"I- no, there isn't I should have told Hopper where to shove it, I had a moment of weakness because he was giving me his sob story. It won't happen again, I promise" she says, eyes big and round and he knows that shit will work and Steve and Jonathan but it sure as fuck won't work on him.

"Promise or not if I find out you've been running your mouth again I'm going to lay you on your ass, I don't care if you're a woman because honestly you're fucking insane and you could probably kill me anyway" he says with a snort as she tries to hold back a smile.

"Alright Billy, that's fair" she says, nodding her head as Jonathan is suddenly in his face.

"What the hell-!" Jonathan yells out as Nancy pulls him back by his arm and suddenly all Billy can see is the back of Steve's head as he pushes Jonathan back.

Huh, that's a first.

Usually Steve is immediately in his face thinking he's doing something wrong.

"How about we don't start swinging randomly?" Steve hisses out.

"It's fine it's ok, Billy and I were just talking" Nancy says as Jonathan glares at Billy over Steve's shoulder.
"He was in your face" Jonathan says angrily.

Billy shares a look with Nancy as he shrugs.

"It's good, we're cool the issue is resolved" he tells them as Jonathan gets a confused look on his face.

"See? Come on Jonathan, let's go" she says as she pulls him away, leaving Steve and Billy by themselves.

"I don't know how I feel about you and Nancy being in cahoots about something" Steve says as he scratches the back of his head, watching them drive away as Billy snorts.

"We're not in cahoots, she's been talking about our relationship to everyone" Billy tells him as Steve makes a noise in the back of his throat.

"You're joking" he says as Billy shakes his head.

"Nope, wish I was because I had Max trying to give me love advice yesterday" he says with an eye roll.

"What the fuck! Nancy has no god damn right to be doing that shit" Steve hisses out through clenched teeth.

"My thoughts exactly, we talked it out though it should be fine" Billy says, still not entirely convinced.

One of those kids is probably going to say something and it'll get to the wrong person, Billy doesn't need the added stress of homophobes at his door on top of everything else.

"How are you?" Steve suddenly asks him as Billy shrugs.

"Good for now, the memorial is in two days" he says with a grimace.

"I can go with you Billy-" Steve goes to say as Billy shakes his head.

"I don't even know what I'm going to do yet, I'll figure it out" he says with a sigh.

The next day Billy makes a mistake.

He beats the ever living shit out of Tommy because he makes some sort of smart ass comment about how he disappeared with Steve, started implying they had run away together even though Nancy and Jonathan had been gone right along with them.

Not that high school idiots care, they're all fucking stupid anyway.

He's sitting in the principals office, some other teacher standing behind him that Billy doesn't care about and he's only been back two days before he gets suspended.

_Fucking great._

Susan is sitting next to him and he feels bad that she had to be pulled from work for this shit.
"I know your home life is not very great right now Mr. Hargrove but you need to exercise a bit more respect and responsibility towards others" the principal tells him as his stomach churns.

"What did you just say?" Billy asks looking him dead in the face.

"Respect and responsibility, you need to respect others even though you're going through a hard time-" he starts to say as Billy stands up from his chair.

"I know what you fucking said, why did you choose those words?!" Billy yells out, feeling like he's going insane as he starts looking around the room, wondering if it has been wire tapped, wondering if they're being watched.

"Mr. Hargrove control yourself-" he says, holding up his hands, fear in his eyes as Susan starts to look like she's going to cry.

The other teacher starts moving towards him as he starts trying to tear the whole place apart, looking for anything that might indicate they're being surveillanced.

Before he can get very far the door bursts open and it's-

Alex?

Billy stops what he's doing, more confused than anything at seeing him and he-

A name tag.

Teacher.

He's a fucking teacher at the school now.

No fucking way.

"Billy, come on man we've talked about this" he says as Billy just looks at him like he's insane.

"Mr. Brenton, you know this student?" the principal asks, his name leaving Billy, he's never had to deal with the guy before now oddly enough.

Also really?

Brenton?

"I was one of his teachers back in California, I'm really sorry about this Mike why don't I talk to him?" Alex says as 'Mike' rubs at his temples.

"Alright, you're still suspended Mr. Hargrove, five days" he says, holding up his hand clearly just wanting this to be over with.

When they leave the room Alex grabs him by his arm, pulling him aside as he looks at Susan apologetically.

"I'll take care of this Susan, go back to work" he says as Susan nods, looking between them before laying a hand on Billy's arm.

"It's alright Billy, just try to show some restraint please" she says as he averts his gaze, feeling bad for disappointing her.
When she leaves Alex sighs, tilting his head to the side indicating Billy should follow as he rolls his eyes.

They get into Alex’s car and before Alex starts it Billy turns to him.

"You couldn't come up with anything more intelligent than Brenton?" Billy asks as Alex snorts.

"I saw an opportunity and I took it, sue me" he says shining him a bright smile as Billy gives him a look of disgust.

"What is your real last name?" Billy asks, genuinely curious.

"Wouldn't you like to know" Alex says ambiguously.

"Yeah I would, that's why I'm asking" Billy says, completely deadpan.

"If you're thinking he's government you're wrong, he came out clean" Alex says, changing the subject.

"How do you know I thought he was government?" Billy asks suspiciously.

"You were about to tear that whole room apart and I could hear you yelling through the door" Alex says like Billy should already know that.

"Look, you're still a kid so be a kid, we've got this handled and we're here to protect you, it's going to get resolved" Alex tells him as Billy grimaces.

"You talk some big shit and sound pretty sure of yourself" Billy grumbles out.

Alex pinches the bridge of his nose before turning to look at him as Billy stares right back, he finds himself not liking this guy the more he gets to know him.

"That's because I am sure of myself, the five hive mother's I mentioned that have been killed were by my hand Billy, that's my job, I'm the one they bring in when shit gets too far out of control" Alex says, demeanor totally changing along with his usually carefree tone.

Oh.

Oh well shit.

Billy probably should have assumed as much, he's got pyromancy for fucks sake, that's a golden ticket in regards to taking out anything in the Upside Down.

"You- you're like twenty" Billy says, not fully believing him.

"I'm twenty four but thanks, you're only seventeen and you've already lived a life few could ever dream of" Alex retorts, raising a brow.

"Well first off you don't know my life-" Billy says as Alex interjects.

"You don't know mine either but I can assure you I'm going to find it and I will kill it, I've got a pretty good track record so far" Alex says, going back to his unusually brightly uncaring self, acting like nothing bothers him.

This guy is so fucking two faced it's giving Billy whiplash.
"Don't stress it is all I'm saying, be a kid and figure your life out, your father just died so don't put too much onto your own plate when other people are here offering their help to you, don't be afraid to ask either" Alex says.

"Trust me, took me years to learn to ask for help" he says with a snort as he gets a far off look in his eyes.

"You're a weird fucking guy, you know that?" Billy tells him as he shrugs.

"Yeah, I know" he says as he finally starts the car to take Billy home.

"How the hell did you already get yourself suspended?!" Steve yells out as Billy recoils, getting earwax out of his ear at the loud shrillness of his voice.

Apparently he'd rushed to Billy's house after school and waited for him here.

Alex is already gone, had merely dropped him off and reassured him yet again that it would all be fine even though he doesn't trust the guy as far as he can throw him after letting him know he'd be taking him to school tomorrow so he can get back to his car.

Billy lets him know that people will talk as Alex had simply snorted at him, mumbling something Billy couldn't hear under his breath.

And here he is, listening to Steve yell at him.

"Just because you don't want to go to the memorial tomorrow doesn't mean you should take it out on poor Tommy" Steve says, crossing his arms over his chest as Billy gives him a look.

"Poor Tommy? That guy is a fucking tool, he's had it coming for a long while don't sweat it princess, I defended our honor" Billy tells him with a fake smile.

"The hell does that mean?" Steve asks as Billy goes to walk into his room to throw his shit on the bed.

"He said some dumb shit about you and me so I beat the shit out of him" Billy says with a shrug.

"You know that just fuels the rumors right?" Steve says.

"Honestly, fuck Hawkins because I hate this place anyway, my dad is dead and I don't really have anything tying me down to this place other than you, I don't care what these people think of me. I'm out of here as soon as I turn eighteen, maybe even before that" Billy tells him as Steve looks like he's about to cry.

"Oh come on, you've known this for a long time Steve, you can't honestly be surprised right now" Billy says because he knows how Steve's brain works, he's probably gone over every scenario in his head.

"No yeah- I know but hearing it is different" Steve says as he looks down at his shoes looking completely dejected.

Billy walks up to him as he cups his face and he finds himself almost getting lost in those brown orbs, he's missed him so fucking much in so many different ways.

"My future is with you but it sure as fuck does not involve staying in Hawkins for the rest of my life" Billy tells him, wanting to make that clear.
Steve leans into his touch, a small bittersweet smile on his face as he grabs Billy's wrist.

"Honestly I don't think I wanna stay here either, it's just becoming too much" he says in a whisper.

Before Billy can respond Max bursts through the door as she stops and stares at them, flushing in embarrassment.

"Oh shit- sorry god damn it, I even saw his car uh- don't mind me" she says nervously as she nearly runs past them, bolting into her room as they hear the door shut.

Neither one of them can help it as they break out into a fit of laughter, clinging to one another and Steve is the first to recover.

"Let's not worry about any of that right now, we've got time to figure our shit out" Steve says as he wipes a lone tear from his eye.

"Yeah, yeah, gotta be kids and all or whatever" Billy says with a roll of his eyes as Steve looks at him confused.

"Oh, you'll get a kick out of this" he says as he prepares to tell Steve all of the things that Alex told him.

Chapter End Notes

So I actually finally have an 'ending' in sight guys!

I'm still hashing out the details in my head but we ARE getting there! XD
Don't worry though, we still have plenty of chapters to go before this one is complete.

Btdubz if it feels a bit familiar like "Oh Maggie's a mind reader like Charles Xavier?"
That was on purpose because Duffer bros keep adding xmen references into stranger things like the fact that El is similar to Phoenix ;D
Chapter Summary

<333333333333333
*hides*

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

After Billy explains that their resident arsonist is apparently a big fuckin' deal Steve gets a different kind of look on his face.

Before all this it had been obvious distrust towards Alex while Steve had obviously been wary of him, that had been apparent.

Now?

He's oh'ing and ah'ing like he admires the guy, like Alex is the greatest fucking thing Steve has ever heard about since sliced bread.

Billy fucking hates it.

Apparently Billy's lack of a poker face is apparent as Steve suddenly frowns at him.

"What?" He asks as Billy just shrugs.

"He's not that great, we don't gotta go suck his dick too hard now" Billy says with a scoff as Steve gets a look on his face like he's just flat out done.

"Seriously Billy?" Steve asks in exasperation as he rolls his eyes.

It just makes Billy even more annoyed.

Before either one of them can say anything more on the matter though Max comes back out of her room, walkie talkie in hand with her skateboard in the other.

She doesn't even speak to them just walks on by and she almost hits the door until Billy pipes up.

"Oi, where are you going?" He asks, turning himself on the couch so he can see her.

"Out with Lucas and the guys" she says and Billy grimaces as she glares at him.

"Billy-" she goes to say, knowing very well how much he does not like Sinclair.

"Need a ride?" He asks, interjecting.

She gapes at him like a fish, clearly not having expected him to just offer like that.

"Uh- yeah uhm sure that would be- that would be great" she says and she's got this look on her face
like she thinks this might be a trick.

"Alright, gimmie your keys pretty boy" he tells Steve, holding out his hand as he turns back to look at him.

The look of amusement on Steve's face drops within milliseconds as he frowns.

"First of all try asking nicely, second of all it's my car- no, we are not doing this again- Billy!" He starts to say, moving backwards on the couch as Billy starts crawling towards him.

Even if he couldn't hear the jingle of them he knows what pocket Steve puts them in.

"I'm serious, try asking!" Steve yells out, putting a foot to Billy's chest to hold him back and he clearly doesn't know he's only trapping himself even more and Billy can't help the smile he gets on his face as he grabs at Steve's ankle.

They lock eyes for a moment and Steve gets a pretty little blush on his face that Billy can tell moves all the way down to his chest as his pupils get blown wide almost immediately.

Steve starts darting his eyes between his own foot, Billy's firm grip on his ankle and Billy's face.

Oh my.

Billy's found out one of Steve's kinks, that little minx.

How dare he try to hide this one?

He gets a knowing smirk on his face as Steve turns even more red while Billy adjusts his hand so it's holding his foot up, the heel of it resting in his palm as he reaches up underneath the fabric of Steve's pant leg, looking intently at his face.

Billy reaches up a bit further, curling his fingers at the top of his sock as he starts to pull it down, slowly, methodically, gently.

Steve's eyes widen as he gets a horrified look on his face as he glances at Max.

He jolts out of Billy's grasp like he's been electrocuted, curling his legs up to his chest as Billy almost gets impaled in the face by his keys but luckily he catches them in time.

"Fi- fine, take them you animal!" Steve stutters out, looking away like he's embarrassed but they both know the truth.

"Oh my god, are you both done?" Max asks, tapping her foot on the ground impatiently.

Billy still can't help the smirk that's on his face as he gets up from the couch as Steve glares daggers at him.

"Come on princess, let's go take this shithead to her other shithead friends" Billy says as he turns to walk away, with or without Steve.

Steve begrudgingly gets up after mumbling something under his breath and they all load into his car as Steve just ignores him the whole way to the arcade.

Steve's mood improves when he realizes they finally get to see the kids, things had been so insane they still hadn't even gotten to see them yet.
He also still hasn't been able to give Will his necklace and he gets nervous because the last time he'd 'seen' Will he was being burned alive.

Billy apparently also seems to be putting that together because he becomes uncharacteristically quiet.

That shit back at his house had been a bit of a shock, Steve didn't even know he liked-
He definitely liked it, the idea of it, whatever Billy had in mind but Max was right there.

Can't he at least show some restraint?

Also, what happened to the whole keeping their distance from one another thing?

Billy's jealousy in regards to Alex had been a blaring neon sign and Steve wonder's if Billy actually has any right to get like that if he's the one putting the breaks on their relationship.

Also Alex is far too old for him anyway and the guy is very clearly straight from what he can tell, not to mention the most important point being that Steve's so hopelessly in love with Billy anyway so it boggles his mind when Billy gets like this.

The distance exercise is great if it's what they both want and if Billy wasn't so cold and detached one moment only to be hot and heated the next it'd be fine.

It feels like they're right back where they started with Billy's control issues, he's slowly regressing back into who he used to be and it worries Steve and he's worried he'll need to intervene before Billy finally pulls his head out of his ass.

Will Steve need to take drastic measures to put him back in his place?

He hopes not but this is Billy so it's exactly what he's expecting.

For now it's cute, but it won't be a month from now because Steve has already been through this song and dance with him and he knows he's been a huge fucking pushover in regards to everything with making it be Billy's call but that can clearly only happen for a short amount of time.

Again, Steve is reminded once more if you give him an inch, he takes a fucking mile and he's stretching that mile way the fuck out.

When they pull up to the arcade the other kids are already there, Mike is the one that catches sight of them first as he points excitedly at them.

Billy and Steve load out of the car and within the next few moments they're bombarded with children as they lean down to catch them in their arms.

Mike and Dustin throw themselves into Steve's arms as Will goes straight for Billy while Max and Lucas stay off to the side watching them.

Steve has noticed Lucas isn't much of a hugger not that he's complaining, to each their own.

He misses this, misses these kids, misses things being simpler like when he could just drive them around and take care of them and only have to worry about what he's going to do after school is over.

"Do you know how awful it has been without you?!" Dustin yells out, eyes watering and it's sad to
Steve that he's gone missing so often that they're all becoming desensitized to it, even himself.

"I imagine pretty awful I'm surprised none of you have been taken into police custody or something" Steve says with a snort as they laugh at him.

"Hey, we've had a couple close calls it's your fault for not being here to keep us in line" Mike says.

"We've had to bike everywhere man, it's awful" Lucas interjects to say and Steve can't help but laugh.

Steve turns his head as his heart nearly soars out of its fucking chest as he watches a crying Will clinging to a crying Billy.

Billy.

Crying in public.

Billy has his hands around Will's face reassuringly as Steve starts to zero in on what they're saying to each other.

"I saw the whole thing Billy I'm sorry I couldn't help you fight it, I tried- I tried so hard but it made me watch, it made me watch everything" Will chokes out.

"Hey, don't even worry I'm sorry you had to see any of it, I'm sorry I believed that thing, I'm sorry I fell for its tricks" Billy says breathlessly.

The other kids stand around Steve silently, watching and listening to the exchange as they look at Steve knowingly. He sees Mike's eyes looking at his throat that's pretty close to fully healed at this point and suddenly he feels self conscious.

Will must have told them what he'd seen.

Steve grimaces at the thought of Will having seen it, to have been helpless to do anything about it and he feels awful.

Lucas and Max seem to notice a couple kids looking at them strangely from outside the arcade door, wondering why they're crying as they stick their tongues out at them making them throw a look of disgust before the kids stomp inside.

"I'm sorry it made you do those things, it wasn't your fault Billy and you're going to think it is, it makes you feel like it is and you'll see the things you think you did like it's trying to burrow itself back into your mind but it's not, it's not you, it made you do those things" Will tells him as he goes back to hugging Billy.

Billy exhales sharply as he tucks Will close.

Steve lets out a shaky breath, maybe it'll mean something coming from Will, someone who has been controlled by the Mind Flayer before as well, has been manipulated by it and tricked just as much as they have.

Will is the strongest person he knows and he'll never understand the things this kid has been through, he hopes Billy takes what he says to heart.

"Oh, Will!" Steve says, remembering the most important part as he pushes away from Billy who
starts wiping at his own face, still turned away from everyone else.

Will smiles and comes up to him as he throws his arms around him as well as they hug for a moment.

"I have something for you" Steve tells him as he raises his brow after he pulls away.

Steve reaches underneath his shirt as he takes the hamsa necklace off to gently place it around Will's neck.

"Whoa, what the hell is that?" Dustin asks, walking up to them to grab it and inspect it closer as the other kids file around him too.

"We got it from some friends of ours, it protects against the influence of Mind Flayer's" Steve says with an excited smile on his face.

They all seem to look astonished by this as Lucas looks at it suspiciously.

"Yeah right, no way" he says in disbelief.

"Seriously, it's enchanted, there are other people like El and Kali out there and they've got a whole network of themselves working together" Steve whispers to them as Billy comes to stand beside him as he finally stands up as well, hearing his knees pop from having been crouched down for so long.

"Wait, you said Mind Flayer's, as in more than one?" Will asks, fear in his eyes.

"Oh- well ok yeah so, funny story" Steve says scratching the back of his head as he looks to Billy for help as he just shrugs in response.

They've got a lot to fill them in on.

When they tell the kids about everything they've learned, making them all load into the car so nobody can eavesdrop they all file back out when it's done as they start walking to go into the arcade as Billy turns in his seat to start the car.

He tells Max he'll be back for her later as she tells him not to worry, they've got a sleepover at the Wheeler house tonight but Billy glares, not liking the idea of all those boys with one girl as they all stop to turn around.

"Don't worry Billy, we do it all the time. Mrs. Wheeler supervises everything, I promise. We play D&D until we fall asleep and Max sleeps in the guest room, sometimes she hangs out with Nancy" Will tells him, giving Billy his puppy dog eyes as Billy curses under his breath, tapping his fingers against the steering wheel in consideration.

"God damn it fine, but she's your responsibility kiddo, don't you dare let Sinclair and his grubby little hands come anywhere near her, do we have an understanding?" Billy says, pointing a finger to Will as he points one to Max and Lucas next to get his point across.

"Got it" Will says, nodding his head vigorously, clearly taking the request and newly found responsibility to heart as Steve tries to muffle his laugh.

"That goes for you too Henderson, keep your fucking hands off of my sister" Billy says, glaring at Dustin who flails his arms up in a 'Why me?!' gesture as Billy doesn't wait for a response, driving away as he catches the surprised look on Max's face in the rear view mirror.

Steve also doesn't miss the fact that Mike is the only one left out of the equation because it's just a
known fact that he's desperately in love with El and that will probably always be an eternal constant much like the existence of the universe.

He finds himself hoping things are going well between them, knowing that distance can be difficult as he casts a glance over at Billy.

"You've never called her that before" Steve says, big smile on his face as Billy furrows his brows.

"Called her what?" Billy asks, clearly not having caught what he'd done.

"Your sister" he says as Billy just turns away, clearly embarrassed.

Steve wonders if maybe life has been put into perspective for Billy, all of these near death experiences and close calls and being thrown into absolute chaos with the added freshly opened wound of losing his father making him appreciate what's in front of him instead of allowing the past to completely rule over his decisions.

Obviously he still struggles with it but Steve can see the progress.

"Let's go grab my car, it's still at school and you can head back over to my place" Billy says as Steve nods.

"How did you plan on getting back to your car in the first place?" Steve asks, realizing why Billy used his car now, he hadn't even put together that he hadn't driven home, hadn't even paid attention to the fact that Billy's car wasn't in the driveway before remembering that Alex had been the one to take him home.

It had slipped his mind completely.

"Alex said he'd grab me tomorrow but fuck it, the less I gotta be around that guy the better" Billy says as Steve feels the annoyance from before slam back into him.

"Now who's being the child?" Steve mumbles under his breath as he leans in his seat to stare out his window, arms across his chest defiantly.

"What'd you say?" Billy asks, turning to glare at him briefly.

"Nothing" Steve says just to be an ass.

"Did you just call me a child?" Billy asks angrily.

Yep, it's about to turn into a fight.

"I did actually, you being jealous of Alex is pretty fucking childish and you don't really have a right to be acting like this" Steve tells him, he'd meant to just keep it to himself but now that Billy wanted to push the matter he finds himself caring less and less about catering to Billy's whims.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Billy asks, face contorting into something ugly, indicating he clearly doesn't like where this is going.

"You're the one pushing me away, you're the one that wants distance and if I get upset about it I'm the child but the moment you start acting like one suddenly it's ok?" Steve hisses out.

"All I had said was let's take a step back, that's all!" Billy yells accusingly.

"I told you that you can have one or the other but not both and you're swinging me around like a
"fucking yo-yo" Steve tells him angrily.

"That doesn't even make sense, it'd be more like a teeter-totter if we're throwing analogies around, at least use the right fucking ones" Billy huffs out as Steve squints at him, wanting to stab him so much right now.

"Are you seriously arguing analogies with me? The point is this isn't a distance exercise, you have not exercised any distance" Steve says.

Billy has the audacity to look surprised and accused as he huffs out a grunt of frustration.

"I have totally kept my distance-" he starts to say as Steve interrupts him.

"Explain you grabbing my fucking foot and getting ready to give Max a show" Steve retorts, genuinely serious.

"Wha- that was just me having a bit of fun!" Billy says like he doesn't understand at all.

"So it's fun for you to make me sit here and wonder what's going to happen between us" Steve says darkly as Billy's brow furrows.

"It's fun for you to use me in whatever way you'd like without telling me where we stand?" he says, barking out a laugh as Billy goes to open his mouth but he holds up his hand, not allowing him to speak.

"You can touch me in whatever way you'd like, get jealous even though you told me we'd talk about us later?" he asks mostly rhetorically, pointing from himself to Billy and then waving a hand between them.

"We're not broken up Steve, this isn't a fucking break up!" Billy says, slamming his hand on his steering wheel.

"Hey!" Steve says, slapping him lightly on his arm.

"This is my car, you do that shit all you want in your own car but you treat mine with some fucking respect!" he yells out as Billy clenches his jaw.

"What about when I want to touch you? When I'm feeling lonely or when I miss you? I'm supposed to just back off, do nothing, keep it bottled up because I've got to dance around your feelings and your emotions but we don't take any of mine into consideration, it was fine at first but now-"  

"Now what?" Billy asks, concern on his face still mixed with frustration.

"Now, you're just leading me on" Steve says, looking down at his lap, embarrassed at how stupid he feels.

"Leading you- we are together Steve, one hundred and fifty percent together and if you want to touch me you can whenever you'd like, I never told you that you couldn't" Billy says shaking his head.

"You're such a fucking liar!" Steve says, suddenly angry again at how stupid and hypocritical he's being.

"This started because you felt bad for hurting me after telling me no so don't pull that shit on me" he says glaring at Billy.
"You needed time to trust yourself around me again and that's fine but I can tell that you do trust yourself again so why is it all still like this?!" Steve yells out, pulling at his own hair because none of this has made sense to him, he'd been too busy figuring out his own life to bring it up.

Billy parks the car next to his own in the school parking lot as he looks forward thoughtfully and Steve has no idea what is going on inside of his fucking head.

"I don't know" he says and Steve's eyes widen as he laughs in disbelief.

"You don't know" he says, not believing that those words just came out of his mouth. "You don't know" he repeats for good measure.

Steve turns forward in his seat again and stares off into space for a moment as he nods his head, unbuckling his seat belt as he reaches over to unbuckle Billy's too as he looks over at him in surprise, clearly getting taken out of his own fucked up thoughts from the action.

Steve gets out of the car and walks over to the driver's side, opening the door as he waits for Billy to stumble out of it as well and when he does he steps aside, looking confused as Steve goes to sit in his driver's seat.

"Steve-" Billy goes to say as Steve holds up his hand.

"When you've figured it out let me know but let me do what you've refused to do, let me go ahead and make this all loud and fucking clear so there's no room for error okay?" He says, looking at Billy and pausing so he knows he's listening.

Billy gets a worried look on his face and Steve doesn't think he's fully aware of what's coming. He always expects things to be a certain way but reality is so much different, he can't keep thinking he'll get his own way and everything will be fine.

"You and me? We are done, over, broken up, whatever you want to call it because I don't deserve this Billy" Steve tells him honestly and he knows it hurts, it fucking hurts him to say the words, it's tearing him apart inside but he can't let this continue.

"I don't deserve to not know what you want from me and for you to think you can keep me on a fucking back burner just because we're bonded to each other" Steve clarifies.

"Also, just because we're bonded does not mean you can suddenly stop putting in effort because you think we're forever and always, that's not how this works and I love you Billy, you know that" Steve says, grabbing his hand in his own.

"I do, I truly do with all my heart and I always will but I respect myself enough to know when I need to fucking walk away" Steve gets out and he knows he's gotta go, needs to leave because the absolutely stunned and shocked look on Billy's face is going to change and Steve doesn't want to be here for whatever it changes into because he'll just cave.

It's so hard for him to say no to Billy and he'll do just that if Billy pushes.

He can't do that, can't allow himself to give in as he steels his features.

Steve can't let Billy think he can keep getting away with taking advantage of him and for there to be no consequences to his actions.

It may have taken Steve a while to realize this but he's there now, he knows now that he can't just keep being like his mom, he can't just do what she does and roll over like she does with his father.
To have to hear time and again from his father how stupid he is, how worthless he is, to sit there and hope his mom will one day defend him, defend herself but she never does and she probably never will.

Steve doesn't want that for himself, that's a fate worse than death and those awful fucking dinner's proved that to him, he doesn't want to be like them he wants better.

He wants better for himself and he wants better for Billy.

He's tired of rolling over and apologizing for no fucking reason when he's done nothing wrong.

So Steve pulls away and ends it himself because he knows Billy isn't going to, he won't do the mature thing so Steve has to do it for him, for them.

He pulls his hand away and Billy seems to realize what's happening in that moment, shock wearing off as he spurs into action, holding the car door open.

"Steve no wait stop- I'm sorry don't leave, don't go" he says as Steve rubs his face into his hands.

"Billy don't. Just go home, you have your dads memorial tomorrow. Don't stress yourself out, it's going to be okay" Steve tells him as Billy kneels down, gets in his face, starts cupping it gently.

"Love come on, don't do this to me, don't leave me, please-" Billy says as tears start streaming down his face as he strokes Steve's face, runs his fingers gently through his hair, pulls him close by his shirt with one hand.

Steve can't help it as tears start rolling down his own as he keeps his eyes squeezed shut, can't bear to look at him as he grips at Billy's wrist tight.

He forcefully pulls Billy's hand off of his face as the other one let's go of his shirt, coming up to cup the back of his neck, pulling him forward so their foreheads are touching.

"I was wrong I'm sorry I'll do anything, tell me what to do and I'll fix it, I'll fix this" Billy pleads with him and Steve lets out a choked sob as he pushes Billy away all of a sudden.

Billy goes to stand, clearly not expecting that as Steve slams his door shut as he rests his head against his steering wheel.

When Steve wipes the tears from his eyes to turn and look up at Billy it's like he has no idea what to do, standing there as tears roll down his face like he's staring off into space.

Steve knows it's not going to get any better than that as he starts his car, driving away without looking back, can't help the sobs that wrack his body as he feels his fucking heart break into a million broken pieces.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter fucking hurt me to write I am sorrryyyyyy arghhhhhhhhh

But yeah, gotta make it all realistic and shit, it's not all roses and butterflies for our dum
bois.

But hey, this will be good for them.
Billy doesn’t remember getting home but when he comes back to himself he’s standing in his living room looking at his bedroom door.

He just stands there and it feels like he's not really there, like he's dead but walking.

Everything around him is dull.

Sound, the colors around him, the thrumming of the bond underneath his skin makes him feel numb, every part of him is numb.

Steve left him.

Steve has left him.

They are broken up, not together.

He keeps turning it around in his head, saying it in different ways until it sets in because it hasn't.

None of it has set in yet.

Billy doesn’t even care about the memorial tomorrow anymore, the anxiety he'd been feeling is completely gone, he doesn't even give a shit.

He supposes he has Steve to thank for that.

Billy will take going to that shit thing in comparison to this.

This feeling.

The feeling of losing Steve.

The feeling of having fucked it up to the point of Steve feeling the need to walk away.

Steve hasn't closed the bond which almost feels like a slap in the face, it's just there taunting him but he refuses to garner a glimpse into Steve's side.

If he does it'll just be worse, not to mention Steve will most definitely close the bond and Billy can't survive that, he'll probably fucking kill himself if Steve does that.

Jesus, he's being fucking irrational.

Who would take care of Steve if he off'd himself?
Steve would be devastated, he'd feel like it was his fault and Billy can't do that to him, refuses to put him in that position.

He walks himself into his room and the house feels impossibly lonely with nobody home, he almost wishes Max was here.

He does wish Max was here.

She had warned him, the signs had all been there and he'd taken advantage of Steve's kind heart.

Billy doesn't blame him for leaving when he really thinks about it, he's not sure why he's being this way.

Or maybe he really just isn't ready to give Steve what he deserves because he himself needs to focus on getting his own life straightened out.

Why should he expect Steve to stick around when Billy can't engage himself in their relationship?

*What the fuck is wrong with me.*

The dark idea that maybe Steve has taken an interest in someone else boils his blood and swirls in his head suddenly to the point of him needing to take deep breaths as he clenches and unclenches his fists.

What if Steve goes to someone else-

A knock at his front door pulls him out of his thoughts and for half a second he thinks it might be Steve but he knows it's not.

It's second nature for him at this point, being able to feel Steve, he'd be able to feel if it was him.

It's not.

*So who the fuck?*

He opens the door and immediately his expression turns into a grimace.

"The fuck do you want?" He growls out to the man in front of him.

"Wow okay, hello to you too I see you got your car back" Alex says as Billy just continues to glare him down.

Billy goes to close the door when Alex just stands there, chipper as can be waiting for him to ask why he's here.

Billy doesn't care.

Alex puts his hand out, holding the door open.

"Alright you grumpy little shit, I'm here to give you this" Alex says as he holds out a hamsa necklace with his other hand as Billy frowns down at it.

"That was fast. Also I've seen you twice today, that's two times too many" Billy says, letting Alex open the door again.
"It's mine actually, I was hoping you could give it to Steve. I don't like none of you being protected and we know you are all a much bigger target than I am" Alex says with a shrug ignoring Billy's insult completely like he hadn't even heard it.

Is he simple?

Billy almost throws it into his face but he knows that's irrational.

It's logical Billy, he's not making advances on Steve, take a breath.

He gave this to you to give to Steve on purpose, probably as a sign of respect.

He tells himself and he actually finds himself appreciating the gesture if that's actually the case.

"I'll get it to him" Billy says as he goes to close the door again.

"Whoa hey!" Alex says this time as Billy rolls his eyes, staring him down.

"Not gonna invite me inside?" He asks as Billy shoots him a look of disgust.

"The fuck is wrong with you? No I'm not inviting you into my house" Billy tells him.

"Sorry, sorry. You're like an angry pit bull and I can't help but want to give you treats so you'll like me" Alex says as he puts his hands up in front of himself defensively.

Billy's eyes bug out as he replays what Alex has just said to him in his head.

"Are you- coming on to me right now?" Billy asks incredulously.

Alex's face scrunches up as it morphs into horror.

"What- kid no, that's fucking gross I mean it in a literal sense" he answers as Billy looks at him in confusion.

"You're like a pathetically unwanted mangy mutt that someone threw onto the side of the street so now you lash out and try to bite everyone" he clarifies, tone and demeanor changing into the one that isn't carefree and fake.

So the real Alex is a fucking douche.

Huh.

Billy actually feels offended.

"You know it's my job to try and recruit our kind right? That's what I'm trying to do and I can't go through Steve, you'd murder me" Alex tells him as Billy contemplates swinging at him.

"Is this the tactic you use on all of your recruits, call them pathetic and compare them to dogs?" Billy asks, just wanting to make sure.

"I only use it on the ones that have their heads so far up their ass their breath smells like shit" Alex tells him, totally monotone as he puts his hands in his pockets.

Billy's eyes widen as he actually looks at this guy for the first time, throwing away his preconceived notions from before.
This guy truly gives no shits.

Usually words like that are meant as a threat but he notices that he put his hands in his pockets, probably for a reason.

He uses his hands predominantly to use his ability, he'd proven that when he'd demonstrated it the first time they'd met.

Billy wouldn't be shocked if he can merely do it with his mind but his posture is a dead giveaway.

He's putting his gun away figuratively speaking, appearing as someone less threatening as he holds himself in a way that makes people underestimate him.

He wants people to see him as a non-threat, wants to appear weak and stupid.

"If you're going to sit there and psycho analyze me be my guest but word of warning, you've got nothing on Maggie" Alex says, interrupting him from his own thoughts.

"What- oh, the mind reader" Billy says coming back from being in his own thoughts.

"Yeah you learn really quickly there's no point in lying to one, they always know" he says as he still just stands there expectantly.

"You're seriously not going to leave are you?" Billy says as he pinches the bridge of his nose.

"If you really want me to I will but you look like you could use some company right now" Alex says, changing right back to his dorky ass smiley self.

Billy rolls his eyes as he lets out a frustrated grunt.

Susan won't be back until tonight, he's suspended from school, he's got a memorial tomorrow and Steve broke up with him.

If he doesn't keep his mind busy he's going to do something really fucking stupid and he knows it's coming, knows that it still hasn't set in yet, like the calm before a storm because he has no idea how to fix this, how to get Steve back.

Yet.

He just needs to clear his head, get through the next few days and put together a game plan because he'll be damned if he lets Steve slip through his fingers and he'll be damned if he waits around long enough for someone else to swoop right in and-

Thinking about it, the idea of someone else touching him, kissing him, putting their hands on him.

He'll fucking kill them.

"Fine" Billy finally tells Alex as he lets him inside.

"I'm kind of surprised Steve isn't here anymore, I saw his car earlier when I dropped you off" Alex says as he starts looking around the house like he's staking it out or something.

Billy is really starting to regret letting this guy in, perhaps eternal solitude would have been the better option after all.

"He broke up with me" Billy admits, not seeing a reason to lie as Alex stops and whip around to
look at him.

"Oh shit- really?" Alex says like he might be fucking with him.

"Yes really, the fuck?" Billy asks, not knowing why he'd think Billy would lie about something like that.

"It's just- how does that work what with being bonded and all?" Alex asks and it's a decent question.

"Dunno, guess I'm on a wonderful journey of finding out" Billy says sarcastically.

Alex whistles as he turns around slowly to go walk into the kitchen while scratching the back of his head awkwardly.

"Sorry man, that fucking sucks and you've got your father's memorial tomorrow? Here I was thinking you were the heartless one" Alex says as he shakes his head as Billy glares at the back of it.

"Fuck you, I know why he did it or at least the many reasons why he did it, I deserved it" Billy tells him as he follows Alex into the kitchen, going to to fridge to see if he can attempt to be a gracious host and give the guy something.

"You've got it pretty bad for this guy, he breaks up with you and you're still defending him" Alex says as he snorts while going to sit in one of the dining room chairs, completely comfortable like he's been here before or something.

Maybe he has, he seems to know Susan and she recognized him back at the school.

"You want anything?" Billy asks, ignoring him because it's none of his business anyway as Alex shakes his head.

"I'm good, did you read your dad's note yet?" he suddenly asks changing the topic as Billy takes a beer out of the fridge, pausing midway to grabbing it.

"That's none of your business" Billy tells him, wondering why he thinks it would be ok to even bring it up.

"Sorry you were being so open I thought we were having a moment and it seemed like a good segway" he says as he leans back in the chair, using his foot as leverage on the edge of the table to push himself back and forth.

"I don't even know why I told you all that other shit, count yourself lucky" Billy tells him as he pops open his beer, taking a long gulp of it before deciding he wants to down the whole thing.

"Eh, you're vulnerable right now, trying to find a way to fill the void in some way" he says with a shrug.

"You'll probably find yourself spouting out shit you never thought you'd say to complete strangers more than you think" Alex says as he picks at his nails, still rocking back and forth.

Billy wonders how long before he leans back too far and gets himself trapped between the wall and the chair.

He's tempted to just push him backward himself.

"You a love guru now too?" Billy asks as he goes to grab another beer from the fridge while Alex watches him thoughtfully as he downs a second one, belching loudly afterward.
"Just someone who walks around with a broken heart, we're kindred spirits right now you and I. Look at us, we're connecting" Alex says, tone excited as he gestures between them as Billy shoots him a look of disgust.

"Why, you in love with that Maggie chick or something?" Billy asks out of the blue, he's not even sure why he says it but he saw the way the guy would glance at her, had filed it away in the back of his mind as unimportant though.

Alex looks like he has an aneurysm as he finally leans back too far, finally getting himself wedged between the wall, flailing like a fucking idiot.

The chair tips over with him in it clattering loudly on the tile of the floor as he takes an incredibly long amount of time to get his leg out from under where it's trapped as he finally pulls himself up, pulling at this shirt as he clears his throat nervously.

Billy isn't impressed.

"You put that together awfully fast" Alex says as he goes to pick the chair up and put it back in place.

"What's that like, being in love with a mind reader?" Billy asks as he grabs his third beer.

"One that's eleven years older than I am? It's glorious, thanks for asking kid" he answers as Billy snorts.

"I haven't opened it, Steve says I might want to wait a year or when I'm ready" Billy says, getting halfway through his third beer instead of downing the whole thing again.

"It's a solid idea but you don't think it's strange that your father committed suicide?" Alex asks as Billy changes his mind, readying himself to just drink the rest as he stops it right at his lips, frown forming on his face.

"I- wait what?" Billy asks, not knowing where this is going or what he's getting at.

"I've done my research Billy. A man like Neil who needed everything to be exactly as he wanted it, control issues that obviously funneled over into you, a guy like that off'ing himself?" Alex says, clearly thinking there's something more going on.

"I- I don't know" Billy mumbles out as he stares down at his beer can, downing the rest.

"The only way to write it off is that he thought he'd lost you, the sadness at having not only lost his wife but his child as well is a sound argument but we both know that's not true" Alex says darkly as Billy suddenly feels broken wide open.

He dug into his background?

Alex knows about his mom?

"The moment I met you I could tell you're an abuse victim. Kindred spirits remember? I'm good at cracking tough cookies, I cracked a tougher one than you once" Alex goes on to say as Billy shifts uncomfortably.

"Who the fuck are you?" Billy asks.

"Someone who just wants to help. All I'm saying is it doesn't add up and hive mothers don't handle
host bodies well, stick all of that into a human brain and they go squirrelly” he says as Billy's eyes widen.

"I've seen it before they're bipolar as fuck, one second they want you alive and the next it forgets why it wanted you alive and tries to kill you, they do weird shit Billy" Alex tells him as he darts into his room.

"I change my mind" it says.

It turns to look at Richards.

"You really think I'd give you one of my children?” it growls out.

Richards eyes widen, betrayal in his eyes as he pulls out his gun but before he can shoot it the Mind Flayer grips him by his throat and promptly snaps his neck with one hand.

He goes under his bed, pulling out the shoe box and he feels Alex come up behind him but he doesn't care as he opens it, taking out the envelope that's still neatly on top addressed to him.

It's not his dad's handwriting.

How had he not noticed before?

Because he's fucking dense and stupid, that's how.

He opens it with shaky hands and when he reads it he wants to fucking destroy something as he gets through the awful chicken scratch, handing it to Alex after he's done

"Dear Billy,

I'm sorry but you need to know that Dyl is all I have left and errbody wants him dead now, there's no goin' back because the demon has been inside him too long.

I may not be bright but I know they won't let him live now.

I'm just followin' orders and it's nothin' personal so again I'm sorry, I'm just protectin' my brother.

Apologies,

Sheldon."

"Oh fuck Billy I'm sorry" Alex says as Billy falls to his knees, muffling his face into the fabric of the sheets on his bed as he screams into them as loud as he can.

"I'll fucking kill it" Billy growls out as he gets up but Alex blocks his way out the door, is suddenly in his face.

"Keep your shit together, there's no point in losing your cool it won't help anyone" Alex tells him as
Billy goes to give him a hard push.

Alex grabs his arm and suddenly Billy is turned around, down on one knee as Alex is mere seconds from dislocating his shoulder.

_Holy shit he's strong._

"What the fuck kind of secret agent shit is this?!" Billy hisses out in pain not having expected him to be James fucking Bond or something.

"If you promise to be calm I won't dislocate it but I don't really care either way" Alex says, tone impossibly serious as Billy gets chills down his spine.

"Ok fine, fine I promise!" Billy says as Alex let's him go as Billy stands up to face him, glaring at him as he rubs his arm.

"We need to start looking into this, I think we finally have a lead that might take us to Dylan if we can retrace Sheldon's footsteps, find a slip up" Alex says as Billy furrows his brow not really knowing what to think of the man in front of him anymore.

"You down for some secret agent shit?" Alex asks him, tone amused as Billy snorts.

He's suspended from school, he's lost Steve and Sheldon killed his father by orders of the Mind Flayer.

Also he has nothing better to do, no better distraction than this.

"Yeah ok" Billy says with a shrug.

It's the day of the memorial.

Nancy and Jonathan look about ready to punch him in his face.

"If you give in this will have been for nothing, it has been a day Steve, one day!" Nancy yells out at him.

They're by Jonathan's car during lunch and Steve feels like an ass.

"I broke up with him the day before his father's memorial service, the only thing worse is doing it on someone's birthday and even then!"

"So what? Nancy's right don't give in, he deserves this for the way he's treated you and tried to control you" Jonathan says as Steve glares at him.

"I just- I hate this, it's like having a fucking limb torn off and all I'm doing is worrying about if he's okay" Steve says as he pulls at his hair.

"Of course he's not but that's not your problem, he's the one chasing you now so let him chase, make him work for it" Nancy says.

They're right, he knows they're right but it still doesn't make him feel any better.

"He's suspended, avoid him until he's back at the very least. I'm sure he'll come to you anyway" Nancy says with a shrug. Another solid point and idea.
What if he doesn't though? What if Billy avoids him even when he's back at school because he thinks Steve needs space?

*Does he need space?*

Of course he needs space, *don't be stupid.*

*Make him work for it Steve, don't give in.*

What of Billy doesn't actually want to put forth effort in fixing things between them though?

Should Steve care?

*You broke up with him, you shouldn't care.*

Right, he shouldn't care and he doesn't.

Not one bit.

"Hello, earth to Steve the bell just rang" Jonathan says as they start walking away.

"Oh shit-" he says as he scrambles to get up and move on to his next class.

________________________

As Billy gets himself ready in the mirror he feels dead inside, completely emotionless. He wonders if that's a good thing.

He doesn't even recognize himself as he finishes tightening his tie, the last time he wore a suit was at one of his Uncle's weddings back in California and before that had been when his mother had died.

Here he is wearing yet another suit for another parent passed away.

*A parent murdered.*

His mind supplies to him unhelpfully. It's fucking depressing and he can't wait to just get this shit over with as he takes a deep breath, hardening his expression as he goes to open his door.

Susan and Max are waiting for him in the living room and he wishes now more than ever that Steve could be here with him, beside him to hold him up and keep him sane but he isn't and he can't be here because Billy fucked it up, he fucked all of it up.

But he wants to make things right, starting with this.

Susan tells Max to go wait in the car as she comes to stand in front of him, tears in her eyes as he somehow finds it within himself to keep it together.

Someone has to.

"I know how awful Neil could be to you at times, I understand if you don't want to go and I want to be the one to say what no one else will. You don't have to go if you don't want to" she tells him and
he blinks, taken aback by the gesture.

She'd never seemed to have cared before, she always stood by and merely watched it happen.

Probably because he's not her kid, it'd probably be different if he'd ever turned his ire onto Max, he probably would have eventually.

"I know I never did anything to help but let me try to make amends now if it's not too late" she says nervously.

Yesterday before he'd read that note he may have taken her up on the offer to skip out but now?

Now he has no choice, he wants to go, wants to pay his respects because he wasn't here to protect him, wasn't here to protect his own father just like he couldn't protect his mother.

Sure Neil was a piece of shit but that was his dad, his father, the only one he had.

Mostly he's not even doing it for himself though as he steels himself, looking Susan dead in the eye.

"It's fine, I have to go. It's my obligation because she'd have wanted to be there to pay her respects and since she isn't here to do it, it's up to me" Billy tells her as he feels the tears well up in his eyes and Susan puts a hand to her face, tilting her head down to squeeze her eyes shut as she cries.

His mom loved Neil till the end and he'd never have turned into the man he had become if she was still here today but he owes it to her memory to respect the man she loved, the man his father used to be, the father he loved before Neil had turned into the shell of a man he'd been before the end of his life, before his mother's death.

He owes it to the memory of that man.

They say funerals are for the living and not the dead but sometimes Billy wonders how true that statement really is.

Who is he to say anyway, what the fuck does Billy know when there are so many other people on this planet with problems even bigger than his?

People who have no family left or who never had a family in the first place, who have been alone in the world like poor Eleven or have gone through unimaginable pain like Will.

He may not be with Steve but he still has him, they still love each other and he still has Max and those other little shits along with everyone else that comes with it.

"Jesus, Steve's right. I really don't understand." Hopper breathes out as he shares a look with Joyce and Billy frowns. "I probably never will. Look kid, I don't know what happened to the two of you in that place and I clearly don't want to know, but you're family now." Hopper says, pointing to him sternly with an impressively raised brow.

"We won't let this shit go south because we aren't going to be stupid, and you should be more willing to trust us." he says and Billy kind of wishes he had a father like this guy instead of his shit one.

Hopper hadn't been wrong, things had turned out fine in the end, they'd all survived which is not
what he'd expected at all and they'd all stood by him and Hopper had covered for him and setting aside Jim's flaws he understands why he's done the things he's done.

Billy would have probably done the same in his shoes because the Chief will do anything to protect the ones he loves even if it means making everyone else hate him.

Also, Billy isn't stupid. Hopper had come to that compound by himself because he'd been worried, that hard ass had somehow gotten past everyone inside of that place to get to him, had risked himself even though he didn't need to.

Maybe nobody else had noticed but Billy knows, he noticed and he still hasn't even thanked him for it, if anything he'd just been a tool to him about it.

Granted he still kind of deserves to get reamed but there's really no point in beating a dead horse.

Billy hopes his mom would be proud of him right now, proud that he's trying because that's all she'd ever wanted of him, that's all she'd ever asked.

"Try for me baby"

"You gotta try it at least once otherwise you'll never know, love"

"Come on my sweet, if you don't try you'll never know. Right?"

He thinks of Steve, his Steve, kind, caring, love of his life who has stood by him even when Billy didn't deserve it and even now he's pretty sure Steve's hurting just as much as he is, wants to be here with him but knows he can't be.

It'd defeat the purpose of why Steve felt the need to take drastic measures and walk away in the first place.

Billy knows that Steve knows has to be the one to keep them on the right path, to keep him on the right path.

That's not fair to Steve, he shouldn't have to feel like he's taking care of a child and Billy knows he needs to grow the fuck up, he can't hide behind his past forever, he can't keep letting it rule his life, he needs to be stronger and better than this.

"I just need you to try"

"I appreciate that you're trying Billy, really I am"

"Hey, can't say you didn't try"

Susan pulls him into a hug as he lets out a shaky breath.
He can do this.

When this is all done and over he's going to find that fucking piece of shit hive mother with Alex and finally be done with it so he can move on with his life and get his shit straight. He's going to get Steve back and prove to him that he can not only try but he can also do the things Steve needs him to do, become the man Steve needs him to be.

For himself, for him, for them.

"Thank you Susan" he says as she pulls away.

"Gosh I was trying to keep it together I'm sorry Billy" she says, choking back sobs as he smiles down at her.

"That's what days like this are for though right?" he says as she chuckles lightly.

"Shall we?" he asks as he holds his arm out for her to take as she smiles up at him, putting her arm through his, holding a hand to his own in a gesture that feels like reassurance, apology, and comfort as they go on their way.

When Billy gets to the podium he wonders why he'd stood up when the minister had asked if anyone wanted to speak, he'd already told them before they'd begun that he wasn't going to and nobody had seemed to be surprised by this but suddenly he had found himself standing and now here he is like an idiot staring out at his family, most of them having come from California as well as all of the other places his father had lived.

He didn't even prepare a eulogy.

The fuck is wrong with him.

Why did he get up?

Max and Susan look shocked and seem to look at him like they're expecting him to walk right back down but he's here now and he's gotta do it.

He clears his throat as he catches sight of Hopper and Alex at the back near the exit, not having expected them to be here but he remembers how Alex had said he'd pick him up afterwards after claiming that memorials suck and he can tag along to clear his head.

Billy agreed and was grateful for the offer and he'd gone on his merry little way.

Clearly Alex had gone to Hopper for some help and now here they are, watching him fumble around like an idiot.

Billy takes a deep breath as he closes his eyes, reaching into the bond for comfort because he can't help himself, because his biggest strength has always been Steve except it's a request not a demand.

He's giving Steve the choice, merely asking instead of taking and demanding like he always does, letting Steve have a choice in the matter because Billy understands that he's his own person and Billy is his own person as well and while he's still struggling to practice what he preaches at least he's trying and he knows this is the first step.
When he opens his eyes and looks back down into the audience again he sees him.

There he is, his Steve sitting there in the seat he had previously been occupying looking up at him in confusion like he hadn't meant to project himself through the bond and Billy can't help the smile he gets on his face as they lock eyes and he sees the realization dawn on Steve's face as the confusion morphs into a cross between fondness and something Billy knows he doesn't deserve from Steve yet.

He's proud, can feel it wash over him through the bond and he appreciates it but he knows he still has a lot of work to do.

Billy holds fast onto Steve through the bond and Steve answers his call, wrapping him in comfort and warmth as he steels himself to get through this, using him as an anchor to keep him grounded as he looks back over the crowd.

"Hello, my name is Billy Hargrove and I'm Neil Hargrove's son" he says into the microphone.

Chapter End Notes

Oh man this chapter killed me. I cried like a little bitch writing this, our Billy trying so hard and even though we know he still has a long way to go he's making some great first baby steps ;(

ALSO WOW some of you called this in the comments, the whole Neil not having committed suicide I'M SO PROUD GJDFKGNFDJKG

Ya'll are starting to notice my subtle foreshadowing. <3333
Chapter Notes

So here's why this took so long.

1. It's December and the Holiday's got me busy.
2. Yesterday I had planned to finish this chapter later that night because it had been my
day off and I went running around with my bestie but then I got called into work.
3. I couldn't figure out where I wanted to end it so it just kept getting longer.

Pretty sure this is my longest chapter to date?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Steve is in math class when he feels Billy call out to him through the bond.

It's a strange feeling that he's never felt before not that he cares because all he knows is Billy needs
him in some way, is asking something of him.

When he grabs hold of it, answers the call as he closes his eyes to breathe in deeply he finds himself
sitting in a chair between Max and Susan when he opens his eyes back up again.

It takes him a moment but he does eventually put together where he is.

The memorial service.

He's confused at first until he looks up at the podium to see Billy and it takes his breath away.

Oh my god.

There he is in a suit, looking all kinds of ways that make Steve feel so many different emotions at
once it's giving him emotional whiplash.

The longing, yearning and want he feels is intense and when his brain finally catches up he finds
himself taking in what's actually going on.

Billy's going to do a eulogy?

That's what it looks like, why else would he be up there?

They lock eyes as Billy smiles at him and he can't help the feeling of fondness that washes over him
through the bond and he knows Billy can feel it too.

Steve has never been more proud and in awe of him than in this moment and he can feel Billy's
uncertainty, his fear.

The request is one for comfort and there's no hesitation from Steve as he wraps him in it, gives Billy
whatever he needs because no matter what happens between them he will still be here for him.

If the world was burning and Billy had been the one to cause it, if they were somehow on opposing
sides, found themselves to be enemies again in some way like when they'd first met he'd still answer
his call.

Billy is his bonded, he's a part of him, this is his soulmate in so many different ways.

It doesn't change anything but Steve refuses to turn him away in his time of need.

"Hello my name is Billy Hargrove and I'm Neil Hargroves son" he finally says as he takes a moment to pause, Steve knows the look very well because it's the look he gets when he's getting his thoughts together and doesn't want to say something stupid.

Steve only ever gets to see it when Billy knows he fucked up and he's trying to make it up to him in some way and it just makes him miss Billy even more.

"My father and I had a complicated relationship and that's putting it lightly" Billy says as he chuckles and Steve can't help but agree as a few people in the room chuckle along with him, probably the ones that knew Neil a bit better.

"I won't speak ill of him, not here, not in front of all of you who knew the best parts of him" he goes on to say which is big of him, Steve had kind of been expecting him to go a different route but he supposes in front of all of these people it wouldn't be the time or the place for it.

"Of course I would be lying if I sat here and told you I didn't get to see those good parts of him, he had them and I did get to see them from time to time" Billy says as he gets a bittersweet smile on his face.

Steve had seen a few of those moments for himself, when Neil had taken little Billy to an amusement park once it was probably one of Billy's most treasured memories he has with his dad, it had been nice to see.

It had been just the two of them soon after his mother's death and they'd even talked about his mom to each other, had leaned on one another for support if only for a moment. It was one of the only times Steve had gotten to see the broken and battered Neil open himself up, take off the mask and let Billy in to see him for what he was, a heart broken man who'd lost the love of his life and was trying to find out how to go on without her.

"Most importantly the best part of him that I got to see was how much he had loved my mother and at least that was something we could both agree on, it's probably the only thing" he says with a shake of his head.

"Folks we didn't agree on anything, not a single thing. Mostly because I was and still am a cocky defiant little shit in the way you'd expect from a rebellious teenager" Billy says with a toothy smile as he changes his posture for a moment, his demeanor changing into the one Steve had been used to when they'd first met, the Billy who hides himself from the world behind a mask.

A mask Steve can see right through at this point, a mask Billy lets him see behind and only him and he can't help the small laugh that leaves him as the whole room erupts into laughter as well.

Billy pauses to look over the room, probably at family he remembers and even the ones he doesn't as Steve continues to wrap him in safety, security, and unconditional love and he feels the thankfulness wash over him for a moment coming from Billy.

"I have my regrets and I know he does too and I know I'm supposed to sit up here and tell you stories and lighten the mood but honestly I-" Billy pauses as he locks eyes with Steve before averting his gaze.
He grips the podium tightly, trying to compose himself, head bowed as Steve's eyes water and he wants nothing more than to hold him right now.

Eventually Billy looks back up.

"I can't, not right now when it's still too fresh, there are just so many things that are too hard to stomach about the whole thing-" he says, interrupting himself with a heavy sigh as he goes back to standing upright.

"I can't sit up here and lie because it wasn't always good or beautiful, it was all pretty shitty, this whole situation is shitty actually" he says as he purses his lips and shakes his head, looking upset and angry as he gets lost in thought and there's something in the back of Steve's mind that makes him think there's something Billy isn't saying, like he's hiding something.

Huh, weird.

Steve shakes the feeling off as he refocuses back on the moment at hand, wondering if maybe he's looking into it a bit too deeply.

"Truly let's just be honest with ourselves for a moment before we go back to our typical coping mechanisms of telling ourselves anything we can to feel better, clinging to faith, whatever it is we all do to make sense of something so awful" he says as he rubs a hand over his face and pauses.

Steve feels the energy in the room shift, knows people are a bit uncomfortable but they don't know, they don't understand what it was like to live with Neil and to have your own father terrorize you for most of your life, to feel like all you're doing every single day is surviving and wondering when the other shoe is going to drop, if this is the day your own father is going to finally kill you.

He's been there during Billy's nightmares, during the thoughts that keep him up at night, has held him through them and felt them like they were his own.

Fuck them, fuck these people.

Billy is allowed to tell it in whatever way he chooses because that was his father.

"I can't tell you stories but I can celebrate him with all of you because I know that's what we're here to do, to celebrate the good that had been inside of him" he says and he hears a few people breathe a sigh of relief.

They were probably worried he was about to have a break down, Steve was a bit worried there for a moment as well.

"In all honesty I can tell you that through everything we did to each other I loved him, I loved my father, flaws included" Billy says as he nods his head, eyes watering.

"That's all we really are, flawed pieces of shit trying to find our way through life and stumbling around like a bunch of idiots to get there" he says as the room starts laughing once more at his harsh language.

Steve just shakes his head and snorts. Trust Billy to come in strong in that aggressive way Steve knows and loves, he certainly doesn't hold back his punches.

"I did love him and I know for a fact he's way fucking happier now because he finally gets to see mom again, they finally get to be together again" Billy says, voice becoming shaky.
Steve is trying his hardest to keep it together at this point, he gets so weak when Billy starts talking about her, he'd never met the woman but he adores her so fucking much, wishes he could have met her more than anything.

Billy stands tall, keeps himself together and Steve doesn't know how he does it, how he can look out at all of these people and not sob like a child because Steve is finding it far too difficult to keep from just breaking down right now.

"Rest in peace dad, tell mom hi for me" Billy says as he knocks on the wood of the podium as the sound of it resonates throughout the hall and it feels like for a moment the whole room holds their breath for him.

Steve can't help it as he chokes out broken sobs, can't hear anything anymore because it hurts, he hurts so much for Billy and worries that he's made a mistake.

How could he have done that to Billy?

He left him and sure he needed to, it needed to end but maybe he should have waited, perhaps the timing could have been better.

Billy must finish because suddenly the room erupts into applause as Billy starts to walk down from the podium looking directly at him as he wipes the tears from his face.

Steve feels Billy flood him with reassurance, picking up on his feelings of regret.

*It's alright love, you did what was right.*

He hears Billy's voice say to him gently in his head as he gets up from his seat to meet him and when he comes to stand before him Steve can't help but cup his face gently, the reassurance from him coursing through his entire being like a gentle wave washing over his feet and he's wrapped in a sense of calm.

Touching him is strange, it's that feeling from last time like in the hospital when Steve had been stuck inside of his mind and the feeling of it is like a memory, it's not real and it reminds him he's not really here physically.

"I'm so proud of you Billy" he tells him as Billy gets a small bittersweet smile on his face as he leans into his touch-

"MR. HARRINGTON"

He's snaps back to himself, he's back in the classroom to see Mr. Fitz banging on his desk as he looks up at the man.

"Oh- ah sorry I was-" he says as Mr. Fitz looks at him with a look of frustration and concern.

"Go take a moment to yourself Mr. Harrington you look like you need one" he says as Steve realizes a few stray tears had started rolling down his cheeks.

He flushes as he mumbles apologies under his breath, grabbing his things as he stands and leaves
refusing to look anyone in the face as he wipes the tears from his eyes as subtly as he can but he's pretty sure it's too late.

People are going to think he's insane.

Steve finds himself not caring soon after that though because he can project himself to Billy at will now, he knows if he wanted to do it again he could.

It's exciting.

*Can Billy do it too?*

This cool new trick is by far the most useful they've developed in his opinion. He actually gets to see Billy's surroundings in a strange omniscient way that he still doesn't fully understand, it feels exhilarating.

It's like he's pushing himself outward, he's truly projecting himself to Billy and he wishes they could have done something like this sooner.

That's just fucking cool.

Wait.

Oh, that's right...he's supposed to be ignoring Billy.

Steve makes his way to his car and when he gets inside he contemplates reaching back through the bond to do it again except all he can hear in his head are Nancy and Jonathan yelling at him and screaming at him, saying no, telling him he needs to stand his ground.

If he gives in there will have been no point.

All he'd done is answer the call, that's all Billy had asked of him and that's all it had needed to be.

*Step away Steve.*

What's happening is good, he'd felt it through the bond.

Billy holds no ill will towards him, if anything it feels like Billy finally understands all of the things Steve has been telling him for months now and he can feel Billy's acceptance of what has happened, has taken it to heart and it seems like he's really putting in some actual effort to improve himself.

Steve needs to respond in kind, needs to meet him where he's at and improve himself as well no matter what ends up happening between them, they owe it to themselves and each other.

There's a calm that washes over him once more at the prospect of them finally being on the same page and he hopes not for the first time he did the right thing.

Steve skips math entirely as he waits for his next class to start.

---

Billy chuckles lightly because he'd heard Mr. Fitz voice when Steve had faded away, had been pulled back into himself.
Silly, he could have just excused himself from class but it's Steve, he'd clearly acted on instinct.

His instinct that seems to be to come to Billy when he calls, no questions asked which makes his chest constrict at the thought of it.

Once more he knows he doesn't deserve Steve's kindness yet he gives it so freely and he wants so much to be worthy of it.

*Baby steps, take baby steps.*

He tells himself and he feels free.

It's a feeling he seldom gets and usually he only feels it when he's with Steve but this time it's because he feels like by doing that eulogy it's a symbolism of sorts.

It's him acknowledging his past yet putting it behind him, finding peace with what happened between him and his father, his mother's death, all of it.

Maybe one day the wounds will heal, it's not a prospect he'd ever considered before until now.

"I'm proud of you kid I know that couldn't have been easy for you" Hopper tells him after he says his goodbyes to Susan and Max as well as everyone else from his family that comes up to him afterward and he ends up being there longer than he'd have liked but that's memorial's for you, they're fucking exhausting and he feels drained in every way possible.

He notices Hopper looking at him strange but doesn't comment on it.

So much energy all in one place, he had not missed it at all and if anything now that he's older he feels the effects of it even more, is more sensitive to it and he thinks he could probably sleep for days from how fogged up they make you feel.

"It needed to be done" he tells him as they load into Hopper's car, Alex jumping into the front passengers seat while Billy gets into the back.

"Well your mother would be proud" Jim tells him, clearly knowing far more about the strain he'd had with his father than he let's on.

"Thanks Chief, any updates?" Billy asks, wanting to move past this as Hopper and Alex look at each other in a way Billy can't decipher.

"So before we get into that I'd like to discuss something first" the Chief says and already Billy doesn't like where this is going.

That's a tone he isn't a fan of and it usually means-

"I've heard the whole story from multiple different sources, the fact that this bond between you and Steve can be turned on others is-" Hopper stops himself, clearly trying to find the right words.

"Concerning" Alex says, finishing for him.

Oh, he'd been wondering when someone was going to bring it up, he should have known.

Honestly Billy had been blocking the whole thing out of his mind because there was too much else going on, there had been no time to really stop and dissect the new evolution of the bond.

Compulsion aside the whole Steve projecting himself had been new and Billy thinks he could
probably do the same to Steve if he really tried.

It feels like something they could both do but he's not sure and since they're not exactly on terms that allow for Billy to show up unannounced whenever he wants he's decided to just not touch that one with a ten foot pole.

"Well if it's any consolation it hasn't happened since" Billy says with a shrug, letting them know there really shouldn't be any issues.

"But it will happen again and you both should find a way to control it" Hopper says as he looks at him from the rear view mirror as Billy averts his gaze.

Hopper's not wrong but he's also not right.

It's not something they can just switch on and off as much as he wishes that were the case at times.

It had happened through extreme trauma, Steve had almost died and Billy had almost been the one to cause it to happen and the bond had reacted in kind.

"We have more important things to worry about, it has no reason to manifest because when the bond feels under threat that's how it seems to trigger in the first place" he tells them, not really wanting to go too far into detail.

That's how it had felt though.

Steve had called out to him, the energy inside of him had clung to Billy like a second skin and the bond was fucking pissed to see them potentially being torn apart and taken from one another so soon after Steve had been near death.

Steve also hadn't been breathing at one point and Billy had panicked, the bond had panicked and he couldn't think straight anymore.

It was like he'd been gone too, not there right along with Steve, also not breathing.

The bond had been pounding in his head and it had been an endless mantra, nothing else was getting through to him other than those words.

*ProtecthimProtecthimProtecthim*.

It had pulled on his own desires to keep Steve safe and projected its own desires to keep them both alive and the whole thing had spiraled out of control.

It was a cluster fuck of a mess.

The other half of himself, the Steve part of himself had been under threat and it needed to be stopped and that's all the bond had needed to know.

It had become an entity taking form, changing inside of them and between them in a single instant.

The idea of it, the feeling of it, all of it had been terrifying because there was a part of him that had not been in control.

That control had been taken from him by the bond because it had suddenly taken the reins and started steering them in a certain direction.

*Especially* the second time when they'd woken up in separate rooms, away from each other and not
near one another and the bond had thrown a tantrum like a petulant child.

It had started pulling on their emotions for one another and amplifying them in ways Billy hadn't known was possible because it was thrumming between them like a scream, wondering why they were apart, angry that they were still apart.

It had pulled on Steve harder than it had pulled on him.

He'd heard the glass shattering all around them and all he could think was 'oh fuck' but there were hands on him.

More importantly there were hands on Steve and he had surrendered to his own feelings and the bond, allowed them to meld into one, hadn't even fought against it.

Billy had been powerless against it, there was nothing he could do and on top of being controlled by the Mind Flayer as well as being controlled by the bond the whole thing had been an absolute shit show.

Leaving Steve, allowing him out of sight for even a moment had taken him a few days to shake off because the bond had still been awake and angry.

It took fucking days until the bond had finally realized they weren't going to die, Steve was not going to die and they were safe like the bond had been on some sort of high alert, had gotten traumatized right along with them.

So naturally it had been a relief to feel when it had finally taken a step back to just sit there between them and go dormant once more.

Billy knows it's waiting though, there's an energy in the air, the bond feels something coming and he's not sure if it's his own paranoia or the bond itself.

Maybe they're feeding off of each other.

All he knows is there's this tingling in the back of his mind like a thought he can't reach and somehow it's coming from the bond.

The calm before a storm.

A sixth sense.

Billy can't seem to get to it, whatever it is like it's just barely out of reach.

All he knows is he never thought he'd see the day when he'd have to start playing mental games with a fucking bond.

It's like some strange creature inside of them that has no physical form but is a separate entity altogether from the two of them and its sole purpose is to keep them alive.

Go figure, it was planted inside of them by the Mind Flayer, he should have seen this coming.

At least Billy knows that now though, at least he can understand and respect the bond and its intentions because Billy also wants to stay alive.

More importantly he wants to keep Steve alive, safe, protected and well.

That's really all he personally cares about at the end of the day.
Finally he finds himself understanding where Steve had been coming from, how terrifying the prospect of the compulsion is and it finally put into perspective why Steve had reacted the way he did when Billy had used it on him.

Except now that Billy knows what it feels like he knows he deserved worse than what he'd gotten from Steve.

"Ok, so that's how it triggers, you're certain it's only when you're under threat?" Hopper asks as Billy nods his head.

"I'm saying if death is a looming threat the bond starts to take control, if there's another way to use our compulsion on others I haven't found it yet and the bond is-" Billy stops himself, not knowing how to explain it.

"The bond is a separate entity, I don't know how else to explain it" Billy says as he scratches the back of his head.

They all sit there in silence for a moment, letting that sink in before Hopper speaks up again.

"So the bond- it's an actual being, it has its own thoughts and feelings?" he asks and those are all good questions.

Billy purses his lips and thinks about how to answer that because he doesn't think he truly knows the answer to that.

"No I don't think so, it's more like a major organ inside of the body that has specific functions and the function is to keep us alive and if it feels like we're not doing a good enough job it starts to- it begins to take control" he says hoping that makes a bit more sense.

Alex looks impressed as he turns to stare at him.

"You realize you're implying you exhibit signs of a hive mother right?" he asks and Billy frowns.

"Do you think the bond is- are we changing into a hive mother or something? That's some weird sci-fi shit I'm not down for" Billy says feeling panicked as Alex snorts.

"I doubt you'll both turn into a big puff of black smoke if that's what you mean" he reassures him but how would he know that?

How would anyone know?

"The changes you're experiencing aren't physical and never have been, they're far more sentient because every change that has occurred has been mental in nature" Alex says thoughtfully.

Billy sees no reason to disagree.

"The bond, this entity inside the both of you that has you connected to one another is clearly the source of your power and it's working with you, not against you" he goes on to say.

"So it's just going to keep getting stronger is what you're saying?" Billy asks with a grimace on his face.

The bond is already intense enough, he doesn't know what the next step will be after this.

"I think if you both work at it then yes, it'll become stronger" Alex says as he nods.
"That's a choice between you and Steve though, how far are you both willing to take it?" He asks rhetorically.

"You also need to ask yourselves if you're looking to find a way to remove it" Alex rapid fires at him and the idea of removing it isn't even a question in his mind.

He wants this, he wants what he has with Steve.

But is it what Steve wants?

Bond or no bond Billy wants to be with Steve and wants to keep working to get him back but he can understand Steve wanting to find a way to get rid of it.

The amount of responsibility it holds now is overwhelming and perhaps it's too late, perhaps they're so heavily bonded at this point it's too late and they're stuck with it.

It doesn't feel right, it feels wrong to just keep his mouth shut and to not ask Steve what he really wants because he'll do it, if that's what Steve wants is to tear it out of them he'll do it and suffer the pain.

If it means keeping Steve it's what they'll do.

Perhaps it's time to revisit that discussion again at some point.

They'd agreed they wanted it before but things are different now, the bond had been less complicated back then.

"Regardless I'll talk to Steve as well, we need to make sure everyone else around the both of you is safe and protected from your lack of knowledge" Hopper says, noticing that Billy has no intentions of continuing with the conversation any further.

Billy rolls his eyes while mumbling 'Yeah, good luck with that' under his breath as Hopper glares at him from the rear view mirror.

Does the Chief know they're broken up?

_Probably not._

He wonders how Steve will respond to being told that everyone is apparently afraid of them except they're all skirting around saying it outright to their faces.

Billy doesn't blame them.

He's afraid of it too and if he's afraid of it then how could everyone else not feel uncomfortable about it?

"Anyway, we're going to the scene of the crime is that okay?" Hopper asks, finally changing the subject as Billy inhales.

"Yeah, it's good but do you think we'll find anything now that it's cleaned up?" he asks them, trying not to envision in his mind Neil's final moments.

"I've got this cool little doohickey and one of those energy readers, if we get an energy reading Lee might be able to work his magic and track them down" Alex says as he hands Billy a-
Pocket watch?

"This doohickey, it's a fucking pocket watch" Billy says as he looks at Alex completely deadpan while holding it in the palm of his hand to inspect it suspiciously.

"Yeah, cool huh?" Alex asks like an overly excited puppy as Billy looks at him with a clear look on his face indicating he doesn't agree.

*Maybe it's enchanted.*

He says to himself as he turns it over but it doesn't *feel* enchanted.

Then again what does Billy know?

He's only ever held one other enchanted item before that he knows of and he's pretty sure that's not a good reference point of being able to tell if an item is enchanted anyway.

"What does it do-?" he starts to ask as his thumb moves up to the top of it, getting ready to press it down to open the casing.

"DON'T OPEN IT!" Alex yells out as he puts his hands up all of a sudden in alarm.

Billy flails and fumbles with it as it drops to the bottom of his seat and rolls underneath Hoppers as he lifts his legs up to get as far away from it as possible, contemplating jumping out of the car with his hand on the door.

He turns his head back up to look at Alex with wide eyes and immediately wants to *fucking kill him.*

Alex loses his shit and starts laughing hysterically as Hopper tries to muffle his own laughter and fails pretty badly.

"Oh my goooood your face, your fucking face!" Alex says as tears start to form in the corners of his eyes from how loud he's laughing.

"You motherfucking piece of shit!" Billy yells at him angrily as he contemplates lunging over into the passengers seat to strangle this fucking *asshole.*

"Sorry kid, that was pretty fucking funny" Hopper says between chuckles as Billy shoots him a glare instead as he goes to pick up the *stupid* fucking pocket watch, throwing it at Alex who fumbles with it but inevitably ends up catching it in his hands.

"It's just a normal pocket watch I'm fucking with you, we're going to do some energy readings to see if Lee can get us any intel" Alex says as he still can't seem to stop himself from laughing.

"I fucking hate you so much" Billy says, voice dripping with malice as Alex just smiles at him with a dorky, retarded look on his face.

He's starting to wish he'd never come.

When they reach the crime scene Hopper stops the car as they all load out and Alex is *still* laughing under his breath every now and again.
"You're still in a suit so why don't you just stay here with the car?" Alex says and it sounds like a demand more than anything.

"Why the fuck did you bring me if I'm just going to stand here and look pretty?" Billy asks, lifting his arms in exasperation.

"You're suspended from school and you've got nothing better to do. Besides we both know Steve is the pretty one" Alex says with a shrug as Billy doesn't rise to the bait, fully aware Alex is just trying to get a rise out of him.

Billy isn't falling for it, not anymore because now he has blackmail on this little fucker about Maggie. Checkmate.

"Hold on old man, aren't you a teacher at that school now or something?" Billy asks as he puts his hands in his pockets, leaning forward to emphasis his point. "Shouldn't you be working?"

"I'm a substitute, I don't need to substitute at the moment" Alex tells him looking like the smug bastard he is.

"Can you believe this guy Chief?" Billy asks, wanting at least a little bit of backup as Hopper takes off his hat, throws it into the passengers seat and just shrugs in response, completely uninterested and exhibiting the signs of someone who just wants to get this over with.

Billy rubs his hands over his face as he just rolls his eyes and leans up against the car as they both start walking away.

"Chief, you got a smoke and light?" he asks before they make it to the hill.

Hopper turns around and throws them to him and somehow he manages to catch them as he gestures thankfully.

When he lights it up and takes a couple puffs from it he feels the pang of longing in his chest, wishing Steve was here with him right now, wanting to hear his voice and to be wrapped in his warmth again.

---

**Two Day's Later**

"So, anyone wanna tell me why Billy has been spending his suspension running around town with Alex?" Jonathan says as he comes up to his own car during lunch as Steve slides off the hood to sit on the grass with a piece of an apple sticking out of his mouth as he whips his head around to look at him with a frown.

"Wait, define running around town" Nancy says as Jonathan nods.

"Whath do you mean ruwning awroun town?" Steve asks with his mouth full, like Nancy hadn't just spoken as chunks of apple fly out of his mouth while Jonathan looks at him in disgust and when he finishes chewing his food he shoots him an apologetic look.

"I followed them, Billy was tagging along with him in Alex's car as they made stops to the grocery
"The grocery store, what is Billy doing at a grocery store with Alex?" Nancy asks suspiciously.

"Good question. After that they went to some random house and some woman I've never seen before had opened the door and invited them in like they were going to have a dinner or something because they brought the groceries inside with them" he tells them as Nancy gapes at him.

The look on Steve's face is one of confusion and shock as he scratches at his arm absently.

"Ok that's weird, you said Billy doesn't seem to like him" Nancy says as they both look at Steve.

"I mean- that's what it seemed like, he'd gotten all jealous because I was impressed to find out he'd killed five hive mothers" Steve says and suddenly he looks like somebody killed his puppy.

"Well it is impressive and I'm sure there's a perfectly logical explanation" Nancy says as she slides off the hood to put a comforting hand onto Steve's shoulder.

"Or he's showing his true colors and going back to being the playboy we knew him to be" Jonathan says angrily.

"Jonathan!" Nancy says, shooting him a glare as he shrugs while Steve just looks even more dejected.

"Well it's not like we're together, he's allowed to do whatever he wants and I'm pretty sure Alex is straight anyway" Steve says quietly.

"Okay but he's hanging out with the guy he'd been getting jealous over you about though? That's fucked up whether he's straight or not" Jonathan says and there's a sour taste in the back of his throat from the idea of it, that Billy might do something like that to Steve.

"No offense Jonathan but you don't know Billy and I'm pretty sure that's not what's going on anyway" Steve says as he rolls his eyes while picking up the uneaten remnants of his food as he starts to walk away from them.

"Steve wait!" Nancy yells.

"It's fine, I need to grab some things from my locker anyway" he says as he waves a hand behind him without looking back at them.

As Steve walks away to go back into the school Jonathan notices there's some random guy leaning against the car on the side of the road, watching Steve walk back in as he gets a frown on his face.

"Do you think they're still watching Steve?" he asks Nancy as she catches sight of what he's seeing.

"Hopper hasn't said anything. If they're sending out agents in person, that can't mean anything good" she says as they look at each other with concern on their faces.

They watch the man for a bit longer and soon after he loses sight of Steve he gets into his car and drives away.

"Son of a bitch" Jonathan says, feeling like that proves his paranoia. "We can't leave him alone Jon, what if they try to take him?" Nancy asks out loud as Jonathan nods to her, agreeing completely.
"Richards might be dead but that doesn't mean shit, someone else will have taken the mantle and they probably still have their little spies everywhere" she goes on to say like she's reading his mind completely.

"We drive him to and from school, there needs to be a buddy system from now on. Should we get him away from his house?" Jonathan asks, knowing she'll have better ideas than he will.

"Probably, do you think your mom would be willing to take him in until we can make sure Hopper gets what he needs done?" Nancy asks and he doesn't see it as a bad idea, that way one of them can keep an eye on him at all times and he is the one with the car, he can get them all to school if Steve is at his place.

"I'll talk with her later tonight, you talk with Steve and then we can go and see Hopper after school today" Jonathan says as they both nod to each other.

After school Steve tries to consider why Billy would be hanging out with Alex.

Did something happen in regards to the Mind Flayer maybe?

It's the only logical thing he can think of.

Jonathan is just an idiot who doesn't know Billy the way that Steve does and he always assumes the worst of Billy anyway because they don't like each other.

Billy wouldn't do that.

Steve knows this and he knows that if he's being honest with himself the idea of even touching someone other than Billy repulses him.

If it repulses him, does that mean it's the same for Billy?

Obviously Steve is aware it has only been a few days since their break up so of course he's not looking at anyone else but that's completely besides the point.

Okay so maybe it isn't but still.

Billy wouldn't just start fucking around with Alex of all people and if he did start fucking around it would probably be with some random chicks that he's gone to before.

That's what Steve could easily see happening because he knows that Billy is a very sexual creature, had experienced it first hand.

They're both very sexual, they like sex but Steve isn't like Billy, he can't differentiate sex as just sex but he knows Billy does and he knows that he can.

The feeling of jealousy that washes over him is completely involuntary because he knows he has no right to it, to having those feelings because they're not together.

When he's halfway to his car he's pulled out of his thoughts by Nancy who comes to stand beside
him, smiling up at him.

It seems strained.

"What?" he asks as she looks a bit surprised.

"What do you mean what?" she asks with a frown.

"You ok?" he asks, knowing full well the many different expressions of Nancy Wheeler and what they usually translate to.

She's emitting concern, worry, and anxiety with her current look.

"After lunch when you walked back into the school you were being watched" she tells him, not beating around the bush as he comes to a stop, not expecting that to have been what this conversation would turn into.

"Wait- you're sure?" he asks, maybe they'd been mistaken and everyone is just paranoid still.

Although Steve's track record in regards to downplaying a situation have been pretty off point lately.

He knows he's under surveillance so it's not exactly shocking but to send out physical people to keep an eye on his every move is definitely concerning.

If he's being honest he'd assumed that was the case a few days ago, had noticed people watching him when they shouldn't.

Or rather the bond had noticed and he'd decided to ignore the bond because he's unhappy with it right now.

Perhaps he should be paranoid.

"Yep, when you got out of sight he got into his car and left but don't worry, Jon and I have a plan and you'll be safe" she says reassuringly as he raises a brow.

"I- okay lay it on me" he says, more curious than anything else.

"Get your car home and get your things together, Jon and I will be over to pick you up" she says like he has no choice.

"After we grab you we're going to go see Hopper and let him know what's happening and after that, you'll be staying at Jonathan's until things get sorted" she goes on to say as he lets that all sink in for a moment.

His first immediate thought is that Billy would never allow him to sleep under the same roof as Jonathan until he remembers...wait, _they aren't together anymore._

Steve can do whatever he wants, Billy is _not_ the boss of him.

"What does Joyce think of that?" he asks because she seems to have failed to mention where Ms. Byers falls into the equation in all of this as Nancy looks at him sheepishly.

"It'll be more of an ask for forgiveness later sort of deal, we know she's going to take you in Steve" Nancy says with a shrug.

"How about you have Jon call her from the school and make sure she's okay with it first?" Steve
asks as he makes it more of a demand than a request as she rolls her eyes at him.

"Fine, you're right I'll have him call and then we'll be over, what do you think?" she replies as he shrugs. "It's a solid plan, I hate being at my house anyway it's a good excuse to not have to deal with my parents and suffer through another awful *family* dinner" he says as they both grimace.

Nancy has met his parents multiple times, she thinks they're complete doormats and she hated having to suffer through being around them so he'd stopped bringing her over altogether.

She also can't stand being near his pool.

His parents liked Nancy a lot and they still give him shit for letting her slip through his fingers which used to bother him but now it's just annoying.

They considered her a good influence on him and they weren't wrong because she had helped him become a better person but she could see right through them.

"They don't seem to care very much about what you want or what you think Steve" she had told him one night.

"They've always been like that, I kind of just do as I'm told" he tells her with a shrug.

"You're your own person Steve, don't let anyone dictate what you can and can't do" she had said to him.

She was right of course but he still struggles with it, he knows he can be so damn passive and he knows he'd done exactly that with Billy and part of it hadn't even been Billy's fault.

He'd fed into Billy's controlling nature, he's just as much at fault because he should know better.

Steve has been so used to being told what to do his whole life that it's hard to break himself of the habit but he's been *trying*.

This whole break up had been a good first step towards that, it's one of the major changes he needs to make if he ever wants to make something work with Billy that they can *both* be proud of.

"Alright, see you soon" she says as she smiles and waves at him while walking away.

---

He subtly lets his parents know he'll be gone for a few days to stay at a friends house and they thankfully don't ask for any details.

Steve wonders if it's because they picked up on the fact that he's trying to be subtle or if they just actually don't care.

Or maybe it's a combination of both.

His mother looks at him in a way he isn't familiar with but she doesn't say anything, it's a strange silent exchange and Steve doesn't look too far into it.
Steve finds himself missing Billy in that moment and he considers telling him what's going on. He could project himself again and give Billy a heads up but it's not really his business and it's handled anyway so it's not like he needs to know and Steve ultimately decides against it.

The bond simmers beneath his skin, upset by his decision.

_Fucking Christ._

He ignores it and loads himself and his things into Jonathan's car when they finally get to his house as quickly as possible, not wanting to be there for another second.

"You asked Joyce right?" Steve asks as Jon backs out of the driveway.

"Yes we asked my mom, she's of course all for the idea and I don't have a guest room so you'll need to sleep on the couch" Jonathan tells him.

"Small price to pay if it means getting away from them" he says, clearly indicating his parents as Nancy and Jon share a look.

"Is it really that bad?" Nancy asks.

"Not really, but them trying to talk to me more is just weird and there's something that doesn't feel right, it's just weird and it makes me uncomfortable" he says, feeling chills just from talking about it.

"What does that mean Steve?" Nancy asks, trying to get more clarification.

"I dunno how to explain it Nance, I know my parents and the way they're treating me is different" Steve says as a shrugs.

"It's probably because they almost lost you again so soon after the whole 'hospital in a coma' incident and I heard they poured a lot money into finding you and that's how the government flagged them down" Jon says as Steve frowns.

He hadn't known all of that, they hadn't told him any of that.

All they'd said was how glad they were to have him back and then his dad would start asking strange questions he really didn't want to be answering while under surveillance for every dinner.

A couple days ago his mom had actually asked about Billy, it had been subtle and she hadn't said his name but eventually it all started to come out through his own prompting.

"How about that boy at school you seem to be hanging out with now?" his mom asks as she puts down her fork.

"Which one?" he asks stupidly.

"Answer your mother's question" his dad says as Steve just sighs.

"I assume you mean Billy, he's one of my friends. Why?" he asks, wanting to know where this is going.

"We've heard things from people in town and-" his dad starts to say before his mom puts a hand on his as he stops talking.
"Don't get us wrong Stevie, the people in this town can be dramatic but we have your best interests in mind, we want what's best for you" she says and ain't that just bullshit.

If that was true why don't they ever ask him what he wants?

"Okay, I know he's part of a bad crowd but I'm not being pulled into that again so don't worry" he reassures them.

"That's part of it but there's also other things and I don't know if it's because of things that this boy is saying but maybe you should stay away from him" his dad says and suddenly Steve knows what this is about.

How the hell do his parents even know about those rumors? They sure as hell aren't around Hawkins enough to hear them.

Perhaps the Spring Break disappearance the four of them had done wasn't handled well enough, maybe people were starting to take note and look at them more suspiciously.

They had all worried about this but the stories they'd told friends who had asked were simply blown off by simple answers of complications with getting back to Hawkins that ranged from cars breaking down to straight up ditching school on purpose.

Tommy seemed to be the only one he'd heard of that had started talking shit about him and Billy in regards to the gay rumors.

For the most part those rumors at school would be hushed simply because Billy would go out of his way to flirt with girls.

None of it had bothered Steve when he'd do it at school because it was a necessary evil.

Fear of Billy had shut a lot of people up too because all he ever really needed to do was glare menacingly at others and they'd shut up.

Steve himself also knew how to sweet talk a girl or two, it had been nice but Billy had quickly told him to knock that shit off which had been annoying as hell.

Why could Billy do it but he couldn't?

It would help their cover but Billy hadn't let up on it, he hated seeing Steve show interest in other people and finally after being sick and tired of listening to him bitch and moan he'd relented.

It was the adults or teachers that were a bigger problem, they'd look at them strangely and Steve knows it's because the town is so conservative.

If anything, that's another thing this break up had seemed to be good for, it would probably deflect rumors.

Hopefully.

"I don't know guys, maybe you're right" he says not wanting to think about it any longer.
When they stop by the station Alex is walking out right as they're walking in as he comes over to them happily waving as Steve frowns.

"Good to see you all again, what brings you here?" Alex asks curiously.

"Wouldn't you like to know" Nancy says, folding her arms over her chest.

"Uh yeah, that's why I asked but if it's something personal ignore me but if it's hive mother related let me know, that's kind of my jurisdiction" he says as he puts his hands in his pockets.

He keeps stealing glances at Steve and it's making him uncomfortable.

"Why have you been hanging out with Billy?" Jonathan asks like suddenly the poor guy is under an interrogation as Steve pinches the bridge of his nose.

Jesus, they're just really laying into this guy and it's probably not even close to what either one of them has playing out in their minds.

Alex snorts and looks at them like they're all endearing, like he knows exactly what they're thinking.

"I'm a bit shocked Billy hasn't gotten in touch with any of you but he's been a bit busy and he's suspended so I know none of you have been able to talk" Alex says as he shrugs and suddenly Steve is even more confused.

"What do you mean?" Nancy asks, still looking at him suspiciously.

"His father didn't commit suicide he was murdered by Sheldon by orders of the Mind Flayer. The note to Billy was Sheldon's admittance of the crime, I had him open it just in case" he says and suddenly Steve feels like he can barely breathe.

"I'm only telling you this because anything to do with this hive mother is your business too" Alex tells them.

It had been Steve's idea to tell Billy to wait to open it, what if they'd never known?

What if a year from now they'd found out Neil had never killed himself and it had been the Mind Flayer all along?

Suddenly that feeling he'd had from the memorial makes sense, Billy _had_ been hiding something and now his words make far more sense.

"Hey don't stress it kid, it was a solid idea to have him wait to open it until he was ready and I'm sorry my hunch was right" Alex says as he slaps Steve on the shoulder like he can somehow read his mind or maybe he's showing on his face.

"I- I can't believe it" Jonathan says in disbelief.

"This doesn't explain why you bought groceries with him and showed up to some random woman's house" Nancy says, still hung up on some sort of possible affair and Steve appreciates their protectiveness of him but it's seriously getting annoying.

"We have a lot of ground to cover, she was a possible lead to finding Sheldon and I offered to help
her out because she's taking care of her dying mother so we got her some groceries in exchange for information that ended up leading nowhere useful" Alex tells them.

Steve knew it hadn't been anything like what they'd been thinking all along.

At least he'd finally been right about something.

"Also perhaps you don't want to take out your pitchforks if you don't know what the fuck you're talking about" Alex says, tone cheerful which creates a strange creepy contrast paired together with his harsh words as he turns around, not waiting for a response as Nancy and Jon gape at him.

"Anyway, keep your eyes and ears open, let me know if anything comes up!" Alex yells, waving his hand with his back turned to them as he gets inside of his car.

Steve can't help but snort, they had totally deserved that.

"Can you believe that guy?!" Nancy says as Jonathan shakes his head.

"He's right, you guys are being assholes" Steve tells them honestly as Nancy glares at him. "I'm being serious, I told you all along it wasn't what you were thinking and you ignored me"

They both deflate at that as Jonathan sighs.

"You're right, I'm sorry Steve" he says which is more than he'd expected as Nancy murmurs a half-hearted apology and Steve understands they're just looking out for him but hopefully this has taught them some restraint.

They walk into the station and suddenly Steve doesn't know what to do, his mind is racing.

God, poor Billy...this whole thing is all kinds of fucked up and he definitely doesn't want to tell Billy he's being followed now.

He'll just worry unnecessarily and it probably won't take long for Hopper to get him off of the surveillance list and everything can go back to normal and they can focus all of their attention on the Mind Flayer.

Honestly Billy doesn't need the distraction of worrying about him, he's clearly got too much going on and Steve doesn't want to do that to him as he resolves to get this all taken care of as quickly as possible.

The bond flares angrily, is still upset with him as it suddenly goes dormant, like it's giving him the silent treatment.

Fine, fuck you too.

He thinks and he really doesn't care how the bond feels, it is not the boss of him.

When they're done filling Hopper in and he assures them he'll work double time to get things figured out he asks to speak to Steve alone.

Nancy and Jonathan look like they don't want to leave but ultimately they oblige as they tell him they'll wait in the car.
"Have you spoken with Billy?" Hopper asks him when they're finally alone and Steve shakes his head as he grabs his own arm, feeling guilty and he doesn't know why.

_Stupid bond._

"We just saw Alex though, he let us know what's going on" he admits as Hopper nods, scratching at his beard thoughtfully.

"I don't know what's going on between the two of you and quite frankly I don't really care, that's your business not mine" Hopper says as he stares him down, tone serious and suddenly Steve has no idea what he's getting at.

"Uhm, ok?" Steve says nervously as the silence wears on.

"I'm going to tell you what I told Billy alright?" he says as Steve gets a confused look on his face, waiting for him to continue.

"We need to make sure everyone else around the both of you is safe and protected from your lack of knowledge in regards to your bond" he says as Steve inhales sharply.

"Billy has assured me the compulsion is triggered if one of you is under threat and I wonder how long that will be the case" Hopper says and Steve frowns.

"I don't know what you mean" he says, usually Hopper gives it to him straight but it's like he's dancing around the subject.

"I know neither one of you is willing to get help anymore, Owen's and I saw to that and I'm sorry but if it becomes too much please don't be afraid to get help" he says and his voice is filled with regret and Steve doesn't know what to say.

"I haven't apologized to you or to Billy for that matter. I have a lot to apologize for and I don't even know where to begin" he says as he rest his elbows on his desk as he rubs his hands over his face.

"It doesn't need to be me Steve, anyone you're comfortable with but don't close out those who are willing to help you. I'm sorry I did this to both of you. I feel responsible for tearing you both apart and for letting things get to this point" Hopper says as he buries his face in his hands, keeping them there.

Steve doesn't know what to say to that, isn't sure why Hopper is saying all of these things to him all of a sudden.

Maybe Hopper doesn't know either.

"I- what's happening between Billy and I is exactly as you said, it's between him and I and you are not at fault for that in any way" Steve says to reassure him because it's true, their break up was born of more than just one thing and most of those things had to do with the way they were treating each other.

It's all personal reasons.

"I think I know that but I- I told El this once. I feel like a black hole Steve, like I suck everything in and destroy it and if I'd done what I'd felt was right in my gut and killed that fucking thing we wouldn't be here right now" Hopper says and there's a dead look in his eyes that worries Steve.

"Neil would be alive right now and I don't know how to apologize to Billy for killing his father" Jim
says as they lock eyes and Steve takes a step back.

No that's-

Hopper didn't kill Neil, the Mind Flayer did that but it wasn't Hopper, he had nothing to do with that.

Steve is still trying to wrap his head around it but he knows this isn't Hopper.

"This is not your fault Jim, this is not your fault" he tells him.

"Thank's kid but I know the truth" he says as he chuckles lightly and it sounds so hollow and sad.

Steve goes to sit in the chair across from him and he truly has no idea what he can say to him.

"I promise if it gets bad we'll get help. Maggie told us how to find her and I'm sure maybe when Billy and I can get things sorted out we can get in touch with her if it gets to that" he reassures him.

Honestly he's not sure how he feels about the bond anymore or if he even wants to have anything to do with those people but he hopes that maybe by telling Jim he'll consider it, it'll make him feel better even if just a little bit.

"Thank you Steve, thank you" he says.

"No problem, don't sweat it Hopper seriously" Steve tells him before they part ways.

He knows it won't help.

When Steve gets to school with Nancy and Jonathan the next day he catches sight of Billy's car as he tries to get a kink out of his neck.

The couch at Jon's house is nice but he's just not used to it yet.

Oh.

Billy's suspension is over, that's right.

He'd considered seeing Billy yesterday in light of what they'd learned but ultimately decided against it.

Steve is pretty sure he'd end up blabbing about being followed.

The prospect of physically seeing Billy makes his heart beat faster in his chest as he wills himself to stop being so stupid.

They won't be seeing much of each other anyway since one of the first things Steve had done when he'd gotten back to school had been to take himself out of basketball yet again.

The coach had been concerned but still offered to take him back for what seems like the hundredth time again if he chooses to.

Coach had specified that he wouldn't do this for just anyone.
Steve had been appreciative but he can't be around Billy like that, it had been such a bad fucking idea last time and this time would just spell out disaster.

Before, distance had been simple because they hadn't been as close, they hadn't really been together.

Now?

There's a full blown sexual history there, Billy knows him in ways nobody does and knows his body in ways nobody ever will.

There's a blatantly apparent physical comfort between them that could easily fuck all of this up.

Not to mention the bond responds to Billy naturally, curls around him naturally because of what they are to each other and he can feel Billy's proximity even from here.

Also the bond is being a little bitch lately.

It would be impossible for them to keep their hands to themselves if Steve lets himself too close or puts them into precarious situations with one another.

Steve doesn't need to complicate things between them more than they already are.

Just friends, Steve can do that.

It'll be fine and he knows he can keep the lines from getting blurred.

Right?

It'll be great.

At lunch Billy comes up to him while he's at his locker and he prays for strength.

The bond engulfs him in excitement like a hyperactive puppy at the prospect of being near Billy after being apart for days.

Steve mentally rolls his eyes.

It's like dealing with two children now.

"Hey, can we talk?" Billy asks, grabbing his wrist and he can feel the heat of it seeping into his skin through the fabric of his shirt like a brand.

The bond goes dormant, finally content that they're near one another.

Just hearing Billy's voice makes him want to get the fuck out of dodge because he yearns to be near him, to hug him, to touch him.

The scary thing about that is that's him, not the bond.

"Oh- yeah ok" he mutters out quietly.

Damnit Steve, should have said no.

They go over to sit on the bleachers by the field away from view sitting side by side except Steve makes sure to put a bit of distance between them.
The ache inside of him is unlike anything he's ever felt and he doesn't even know what to say to Billy.

Technically the last time they'd talked had been after Billy's eulogy.

Also, he doesn't know that Steve knows about Neil.

*I'm so proud of you Billy*

"How are you?" Steve asks to finally break the silence.

"I'm- I'm good, you?" He replies and his obvious nervousness would be cute except it just makes Steve ache even more.

"Pretty good" he says stupidly.

There's so much to tell him, so much to talk about.

Billy rubs his hands over his face as he eventually takes his hamsa necklace off from around his neck, handing it out to him.

"Uh, what-" Steve starts to say in confusion not reaching out to take it from him because that makes no sense.

"It's for you, it's Alex's and he asked me to give it to you" he says, getting impatient as he turns to scoot closer until they're inches apart as Billy places it over his head.

Steve is more than confused as he grapples onto Billy's jacket to unzip it.

Billy inhales sharply, hands coming back down to rest in his lap as he gets a confused look on his face after the necklace is around Steve's neck.

He effortlessly unbuttons two of Billy's buttons at the top of his shirt because it's something he's used to doing, a muscle memory at this point.

It's just usually he's doing it for more intimate reasons and the cold air against Billy's exposed skin makes him shiver under Steve's touch, willing himself to focus.

He wants to make sure Billy isn't bullshitting him right now and trying to give his own necklace away for some dumb reason.

This is Billy and he'd be stupid enough to do it.

His fingers brush lightly against Billy's collar bone as he pulls both chains out and sees the one he usually wears from his mother and the hamsa one as he feels better.

Sometimes he likes being wrong, this is something he'll gladly be wrong about.

Billy snorts at him as they pull away from each other while he buttons his shirt back up, casting a glance at Steve that has a bit of heat behind it, making him avert his gaze.

"You could have just asked me to show it to you pr-" Billy says and he can tell that Billy stops himself near the end, a pet name had threatened to fall off of his lips before he'd caught himself.

The ache in Steve's chest grows as he takes a hard gulp.
Billy had been calling him by pet names well before they'd even liked each other, it's not like he needs to stop now.

Maybe it's something Billy feels the need to do, to keep things separate.

Steve doesn't like it.

"So we talked to Alex yesterday" he finally says, ignoring Billy's almost slip up.

Billy frowns, getting a thoughtful look on his face.

"I'm so sorry Billy, I can't fucking believe it" he says, not knowing what to say or do.

"Yeah, tell me about it. Alex and I have been trying to retrace Sheldon's footsteps and we're waiting on Lee to get back to us with some energy readings from the scene of the crime" Billy tells him as Steve blinks in surprise.

"Wow, you've been busy" Steve says as Billy shrugs.

"Has Hopper- did he talk to you?" Billy asks with a grimace.

"Yep, I don't think he's wrong and I agree we should learn how to control it but I don't even know where to begin" Steve says with a shrug.

"My thoughts exactly, the compulsion seems to only trigger if we're under threat" Billy says.

"See I couldn't even figure out what had triggered it, you and I seem to be feeling entirely different things" Steve says as he pulls his own jacket closer to himself.

"Sounds about right- I want to apologize for the time I used my compulsion on you" Billy says all of a sudden.

"I- thanks but we're past that one at this point" Steve says honestly.

"I know but now I truly understand what it feels like to have my free will taken from me and I'm sorry I was the one to put you through that" Billy says, not looking him in the face.

"Billy hey- come on, look at me" Steve says as he puts a hand over the one resting on Billy's lap as he moves closer, their knees brushing and everywhere he can feel his touch feels like fire.

"Stop beating yourself up about the wrong things, it happened and we worked it out" Steve tells him.

Billy nods and suddenly the air around him feels heavier as Billy uses his free hand to grip his wrist gently and Steve wonders if he's going to forcefully pull his hand off of his own.

He doesn't, just rests his hand loosely around it, doing nothing.

Steve involuntarily turns his hand over in his grip so his palm is facing up.

Billy begins to trace it with his fingers and it's feather light as Steve shivers from the touch and he can't help that his eyes flutter from the feeling of it.

He makes the mistake of looking up to see Billy staring at him intently as Billy leans in closer, or maybe he does, perhaps they both lean in closer but he can suddenly feel Billy's breath on his face.

Billy let's go of his wrist.
Steve still feels the heat of his touch and it's dangerous, this is dangerous.

They're playing with fire right now.

Billy lifts his hand up to run it gently through his hair slowly, brushing a strand of it behind his ear at first, letting his hand hover.

A few moments later he traces the top of his ear lightly with his nail which just makes Steve's eyes flutter closed as he takes a deep breath.

Why do his ears have to be a weakness? Why does Billy have to know about it?

It doesn't stop there as Billy goes back to running the hand gently through his hair.

It's so slow and methodical as it moves down to trace the nape of his neck before he grips it softly, not pulling closer just laying it there like a question.

Steve's breathing has gotten heavy at this point as he opens his eyes again to see Billy's pupil's blown wide and he knows his own are probably an exact mirror as they just stare at each other for a moment.

He's giving Steve the opportunity to pull away.

The whole thing feels like an eternity as his heart rate sky rockets from the feelings that wash over him.

The feelings that come to life upon Billy touching him like this.

Steve had no clue it would be this difficult to keep from touching him, from wanting him this fucking badly.

All he wants right now is to just push him down, to take him inside of his mouth.

To taste him and the want is overbearing as he chokes back a quiet whimper.

He knows Billy has heard it because the grip on the back of his neck tightens and Steve squeezes his eyes shut as he bites his lower lip.

Billy's touch is searing into him and he feels a heat unlike anything he's ever felt and he knows they shouldn't be doing this.

He needs to pull away.

But he's missed Billy so much even though it hasn't even been a week.

Not even a damn week Steve, calm the fuck down.

It's embarrassing that Billy could ask anything of him right now and Steve would probably just give in.

It's like they're magnets being pulled toward one another and he's helpless against the pull except he's also not even trying to resist when he knows he should be.

So easy Harrington, you're so fucking easy.

Having Billy here in front of him awakens those primal urges inside of him and the longing is unlike
anything he's ever felt as Billy pulls him even closer.

Steve reaches up to put his hands against Billy's chest.

Billy stops as he looks at him with dark swirling pools of blue hooded eyes that can swallow him whole and they're almost there, it's almost to the point of no return.

One more push from Steve will tip them over the edge.

His hands move without his permission, running them up and down the fabric of Billy's shirt lightly as cold hands slip up and underneath to touch skin because he fucking hungers for it, needs to feel Billy beneath his fingertips.

Billy's nostrils flare and he feels the muscles tense under his touch.

Steve can't help himself because he's done it hundreds of times before and they're both breathing like they've run a marathon.

Billy moves in to close the distance and Steve pulls back still just barely out of reach as Billy makes a low whine in the back of his throat as they touch foreheads.

"Fuck Steve-" he chokes out in a deep husky whisper that makes Steve groan in response.

The grip on his neck moves away and suddenly Billy is grabbing his waist desperately instead and Steve can tell he's holding himself back but he doesn't take, doesn't demand, he let's Steve set the tone, let's Steve control what Billy can and can't do, is waiting for him to make the first move.

Steve finally brings one of his hands back out from under Billy's shirt, uses it to come up and cup his face and their heavy breaths are mingling but their lips still haven't touched.

The hunger in Billy's eyes is so palpable he feels like he's been set aflame and engulfed by it, the cold suddenly not even an issue because it's coiling low inside of him and it aches, it fucking burns and he fucking needs-

They're a hairs breadth away from bliss-

Brrrrriiiinng

The sound of the bell jolts them right out of the moment as Steve bolts upright and almost falls right off the damn bleachers.

Billy grips his wrist to keep him from falling as Steve mouth's a quiet 'thank you' under his breath after wrenching his hand away a bit more violently than he probably should.

Holy shit, fucking son of a bitch-

This guy really needs to stop being so fucking touchy because he's going to make Steve fucking combust except in the next moment Steve realizes he's the one that had started this.

He's the one that had gotten touchy with Billy first.

God damnit, shit.
"I- we'll talk later" Steve says as he doesn't wait for a response, quickly hurrying away before either one of them can do anything else stupid.

Before he can do anything else stupid, stupid, stupid idiot why don't you ever show resistance.

Grow a fucking backbone Harrington, control yourself.

Don't give in, don't give in.

He repeats to himself as he clutches the hamsa symbol tightly before tucking it underneath his shirt as he hurries back inside of the school to go to his next class.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so glad to hear a lot of people responding positively to Alex, I am also getting really attached to him tbh and he's just so fun to write especially if Billy is in the scene, they play off of each other really well.

There was so much going on in this chapter I hope you all enjoy it <3
I can't wait for this holiday shit to be over.

November and December are by far my least favorite months, don't work in retail and definitely don't sell coffee.

I'm partially joking, I love my job but it's weeks like these ones when I come home after work and go straight to sleep from pure exhaustion that make it difficult.

I just keep telling myself it's almost over and I write to repress the swirling abyss of stress building inside of me *gives a thumbs up*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Billy has clearly fucked up and he's worried Steve is pissed at him now.

Steve had pulled his hand away so damn fast it had stunned him into silence and now he feels like an ass as he watches Steve's retreating figure.

That was not how he had intended for things to go and he berates himself for having such shitty self control.

He also needs a fucking minute.

It's insane how Steve is truly all he sees, all he wants, all that he needs.

The whole thing is a bit embarrassing if he's being honest with himself.

There's truly no one else for him and this break up has proven that to him because he'd expected himself to go back to his old ways, to revert completely and just feel the need to get destructive, to punish Steve and to get antsy.

He'd even expected to want to take it a step further and just go around fucking other people and he could but he doesn't even want to.

What's the point?

He'd tried looking at Lisa in the hallway earlier today because she'd been giving off some serious 'hey its been forever let's fuck' vibes and he had considered it.

Billy had truly considered just being the immature piece of shit he knows himself to be but he didn't want to, the thought had made him sick to his stomach.

Even the idea of it was so unappealing, so boring, so lifeless.

If Billy really wanted to he could get it up but he'd just be thinking of Steve the whole time and the guilt would tear him apart from the inside out.
It's pathetic but Billy is so far fucking gone for him it's not even funny, it's frustrating and it pisses
him off.

Nobody makes him feel the way that Steve makes him feel, nobody else will ever be good enough,
nobody knows him like Steve does.

For fucks sake they become one when they make love in every sense of the word and it's the most
glorious fucking thing Billy has ever experienced.

Next to waking up with Steve plastered to his side in the morning.

There's something about that, he likes that the first thing he gets to see in the morning is Steve and it
does things to him every single time without fail, his whole day is made if it starts with seeing his
face.

Mostly because Steve is the first thing he thinks about in the morning when he wakes anyway so
seeing him makes it even better, seeing him there just completes something inside of him.

Part of it is because they don't always get to have that between needing to be subtle and sneaking
around.

Hawkin's is seriously way too small.

It's why he'd been so excited for their Spring Break, they'd finally get time to be them.

Until it had turned to shit of course.

Also with every other crazy thing in their lives it's more of a luxury if they get to spend the night
together.

It's his mom's fault too, sometimes he'd wake up from nightmares when he was little and he'd sneak
into bed with them and when he'd wake up his mom would be staring down at him.

Neil didn't mind for a while and he'd grown out of it long before it had been an issue but one day he
finally got curious as he'd woken up to his mother staring down at him one morning after Neil had
already gotten out of bed.

"Mom why you always starin' at me like that?" he'd asked her.

"Because baby, the world is a big place and sometimes the only thing I need to keep my head
straight is to wake up to your sleeping face" she had said to him softly as she had pinched his nose
and he couldn't help the giggle that had come out of him as he batted her hand away.

The memory makes him fucking ache, he misses his mom but he misses Steve so fucking much and
now his dad is gone too-

He's losing everything.

Billy knows he can't have Steve anymore and that's fine, he can make this work, he can work around
the parameters and behave himself.
They don't even need to do anything, Billy can control himself.

Easy.

Now though?

Steve is probably going to avoid him even more, he truly needs to keep his fucking hands to himself if he's ever going to begin to gain back favor with Steve and he'd already gone and fucked it up.

What if he's losing Steve?

That can't happen, he can't let that happen.

He rubs his hands over his face as he lets out a frustrated groan before he stands to start making his way down the bleachers to head to his next class.

School can't get over fast enough for Steve and he gets the fuck out of there as quickly as he can. Luckily because he's waiting on Nancy and Jonathan they leave later which means by the time they're to his car Billy is already gone.

Steve learns very quickly the bond is content to sit back for the most part but the moment it feels danger on the horizon all bets are off.

This is something Steve learns the hard way.

That night Steve is sleeping on his back as he suddenly opens his eyes to stare up at the ceiling.

He doesn't bolt awake, it's not jarring, it's just one second he had been asleep and in the next moment he finds himself wide awake.

When he finally turns his head he almost screams like a little girl as he bolts upright, holding a hand to his chest because he's pretty sure his heart is about to beat right out of it.

"Jesus fuck- what the hell is wrong with you?!" He asks in a hissed whisper.

Billy is standing before him and his expression is-

"God damn Billy, if looks could kill" he states because he looks ready to mangle him as he continues to stare at him like a bad nightmare and for a moment he really does wonder if he might be dreaming.

Something isn't right, he looks really fucking pissed but not like his usual pissed off self, it's a different kind of pissed off that Steve isn't familiar with.

It's like he's angry and disappointed?

Steve suddenly doesn't know what the hell is going on and within the next moment Steve realizes he isn't actually there.
Billy is projecting himself, he can feel it and Steve looks up at him in awe, had wondered if Billy could do it too and it seems his question has been answered and he can't help himself as he reaches out to touch Billy.

The expression on his face seems to turn even darker as he takes a step back and there's a pit inside of Steve's stomach from the feeling of rejection that washes over him.

"Sorry, I didn't know you could do it too" he says, not meaning to have crossed a line as he brings his hand back into his lap.

Way to go Steve, you stupid idiot.

Billy looks like he's at war with himself and Steve just stares at him as he frowns, not really knowing what the hell is going on all of a sudden as he crosses his legs on the couch and waits out whatever is happening.

"Uh, are you okay?" he finally asks because Billy hasn't said a single word yet and it's making him feel really uncomfortable.

Billy just continues to stare at him and Steve fidgets.

"I'm trying to find the right way to say this" Billy finally says and Steve nods slowly, not knowing what that means.

"Honestly you're lucky I'm not really here and asleep in my bed right now because if I were here it wouldn't be pretty" Billy tells him and Steve actually looks at Billy like he's insane.

"The fuck are you talking about?" he asks, suddenly offended because he's not sure what he's done wrong all of a sudden.

"When were you going to tell me you're being followed?" Billy asks and Steve averts his gaze wondering how the fuck Billy found that out.

"What's wrong, wondering how I found out?" Billy asks next, like he's reading his mind. Which isn't very far fetched.

Steve doesn't answer, feels like if he speaks it'll just come out wrong as he picks at a loose thread on his shirt.

"Funny story, the bond has been tipping me off, was clearing a path in my mind to yours and that path lead to some very interesting memories" Billy says, tone decidedly angry as Steve looks up at him in surprise.

"I- you can see my memories now?" Steve asks because that hasn't even been something Billy could do.

Steve could barely do it and the only way they could see memories is if he pulled them both in between the bond.

"I saw what the bond wanted me to see which was of Nancy and Jonathan coming up with a game plan to protect you as well as anything else pertaining to the fact that you're being fucking followed" Billy hisses out and Steve feels guilt creep into him like a slow moving disease.

"Billy I wasn't sure how to tell you because of everything you've been going through lately and-" he
starts to say as Billy shakes his head.

"There's no fucking excuse" Billy tells him and Steve really doesn't know why he's this upset.

"Look, you're being a bit dramatic and it's being handled" he tells Billy as he rolls his eyes at him.

Billy's expression suddenly goes from anger and disappointment to completely emotionless within seconds and it sends a chill down Steve's spine.

"I'm going to make this very clear with you. At the end of the day you and I are bonded to one another and being broken up does not change any part of that" Billy says menacingly as he takes a step forward and Steve can't help but avert his gaze again.

"Yeah okay, I know that" he says quietly and suddenly Billy's hands are on either side of him, caging him in and even though Billy isn't there he can still feel the memory of his heat.

He feels like prey all of a sudden being hunted by a predator as it decides whether or not it wants to eat him but not in the good, fun kind of way that leads to great angry make up sex.

More like the 'oh my god he looks ready to smash something' kind of way.

When Steve turns to look into his eyes they're inches from each other's face and Steve tries to sink himself further into the couch, hoping it will just swallow him whole instead.

"You don't though, you don't know that because if you did you would have told me" Billy states and he's not wrong, Steve is starting to realize this probably hadn't been the smartest thing he's ever done.

Or in this case not done.

"I'm sorry okay?" he says, trying to placate him and Billy's upper lip straight up curls into a snarl as he pushes away to pace the room and Steve really doesn't understand why he's this fucking pissed off.

It's a bit unwarranted.

When Billy is finally done pacing he faces Steve again, expression still thunderous.

"You have no sense of self preservation so let me explain this in a way that you might understand. You and I feel each other's pain so if you're in danger that means I'm in danger too" Billy tells him as Steve frowns at him.

"Don't do that, don't talk down to me like I'm a child or something" he says defiantly because he doesn't need to sit here and listen to Billy be an ass.

"Getting defensive isn't helping, what if you get taken Steve?" Billy asks him a bit desperately as Steve just shrugs.

This is how he always gets, whenever he feels like Steve is in danger he gets fucking crazy like this and it's so stupid, he needs to chill the fuck out.

"I mean we've got that whole compulsion thing now, it's probably going to be pretty hard to nab either one of us" he says honestly, trying to diffuse the situation.

Maybe if he acts nonchalant Billy will just cool off.

"Something we have no control over, we've got no idea how to use it or how it works and that's
besides the point” Billy says as Steve just rolls his eyes at him.

"Don't- I swear to fucking god so help me Steve there is a reason the bond felt the need to interfere, do you not understand that?” Billy hisses out to him and he can't help the frown he gets on his face.

"I figured it's because it's a lot like you, a petulant child that throws a tantrum every time it gets told no" Steve fires back at him as Billy tilts his head to the side thoughtfully like he's realizing something.

"Is that why the bond showed me your memories Steve?” Billy asks and Steve's jaw clenches in response as he says nothing.

"The bond was warning you and you ignored it, you- I can't fucking believe you!” Billy spits out as he rubs his hands over his face.

"Fuck you Billy, the situation is handled and there was no point in telling you because I'm sure in a few days I'll be back at my house and this whole thing will have blown over" Steve says as he waves his hand in the air in a nonchalant manner.

Billy just stares at him for a long while and says nothing until finally he gets a different look on his face, a look of concern.

"Do you not want the bond anymore?” he asks quietly and Steve's eyes widen.

"What- no that's not what this is" Steve tells him as he gets up off the couch to move closer to Billy who just moves away from him.

He doesn't like this, Steve is seriously not down for what's going on right now.

"Then tell me what it is because if you're in danger I need to know about it, I have a right to know about it and you know that's true” Billy says and some of it comes out through clenched teeth.

He's clearly trying to compose himself.

_God damn it, he's right._

This whole thing is so stupid and has gotten blown so far out of proportion.

Steve knows he should have told him because Billy has a point, if he gets harmed that could easily effect Billy as well.

That's just a fact, that's not even an opinion.

At this point it's just his pride that's keeping him from straight up apologizing and admitting he's an idiot who should have just filled Billy in on what was happening.

Why did he even think it was a good idea to keep it from him in the first place?

_Oh right._

Because he doesn't want to be around Billy more than he needs to be, because if he is he'll slam Billy into a wall and have his way with him.

"Look- it was a mistake but now you know and we can move on with it” Steve says, really wanting this conversation to be over.
Billy swallows hard and the expression on his face kills Steve.

He looks hurt.

"I'm being serious when I ask you if the bond is something you really want to deal with for the rest of our lives" he finally says and Steve can't help the worry that pours over into him, out of him, seeps through everything around him.

Is this-

"Do you- is this you saying you don't want it anymore?" Steve asks him quietly as he wrings his hands together.

Billy groans as he chuckles except it comes out exasperated.

"If I didn't want the bond I'd be fucking telling you that right now, I'm asking you what you want" Billy says as he points an angry finger at him.

"Of course I want the bond I've already accepted that we're stuck with it" Steve tells him like that's the stupidest question he's ever heard.

"What if we had the choice to get rid of it though?" Billy asks him and Steve takes a physical step back.

"Why are you saying that?" he replies, mind going into a high state of alert and it's getting harder to breathe all of a sudden.

"Stop- Steve stop looking into this like I'm hiding my fucking intentions I'm asking you these questions straight, there is no hidden meaning behind them" Billy says as he rolls his eyes, looking up at the ceiling like he's done with this shit.

Steve tries to rewind, tries to think about what Billy just asked because his mind is convinced at this point that Billy wants the bond to be gone and everything is over as he knows it.

And he can't live-

That's not something Steve can handle, losing Billy like that, in that way.

He takes a deep breath as he looks down at his feet, trying to compose himself.

"If- if we could get rid of it?" he asks, trying to make sure that's what he actually asked.

"Yes, if someone came up to us and told us they could remove the bond would you still feel the same way?"

Steve ponders the question and although he's afraid of the bond and what it can do and the way in which it just keeps getting stronger he can't bear to be without it.

Billy is part of him, if he gets Billy ripped away from him-

The feeling, that first time when there had been so much pain, when the bond had first formed comes rushing back to him.

He feels tears involuntarily streaming down his cheeks and Billy has a look on his face like he thinks Steve is going to say no.
"I can't- I can't live without you, without this bond because that's just not an option in my mind Billy" he tells him before Billy starts to panic because he looked pretty close to having a mental breakdown.

There's an immense relief he sees wash over Billy as he gets a frown on his face in the next moment.

"Then why are you fighting the bond right now?" he asks and it's a good question in all honesty.

It kept pinging awake and getting upset with him for hiding this from Billy and he just didn't want to listen because he's trying really hard to keep things separate.

"Because- I'm afraid of it, because it's not the boss of me and I can do whatever the fuck I want. I don't like that it went crying to you instead because I chose to ignore it" he tells him which is actually some of the other reasons the whole thing is pissing him off.

"It's not a petulant child Steve, its primary function is to keep us alive so when it feels like we're under threat or in danger it adapts and does what it must to keep us safe, do you not understand that?" Billy asks like Steve is an idiot or something.

"Yeah well to me that translates to it throwing a fit" Steve says as he snorts while wiping the tears from his face.

"I know that you were dead for a moment so you didn't get to feel everything the way that I did but it's not doing this to be difficult, you are in real tangible fucking danger and I can feel it Steve, I can fucking feel it through the bond" he says desperately, willing him to understand and Steve is suddenly unsure of himself.

"I- I don't know what that means" he says because they're always in danger, that's just a thing.

"It's picking up on something that we're not. Something is wrong...you seriously don't feel that?" Billy asks, suddenly confused.

"I- no? It just tingled under my skin and got angry whenever I kept telling myself I wasn't going to tell you but other than that I feel nothing" he tells Billy honestly because there's really no point in lying anymore.

"The moment I connected to those memories it has been tingling under my skin like an impending doom" Billy says and Steve grimaces, still doesn't know what that means.

"Wha- I don't feel that at all" he tells him, wondering how they're suddenly experiencing different things.

Billy walks up to him as he takes his hands into his own and he's still not used to the feeling of the projection.

He doesn't get to focus on it for very long as Billy starts pushing the feeling of it onto him, letting him feel what he's feeling and suddenly it's-

There.

He's right.

The bond is thrumming under Billy's skin like a warning, like they're missing something and the feeling is awful, he'd probably have been just as pissed if this is what had been coursing through his veins too.
It's pounding hard like the moment right before a panic attack, like Billy's standing on the edge of a cliff being forced to jump but he can't jump off and all he wants is to get it over with.

"What are we missing?" Steve asks as he squeezes his eyes shut, tries to think back on the last few days.

"The last memory it showed me was of a dinner with your parents, it seemed strange and unrelated but then they asked about me" Billy says as Steve's eyes jolt open.

"What does that have to do with me being followed?" Steve asks in confusion as they still allow their emotions to mingle together, flowing freely back and forth.

Billy's eyes flutter closed for a moment as he tightens the grip on his hands, nostrils flaring before he seems to come back to himself as Steve raises a confused brow at him.

"Uh- I don't- I don't know" Billy says as he clears his throat, suddenly pulling their hands away like he's been burned and just like that they're back on their respective sides of the bond again.

"Why does this have to be a fucking riddle?" Steve asks in frustration as Billy suddenly takes a step back as he runs a hand through his hair.

"Steve- I think it's trying to tell us that your parents are a danger to you" he says and Steve just stares at him and laughs.

"My parents, you think my parents are having me followed?" he says in disbelief.

The bond creeps up on him, wraps itself around him and it feels like-

Confirmation?

"Please tell me you at least feel that?" Billy asks him as Steve nods slowly.

Billy gets a horrified look on his face and Steve doesn't like the implications of this, doesn't like where any of this is going.

"My parents are not a danger to my life, that's fucking insane" Steve says as he shakes his head.

The bond is mistaken and it's probably just being paranoid except-

What the fuck does Steve know?

The bond is different now, it's completely different and has changed and formed itself in a way he doesn't even understand.

"Steve-" Billy says except he holds up his hand to him because he doesn't want to hear it, any of it.

This is fucking ridiculous.

"My parents are pieces of work but they wouldn't knowingly put my life in danger Billy, that's not a thing" he tells him as he points a finger at him instead.

Steve can't help himself as he starts pacing around the room, running his hands through his hair nervously.

"Maybe you're right, they wouldn't knowingly put you in danger but if they're being fed the wrong kind of information-" Billy starts to say as Steve whips his head to look at him, eyes wide.
"You think- do you think that someone is trying to-" he doesn't know how to finish that sentence because it could be any number of things.

Are they in some sort of communication with the government?

Is that what this has been?

Did they make a deal?

No- that's insane, his parents wouldn't do that, they're just overthinking this.

The strange look his mother gave him before he left suddenly makes a lot more sense though.

"Do. Not. Go. Home." Billy says as he grabs him by his arms and starts shaking him and he can actually feel the memory of pain from his harsh grip.

"I- Jesus Billy okay- okay let go-" he says as he gets out of his grasp, taking a step back as he almost stumbles over before righting himself.

"Stay with Nancy and Jon at all times and I will talk to Alex and the Chief tomorrow after school and we'll figure this out" Billy tells him as Steve nods.

Within the next moment Billy is gone and Steve doesn't know what to do with himself.

Steve doesn't sleep, just lays awake until Joyce gets up as he helps her look for her keys while she frantically runs around the house trying to get Will to school and herself to work on time.

"Are you alright?" she asks him at one point.

"Yeah, just tired- the couch is great but it's just hard getting used to sleeping somewhere else" he tells her, not knowing how to explain to her that his parents are apparently a threat to his fucking life and he has no idea why or how.

She looks at him like she knows he's not saying the whole truth and it's getting really annoying that every person he knows is somehow really intuitive.

"Sweetie if you need to talk- I'm not trying to impose but if you need to talk please don't hesitate, go to whoever you need" she tells him as he chuckles lightly.

"You sound like Hopper" he tells her as she frowns and he suddenly feels like he's said the wrong thing.

"Hopper doesn't know what he's talking about" she says angrily and suddenly it hits Steve like a ton of bricks.

Of course Joyce isn't on good terms with him anymore, how could he be so stupid?

They had almost died, her own son had gone missing for nearly a week, she'd lost Jonathan just like she'd lost Will-

*Oh fuck.*
Now it makes way more sense that Hopper was having a bit of a break down.

Steve doesn't blame Joyce, she probably fucking hates him now but it's not like Hopper knew it would get this bad.

He'd told Owen's time and again to burn the Mind Flayer out of Dylan and he'd gotten turned down every time.

There's only so much Hopper could do in that situation, he'd be putting El at risk by being at odds with Owen's, it's just not smart to turn him into an enemy and go against his wishes.

Again, Steve still understands why Joyce would be pissed, Jonathan and Will are her whole life.

She's the most frightening person he's ever seen when it comes to her children.

Suddenly Steve feels even more pity for Hopper as he clears his throat.

"Ah well- yeah but uhm thank you, for everything and for taking me in" he tells her to change the topic and because he still hadn't actually thanked her yet.

Joyce face softens as she takes his hand into her own.

"You're always welcome here any time, Billy too but he already knows that and I know how stubborn he is" she says as they both chuckle.

"Indeed he is" he tells her as he shakes his head fondly.

"Neither one of you should have had to endure what has happened and I'm so sorry for the pain Hopper's mistakes have caused both of you" she starts to say as he holds up his hand.

"Really, it's fine don't even worry about it" he tells her because all of that is the least of his problems for the time being.

"Okay sweetheart I won't keep you waiting" she says as she grips his hand tightly in a comforting gesture before letting go.

When they pick up Nancy he tells them both what happened, warns them of the things him and Billy discussed last night and they look even more antsy than before, even more concerned.

Steve is pretty sure everyone's about ready to lock him up in a cabin like El or something and honestly he can't really blame them, this is just getting insane and out of hand.

School is a nice reprieve from the craziness of his life and he's in English when all of a sudden they hear the clicking of the intercom as his name is being called over it.

"Steve Harrington to the principal's office please" he hears the familiar shrill ringing voice of Mrs. Lindon say and his blood runs cold.
Oh fuck.

That can't be good.

The bond curls around him protectively, sensing his distress and it's a small comfort as he gets up and leaves class.

Billy falls into step beside him when he's halfway there and Steve almost jumps right out of his skin when he turns the corner.

"Jesus-" he yells out as Billy grabs him by his elbow.

Oh, he's really here right now.

"You should be in class, you could have just projected yourself so that no one would see you, it's less suspicious" Steve tells him as he rolls his eyes.

They start walking towards the office again when Billy just shrugs..

"I don't like this Steve" Billy says and Steve understands, it's unnerving and he feels like everywhere he turns could be a moment that everything could suddenly turn to shit.

He's so sick and tired of fearing for his safety, for his life.

This place should feel safe, his own home should feel safe but nothing feels that way, there's not a single place that he feels safe in anymore.

The only time he feels safe is in Billy's arms and he flushes a bit from the fact that he's standing right there next to him as he thinks that.

Steve really needs to get his fucking head straight.

When they get to the office Billy is forced to wait outside and he looks pissed as Steve goes inside of the room and before he closes the door he looks at Billy with a confused expression.

"Can I help you Mr. Hargrove?" The principal asks as Billy just shrugs, arms crossed.

"Need to talk to you but I can wait until you're done with Harrington" he says as the man audibly sighs.

He clearly isn't a fan of Billy as he closes the door without even responding.

Rude.

"There's a phone call for you from your mother, she asked to speak with you privately" he says and Steve's heart rate skyrockets when he suddenly feels Billy behind him, clearly realizing he can just project himself into the room.

"If she tells you to come home make up an excuse" Billy says from behind him, tone dark and he almost jumps from hearing his voice.

Steve still isn't used to this whole projection thing yet.

When he gets handed the phone Mr. Yates goes to leave the room, giving him privacy and Steve hears his confused voice as he closes the door.
"Where did Mr. Hargrove go?"

The closing of the door keeps him from hearing the rest as he raises a brow at Billy because he said he'd be right outside.

"This whole projection thing is weird, like my real body is on auto pilot. I'm still trying to figure it out and I don't need anyone coming across us when we're vulnerable like this" he explains as Steve shrugs.

Steve wonders where he must have hidden himself if that's the case.

Sounds about right though, when he came back from being at the memorial he'd been spacing off in class.

Maybe they can practice it enough to start being in both places at once but that just seems confusing and impossible.

Steve puts the phone to his ear as Billy stares at him intently and it makes him uncomfortable as he turns away.

"Ma?" he asks as he hears her sigh of relief.

"Stevie, I know you said you'd be staying at your friends house but I need you to come home after school, have them drop you off please if you don't mind" she says and she sounds panicked, like she's trying to hide it but she's doing it poorly.

Steve grimaces as he turns to look at Billy again who has a dark look on his face as he shakes his head.

"Don't" Billy mouth's to him silently.

"I've got plans after school, there's a project I need to get done and it's due tomorrow can it wait?" he asks her and he feels his hands start to shake.

"It's important." he hears her say as he hears the phone get taken from her.

"Listen to your mother, it's not our fault you procrastinated, you need to come home directly after school I don't want to hear anymore excuses" his father says as Steve grimaces and Billy's lips purse into a grim thin line.

"No offense dad but I'm eighteen-" he starts to say except he gets interrupted.

"I don't care how old you are, you are my son and you live under my roof. You will do as you're told-" his father says as he interrupts himself.

Steve can hear another male voice faintly in the background, a voice he doesn't recognize and after a few moments of what sounds like heated debate his dad starts talking again.

"Look, I'm sorry son things are a bit hectic right now and I don't mean to be harsh, I'll be on my way to pick you up right now" he says when suddenly the line goes dead.

"Oh shit-" he says as he stares down at the phone with wide eyes as Billy's expression goes into full blown panic.

"We're leaving, get your shit and go to my car" he tells him as he suddenly fades away and Steve has no idea what the fuck is going on.
Steve almost knocks the principal over leaving the office, his brain racing a million miles a minute and he has no idea what he's supposed to do.

Maybe it's not what they think, maybe somebody in his family died, maybe it's something else entirely.

Billy, the real Billy is in front of him all of a sudden grabbing onto his arm and his grip is bruisingly tight.

Apparently Billy doesn't trust him to get to the car or something.

"You said to meet you-" he says as Billy interrupts him.

"I know"

Asshole.

"Ow- Billy stop you're hurting me-" Steve says as he starts getting pulled along and Billy's grip let's up slightly.

They almost slam right into Nancy and Jonathan when they round the corner.

"What's going on?" Nancy asks frantically and Billy tilts his head to indicate that they need to keep walking and he still won't let go of his damn arm no matter how much Steve starts to struggle.

"Billy seriously I can walk-" he says as Billy whips around and pulls him close as Steve slams into him, chest to chest and he honestly feels a bit afraid of him right now.

"No because you're stupid and I bet you're thinking this might be something else like a family death or some dumb shit like that. So before your dad shows up I'm getting you the fuck out of here" Billy hisses into his face as Steve averts his gaze, turning his head to the side.

Billy just starts pulling him along yet again.

Jonathan gets in front of Billy, putting his hands up to stop him as they all stand there in the hallway staring at each other.

"Stop- tell us what's happening first" Jon says as Billy rubs a hand over his face.

"His dad is on his way here to get him, did Steve tell you what we talked about last night?" Billy asks them as they nod their heads.

"I don't know what it is but it's a trap, there was someone else on the phone talking to them- something isn't right" Billy says as Steve finally wrenches free from his grasp, rubbing his arm as Billy's head whips around to look at him as they glare at each other.

"Alright, let's go" Nancy says as she loops her arm around Steve's, everyone other than him clearly being on the same page as Billy gives her a thankful look.

When they all load into Billy's car Steve catches sight of his dad's car pulling in and he gets nervous as he puts his hand on the door handle.
"Billy they're my parents, I can't just- let me at least talk to them-" he starts to say as Billy reaches over, wrenching his hand off of the handle as he pulls it toward him violently and Steve's body is forced to twist to the side uncomfortably.

"Don't you dare fucking fight me on this right now I swear to god Steve I will knock you the fuck out" Billy says as Steve curls into himself as much as he can to get away from him.

That's not a threat, it's a promise because he's done it before.

Steve is more than fully aware of the lengths Billy is willing to go to when it comes to keeping him safe.

It's not an endearing trait by any means.

"Steve please, he's right it's too risky let's just get to Alex and Hopper and go from there" Nancy says as Jonathan nods.

Steve finally relents as he nods his head slowly.

"Ok, ok I'm sorry" he whispers as Billy just continues to stare him down, trying to get his point across still.

"I said okay you fucking dick, let me go!" he yells as he rips his hand out of Billy's grasp as he folds his arms across his chest and turns to look away from all of them.

They're right, it is too risky.

Billy still stares at him and points a finger at him threateningly.

Steve is not willing to try his patience on this one, not when he gets like this.

How the hell is he supposed to explain his disappearance to his parents now though?

This whole thing is a fucking mess.

He thinks to himself as Billy starts the car and they drive away.

---

Billy takes them to Alex's house.

He reaches into his pocket and takes out a key as he unlocks the door.

"You have a key to his house?" Steve asks in disbelief.

When the hell did that happen?

"Yes I have a key, it's for emergencies you dipshit" Billy says angrily.

Steve grabs Billy by his shirt after he gets the door open and slams him into the wall, he's well past his threshold with this shit.

He gets that Billy just wants to protect him but he's being impossible right now.
Steve absently notices the wall is barren, there aren't any pictures up like you'd see in a normal home which is kind of strange as he glares at Billy with as much malice as he can muster.

"How bout' you take it down a fucking notch you insufferable prick" Steve hisses into his face as Billy looks about ready to tear him a new one except Nancy starts trying to pull them apart.

"Stop it- you're both being assholes just take a breath" she says frantically as Jonathan helps her pull them apart as they both just glare at each other instead as Steve waits for another opportunity to-

"Uh- everything alright?" they hear Alex say as they turn their heads and he's standing at the end of the hallway in sweats and a t-shirt two sizes too big like he's just rolled out of bed as he wipes at his eyes sleepily.

"It's the middle of the day you lazy piece of shit" Billy says as Alex raises a brow.

"Oh wow extra grumpy today I see, still not getting any?" Alex retorts as he winks at Steve after yawning and Steve can't help but flush as Nancy and Jonathan try to hide their chuckles.

Billy just gives him a look like he's going to murder him as he turns around to close and lock the door.

"At least tell me this means the Mind Flayer is in town or something because I'm still waiting on Lee-
" Alex starts to say before being interrupted.

"It's something else" Billy says as he walks past all of them to go into the living room like he knows the damn place like the back of his hand, like he's familiar with it or some shit.

Steve frowns as they all follow him in and this whole place has absolutely no personality at all as he starts walking around to inspect it while Billy fills Alex in on what's happening.

"First of all he's going to be reported as missing, does Jim know what's going on?" Alex asks as they all shake their heads no.

"They'll have to wait the twenty-four to forty-eight hours before they report though right?" Steve asks as Jonathan and Alex shake their heads at him.

"That's a myth, there's no actual waiting period it's just annoying to deal with fake reports but you file a report the moment you know someone is missing" Alex tells them as he gets up and takes out some sort of strange looking phone.

"What the hell is that?" Billy asks as Alex holds it up to them like he's a kid in a candy store.

"This is a mobile phone, these babies finally got released last year and they're like four fucking grand but one of our own has technomancy and helped develop them so he worked his magic-" Alex stops as he realizes his poor word choice.

"Well not his actual 'magic' so to speak- well a little bit. Anyway, we got our hands on a few of them" he says as he wags his eyebrows.
"Four grand?!" Nancy says in disbelief. "I know right?!" Alex says, like he's just as surprised as she is.

"Can we focus?" Steve asks, knowing he's being a bit rude but he's still trying to calm himself down as he catches Billy looking at him from across the room with a look Steve can't identify.

Whatever, fuck Billy.

He thinks to himself, still pissed at him for being such an ass.

"Sorry, I'm going to call Hopper and fill him in. This phone is untraceable thanks to the guy I was telling you about, I'll just be a minute make yourselves at home" Alex tells them as he goes into his room and shuts the door.

Steve gets lost in thought when suddenly Billy is standing next to him.

"Can we talk?" Billy asks in a whisper as Steve just looks at him deadpan.

"We're talking right now" Steve states just to be a jerk as Billy's jaw clenches.

"Alone" he says like he's a caveman who is incapable of forming full sentences as Steve just crosses his arms over his chest.

"Please?" Billy asks this time as Steve rolls his eyes before finally gesturing to him that he's willing to follow and indulge whatever is about to transpire.

Billy walks them down a hallway into what looks like a guest bedroom and Steve is reminded of how familiar Billy seems to be with this place.

"You're really comfortable with Alex, must be nice" Steve says because he can't help himself as Billy rolls his eyes after closing the door.

"You know it's not like that, stop pretending it upsets you" Billy says, seeing right through him as Steve just purses his lips.

Billy shifts his weight from one foot to the other and Steve doesn't know why they're even here right now.

"You okay?" Billy asks as Steve looks at him, feeling the anger rise up inside of him at that stupid fucking question.

"What do you think?" he clips back impatiently.

"Look I know I'm being an ass but it's because I'm worried about you" Billy says as he walks up to him.

When Billy reaches out to touch him Steve steps back, he really can't do that right now because he's way too heated.

Billy stops, hand coming back down to rest at his side as he frowns.

There's way too much going on and all Steve wants to do right now is pin Billy to the bed and have his way with him.
Honestly he needs to get the fuck out of here because they're all alone in a room together and Steve is going to do something stupid soon.

"We done here?" Steve asks trying to grab hold of the anger, using it as an anchor to help his self control.

"Steve it's going to be alright, you're safe" Billy says softly, thankfully keeping his distance.

This isn't fair, it's not fair that Billy gets to know him this well.

It shouldn't be allowed and there should be a rule against it or something because Steve feels yet another metaphorical wall crumb in his resolve and they weren't ever really all that strong in the first place.

"I'm not actually but thanks for the pep talk, this has been fun" he says, keeping up the facade in hopes that Billy will just give up and he can get the fuck out of here.

Billy doesn't relent though, getting a soft look on his face that makes his heart clench.

*Remember the reasons why you broke up, remember why you're doing this.*

He tells himself but the longer this goes on the harder it gets to deny himself.

Steve wishes he could hate Billy, wishes it was all that simple and easy but he *can't* and it makes all of this *so much harder.*

"I know what you're doing" Billy tells him like he has all the answers to the universe or something.

"What am I doing?" He asks as he glares at Billy, genuinely curious about what he means by that.

"Other than being an idiot?" Billy says jokingly, all fondness in his voice.

Well, Steve still needs to pretend he's angry so he purses his lips and rolls his eyes.

"Yeah alright so we're done here then" he tells Billy except it comes out sounding a bit more hoarse than he'd like as he turns around to walk towards the door.

This is going down a road of no return really fucking fast and Steve is intimately familiar with the look in Billy's eyes.

Steve knows what he's doing.

Billy knows him, knows how he gets when he starts freaking out like this and the only thing that ever seems to calm him down is Billy himself.

It's embarrassing.

Usually it happens when Steve has repressed something for too long and it explodes in his face.

One time he'd gone to Billy's after school and there had been one of those assembly's about planning your future and they'd had to listen to some asshole drone on and on about how 'it's ok to not know what you want to do right now but here are some options'.

Steve had stopped listening halfway through, had practiced using the bond to find Billy instead as he'd finally caught sight of him a few rows down and it turns out he didn't mind the speech, had been bored by it even but the whole thing had freaked Steve the fuck out.
So when he'd gotten to Billy's house after school he had proceeded to go on a tangent about how he has no idea what he's going to do and how his parents think he's a failure.

He'd genuinely started crying at one point going on and on about how worthless he is and how he'll never amount to anything.

Billy of course somehow always seems to know what to say and do to keep him from losing his mind.

That particular time Billy had proceeded to fuck him until he couldn't think anymore and after that they had cuddled as Billy started laying down genuine words of wisdom.

"We're not supposed to know what we want, we're young and stupid"

"If I listened to the shit that comes out of Neil's mouth and took all of it to heart I'd go insane"

"Don't listen too closely to parents, they make everything seem like a big deal and it's really not"

"At the end of the day you gotta learn how to live with yourself, you're all you have sometimes"

"We're our own worst critic, nobody is going to put you down more than you do"

Steve had been shocked, Billy hadn't told him to feel better, had simply shared an understanding in what Steve was going through.

It had been nice.

Except they can't do that now, it would be crossing a line so Steve has no idea what Billy is doing.

This is his own fault though because Steve is fully aware he's been sending out mixed signals.

The bleachers were a blaring red sign and he still feels like such an idiot for letting it get as far as he did.

This time he won't make the same mistake, won't underestimate his own feelings for Billy.

Or rather that had been his original intent for all of about 5 seconds.

When his hand gets to the door handle he feels Billy come up behind him, placing his hand over it, stopping him from leaving as his hot breath fans over the shell of his ear.

_Aw fuck._

Why do they keep doing this?

Steve's breath hitches as he closes his eyes, squeezing them shut as his forehead thuds against the door gently.

"Billy don't-" he says breathlessly, not meaning for it to come out sounding so desperate.
"I felt it" Billy says and fuck-

His voice.

It sounds wrecked and it's not fair, Billy isn't playing fair right now the fucking tease.

"You- uh what?" he asks, getting distracted for a moment as Billy presses closer and he can feel all of him at his back, pressed up so good blanketing him in warmth and god he misses this, misses Billy.

Steve bites his lower lip hard enough to almost draw blood as he wills himself to have control.

"When I held your hands in my own, when we shared our emotions I felt what you felt and what I know you feel right now" he says, voice dark and rough as he starts pressing forward a bit to rut for a moment and Steve can feel the hardened length of him.

Oh fuck this is bad.

Steve takes his hand off the handle, placing both hands against the door as he presses back against Billy for a moment, can't help himself because he can smell Billy's scent engulfing him and it's making it hard to think.

Billy's hand gets displaced from the movement as he brings it to hold Steve's waist tight instead as it slips up underneath his shirt to rest against skin.

He doesn't grab or do anything he just rests it there and for some reason it just makes all of this so much harder to fight against.

Not fair, not fair, not fair.

That mixture of Billy's cologne and the natural musk of him is driving Steve fucking wild and he just wants to turn around and run his hands all over his body, wants to lick him wherever he can get to, do as many filthy fucking things as he wants that his head starts to spin from the thought of it.

"I know you're trying not to give in" Billy whispers to him as he nips sinfully at his lobe before catching it in his mouth, sucking gently and Steve's head lolls back onto his shoulder against his own volition.

"We shouldn't" he whispers except there's no real heat behind it as he reaches one of his hands up behind himself to grip at Billy's hair to keep him close.

Billy groans into the crook of his neck and ruts up against him as he puts an arm around his waist, pulling him impossibly closer as Steve can't help the moan that falls from his mouth from the action.

"You fucking ruin me Steve- fuck the things you do to me" Billy growls out against his neck as he finds himself suddenly spun around and pushed up against the wall next to the door.

Nope, that's bad...Steve squeezes his eyes shut so he can't look at Billy because he's about two seconds from caving like a house of cards as he tries to pull on the last of his willpower, pushing weakly at Billy's chest trying to get distance between them.

Billy just cages him in, grips his hands and pins them against the wall.

The action causes Steve to open his eyes as Billy puts his leg between his thighs and he can't help but move himself against it to relieve some of the pressure as they lock eyes and Steve is pretty sure
he's never been more turned on in his life.

So much fucking hunger in those beautiful blue eyes he's going to get swallowed whole-

"Tell me to stop and I'll stop, just say the word" Billy says as he leans in.

Steve turns his head to the side but Billy starts kissing his neck gently instead and it's slow, filthy, and methodical like he knows every single way to take him apart, knows how to chip away at him little by little. Mostly that's because he does know though.

Billy starts working his way down to his collar bone before working his way back up and Steve can't help his small whimpers as he tries to struggle out of Billy's grip but it's no use, he doesn't even really want to fight this anyway, not really.

"Billy we can't- shit fuck-" he says right before Billy bites down on the junction between his neck and shoulder, making his knees go weak.

He could say stop, he could say the word but it's stuck in his throat, refuses to come out.

"We can, it doesn't need to mean anything just let me take care of you-" Billy says as he finally let's his wrists free, both hands moving to reach underneath his shirt.

Billy pulls him flush against his chest for a moment to rake his nails down his back and Steve groans loud and low in his throat.

His back is so fucking sensitive, always has been and that's yet another thing Billy had learned about him when they were together.

Another fucking weak spot.

Billy starts maneuvering them to the bed and Steve is done, he knows he's not strong enough to deny himself this.

He can't let Billy get control though, he'll cave completely.

It's too dangerous.

Steve turns them and pushes Billy down onto the bed as he climbs on top of him to straddle his waist as he starts rutting against him, running his hands down his chest and Billy growls low in his throat, grabs his waist tight and starts watching Steve like he's waiting to pounce.

"God yes baby, come on-" Billy chokes out desperately as he arches his back while throwing his head back.

Steve finally indulges himself as he leans down, grabs Billy's face to pull it close as he let's their breaths mingle yet doesn't let their lips connect and Billy gets impatient, surges forward.

Getting him worked up is a favorite past time for Steve as he pulls away and Billy puts an arm around his waist, leaning up into a sitting position to hold him close so Steve is sitting in his lap and they're both so hard.

"Please-" Billy pleads with a whisper, still holding himself back and Steve is impressed by his control, is impressed that he's allowing Steve to call the shots with all of this and hasn't tried to take control back.

Yet.
He's just trying to get on your good side.

Steve could care less right now as Billy moves his hips up causing Steve to gasp as he wraps one arm around Billy's neck while using the other to grip his shoulder.

There's no helping it as the last of Steve's control breaks and he grips Billy's hair hard to pull him into a desperate kiss.

Fuck.

It's so good.

Billy seems to feel the same because his groan is one that could easily translate to 'fucking finally'

Things move quickly after that as they both get frantic like two junkies that finally get to have their hit and suddenly they're trying to get each other's clothes off but they don't want to break any sort of contact because they've been craving each other for what feels like a fucking eternity.

Calm down Steve, you lasted about a week you pathetic piece of shit.

He really doesn't even care at this point, not with Billy pressing up into him in a way that shouldn't even be legal.

At one point Steve leans back to breathe deeply as he starts to pull his shirt over his head, throwing it across the room as he goes to pull Billy's off next.

"Off- get it off" he growls out as Billy pulls it off in record time, discarding it and in the next moment his hand is gripping into his hair painfully tight, pulling him back in to kiss him deeply and Steve can't get enough.

Actually he needs to get enough because Billy is kissing him like he's trying to erase his ability to think.

That's probably exactly what he's trying to do.

Steve pulls back and forcefully pushes Billy back so he's laying down again and he needs to act fast if this is going to work as he undoes Billy's jeans, starts pulling them off quickly.

God he wants to taste him so fucking bad.

Steve wastes no time as he maneuvers him further up onto the bed so he can get between his legs, feeling his gaze burning into him.

Billy runs his fingers through his hair gently and Steve can hear his breathing get heavier from the anticipation of it.

Steve loves this, loves getting him all hot and bothered like this and he feels like taking his time as he mouths at the fabric of his boxers.

"Fuck princess come on, don't tease me like this" Billy says and his voice is hoarse, so impossibly deep that Steve moans in response.

His hands move up over Billy's thighs as they get up under his boxers, starts to rub the length of him, using the boxers as friction.

Billy clutches a hand into the bedspread and starts letting out a slew of curses as Steve presses a kiss
to the inside of his thigh while chuckling.

Steve finally pulls down his boxers and fuck he missed getting Billy like this, missed hearing Billy moan like this and he finally let's himself taste as he swirls the head of him into his mouth, sucking gently.

"Steve- I'm going to come really fucking fast" Billy breathes out as he bucks up and Steve has to pin him down.

So of course Steve does everything he can to make him come as he takes all of Billy down his throat effortlessly.

Billy thrashes as he pulls at his own hair, mumbling incoherently.

He'd learned quickly how Billy likes it and knows he can make him come in record time and it's going great when suddenly Billy pulls on his hair painfully tight making him choke as Billy forcefully pulls him off as he makes a loud 'popping' noise.

His nails dig painfully tight into his legs as he glares up at him, trying to resume what he was doing except Billy isn't having any of it as he pulls him up by his hair and kisses him with such bruising intensity Steve starts to feel like he's suffocating from it.

When he pulls off to breathe Billy latches onto his neck, sucking hard as Steve makes an undignified noise.

"Don't- don't you dare leave a mark" he hisses out except Billy uses all of this as a distraction to hook his hand under his thigh.

Oh shit-

Billy flips them and Steve is fully aware a mistake has just been made.

That fucker.

"Come on, let me suck you off- want you to come down my throat" Steve pleads, running his hands up and down Billy's chest, pulling, twisting and flicking at his nipples.

Steve can remedy this, all he needs to do-

Billy squeezes his eyes shut after taking both of Steve's hands and pinning them to either side of his head.

"Billy you taste so fucking good, please-" he starts to say except Billy opens his eyes and leans down to stare at him with so much intensity he loses his train of thought.

"I told you I know what you're doing" Billy all but growls out at him.

"Other than trying to suck you dry?" Steve says with a coy smile.

"Cheeky, I told you I'd take care of you and I intend to" Billy says with a light deep chuckle.

Crap.

"I'd feel really taken care of if you let me ride you" Steve tries for, hoping Billy will just give in because he loves it just as much as Steve does.
"Yeah?" Billy says, evil fucking smile on his face as he reaches down to trace a finger over his hole.

Ohhhhh fu-

This is going down a really dangerous road if it hadn't been before and Steve is fully aware he's already lost, he'd lost a while ago though, had thrown in the towel when he hadn't taken the chance to leave when he could.

"Your first mistake was not telling me to stop, you know that right?" Billy tells him unhelpfully as he brings his fingers up to Steve's mouth, pressing them between his lips and he considers being defiant for a split second.

It doesn't happen, he takes those sinful fucking fingers into his mouth, keeping eye contact with Billy as he sucks on them slowly, swirls them around in his mouth, moaning around them.

Billy swallows hard.

"Yeah you fucking want this, we both know if you were really trying you'd put up an actual fight" Billy states and he's not wrong.

"God your mouth-" Billy groans out as he takes his fingers from his mouth.

"Would look great around your cock" Steve tries one last time to say and his own voice sounds foreign to his ears, deep and hoarse.

"Nice try love" Billy says as he inserts the first finger, curling it up immediately to press against his prostate.

Steve does everything in his power to not arch his back and keen but it's a useless effort with the constant pressure as he gives in pretty quickly.

Story of his life at this point.

"That's right give over to me, let me see your pretty face" Billy says as Steve looks up at him as he inserts another finger to start stretching him.

Steve thrashes a bit because it's been a while and it feels so fucking good.

"There's just no more fight left in you is there? It's alright it can go back to how it was before after this, if that's what you want" Billy tells him and Steve groans out.

"Billy-" he gets out only to be distracted by three fingers pressing up into him this time.

"Let me have this Steve, please just let me have this, it's all I ask" Billy says desperately.

"You son of a bitch" Steve hisses out, fully aware he's been played.

"Oh please, we both know the truth, don't we?" Billy asks.

The truth?

That Billy is right, that Steve wants this so fucking much he might die if he doesn't get it?

Yeah, that truth.

"Nobody else can give this to you like I do Steve, can give you what you need like I do" Billy tells
him and his pace is teasingly slow, it's making him ache for more-

"Oh fuck- shut up" Steve gasps out, clenching around his fingers except Billy brushes lightly against that spot again and he sees stars.

He really just needs to gag him at all times, he shouldn't allow Billy to fucking speak at all because it's his biggest fucking weakness.

Not fair.

"Nobody knows you like I do, nobody can bring you to this like I can" he continues to say, ignoring Steve completely.

"Billy come on just-" Steve tries to say 'fuck me' except Billy starts fucking him with his fingers at a brutal pace and he needs-

"Please, need you inside of me" he says instead, arching up as he whines, not caring that he's begging for it at this point.

He can feel Billy waste no time, knows he's just as desperate for it as he is.

Billy buries himself inside him in one single stroke and they both shake and gasp from it and it burns, there had been plenty of precum and slick from his saliva but it's still a hard, rough drag going in.

He's so full, it's insane how he feels right now and the burn thankfully keeps him from losing it completely.

Billy leans down to his ear and just stays there, doesn't move and Steve is going to fucking kill him soon if he doesn't just fuck him.

"Billy fucking move-" he growls out, gripping at his arms, digging his nails in, trying to gain any sort of upper hand.

"Nobody knows your mind, body, and soul like I do" he whispers into his ear and Steve throws his head back and groans, his words cutting into him like a hot knife, carving themselves into him.

"Fuck- do you ever shut up?!" he says frantically, desperately because Billy still isn't moving and Steve is ready to do anything to get him to at this point.

Billy finally moves, taking himself out slowly as he slams back inside, making Steve quake from it as he squeezes his eyes shut from the intensity of all of it.

"I'd do anything for you Steve, you don't even know" Billy says, groaning loud and low as he finally starts to pick up his pace.

Steve likes to think that he does know actually.

"Billy it's alright, it's going to be okay I love you" he reassures him because he knows what this is, it's suddenly all coming into focus for him and he doesn't know how he'd missed it before.

Steve knows the signs, has dealt with them before when Billy's insecurities rise up inside of him and swirl around like a typhoon, destroying everything in its path except this time it's pure desperation, manifests itself in a way Steve isn't used to seeing.

He feels it all crash down as Billy finally breaks but not in the way Steve had been expecting, he had expected Billy to get destructive, for them to get into some full blown fight, he'd expected the worst
but what he gets is so much different than anything he had imagined as he feels something wet against his face.

Tears.

Billy's crying.

His pace changes, becomes something more sensual and soul crushingly loving as Billy starts clinging to him like somehow Steve is going to disappear to never be seen again.

"I'm broken, I let you down- fuck" Billy chokes out as Steve holds him close as Billy starts hitting that spot just right and he clings to Billy.

"I- I'll do whatever you say, I'll suffer for as long as you need me to-" Billy whines out and they're both close already, it's too much and the bond flares.

Steve pulls him in and kisses him, pouring as much of his comfort and love into him as he can and the melding and mixing of emotions is too much for both of them.

They don't break apart for even a moment, breathing into each other's mouth's as they're both coming and everything is spilling out all over, inside of them, all around them but Steve doesn't care.

It's perfect to him and he sees white as Billy sobs into the crook of his neck.

When they finally come back down, when the high starts to wear off Billy curses under his breath but he still holds tight, still moving his hips and he's still just hard enough to brush against his prostate lightly.

Steve hisses from it, jerking from how overly sensitive he feels but Billy seems to be savoring the moment like it'll be their last for as long as he possibly can.

"Jesus Billy-" Steve says breathlessly and he can still feel Billy inside of him, he still hasn't pulled out yet and being connected to him like this is everything.

"I just- shit I was trying to-" Billy says, clearly embarrassed with himself, not knowing how to finish that sentence because his clear intention had been to comfort Steve and suddenly things had taken a bit of an opposite turn.

It's agonizing as he finally pulls out slowly and they both sigh into each other's mouth's from it and he wishes it didn't have to end, wishes they could just stay like this forever.

He missed this, missed the closeness they feel with one another but it doesn't change reality, doesn't change what has happened between them.

So he waits a bit longer, lets them just stay here for a moment and bask in the afterglow until finally Steve cups his face to force them to look at each other, smiling softly at him.

"Babe, we still have a lot of work to do, you know that right?" Steve asks him as Billy nods and he looks so scared, so terrified like somehow Steve's word is the only thing he hangs on at this point.

"We need to find ourselves first, not just you but me as well before we even think of committing to anything, we need to get all of-" Steve says, waving his hand in the air.

"This shit figured out first, it's too complicated right now and we need to- we need to visit this later,
do you understand?" He asks him, because as much as they may want to be together there needs to be a clear separation, there needs to be no promises.

They need to do what they need to do for themselves, work on themselves for themselves otherwise they'll just drown in each other much like they've allowed themselves to do right now.

"I know, I understand god Steve I'm-" Billy starts to say as Steve kisses his face gently.

"Don't say sorry, we both needed this and we should have talked more, I should have made things more clear instead of just taking off like I did" Steve says, hating the look Billy had when he'd left, when he'd ended things and drove off.

"No, you needed to do it that way, I'm an idiot I wouldn't have understood it any other way. I need to stop putting you in that position, making you take drastic measures- I want us to be able to just talk it out and I want you to be able to rely on me" Billy says as he shakes his head and Steve's eyes start to water.

"See? This is good, we're getting somewhere Billy. God you did so good at the memorial- fuck you looked amazing in that suit" Steve says as Billy snorts.

"Thanks, might wanna keep the suit comments to yourself though otherwise I won't be able to control myself" he says with a wink and it's Steve's turn to snort as he runs his fingers through Billy's hair.

"Right, sorry couldn't help myself" he says as they just touch each other and it feels nice, it's always nice to just touch Billy and feel him and have this to himself.

"I really am sorry about Neil" Steve suddenly says, they hadn't really gotten to talk about it, not really.

Billy sighs as he gets off, lays down next to him and Steve rests his head on his chest as Billy take his hand into his own, squeezing it tight.

"We need to kill that thing, we need to find a way to draw it out and fucking kill it" Billy says and Steve couldn't agree more as he turns his head up so they can lock eyes.

"Okay but we need to be willing to be bait, you need to be willing to take that risk because I feel like that's the only way it'll work" Steve tells him honestly and Billy's jaw clenches.

"Let's cross that bridge when we get to it, we've still got whatever this shit with your parents is to deal with" Billy says and Steve sighs as he turns his head to look at the cheap paint job on the wall across from them.

"I won't let anything happen to you Steve, I won't let anyone take you" Billy tells him and he can't help the smile he gets on his face.

"Oh I don't doubt that for a single moment" he replies as he looks back up at him fondly.

Honestly he's pretty sure the bond won't allow it at this point, it seems pretty fucking done with sitting back and allowing things to get out of control.

It seems all it had needed was the one close call before it decided to throw its metaphorical hands up and take control when needed.

The bond still worries him, there's so much there now that they don't understand and he's really
starting to feel overwhelmed by the intensity of everything happening to them all at once.

Billy seems to sense it as he nuzzles his face into the crook of his neck.

"Hey, you're freaking out. It's okay" Billy says and suddenly Steve is reminded of their first kiss, the first time they'd become one with each other. That beautiful, blissful, perfect moment that had just been for them.

"What? Am not" Steve says mischievously, keeping up the facade.

Billy chuckles as he kisses him softly and it's amazing, he loves this man so fucking much and he knows that even if they are putting their relationship aside to focus on more important things they'll probably work things out at the end of this when the time finally comes for them to actually sit down and discuss everything ranging from boundaries to their future plans to see if they can find a way to be on the same page.

Will Billy want to go to College after this?

Is Steve willing to move out of state just yet?

There's too much, so much is still up in the air, their lives are up in the air and they need to eliminate all of these damn threats first before they can even think about their normal day to day lives.

When they pull away Billy looks at him with so much love and compassion he melts.

"It's okay Steve, we'll figure it out." he whispers and Steve can't help but laugh as he pushes off of him, tells him he's so fucking corny as Billy tries to pull him back against his chest and they kiss for a little bit longer, draw it out for as long as they can before it all goes back to how it was before.

When they get themselves dressed again he knows it's time, it fully sets in for him that things needs to stay as simple as possible between them for now, it's time to face what's in front of them but he still needs to make sure Billy understands that and before he goes to open the door he turns back around to look at him.

"We will discuss us again I promise but for right now-" he starts to say as Billy puts his hand up to stop him.

"Steve, I get it" Billy says and Steve raises a brow.

"We are not together and honestly I don't think we should be either" he continues on to say to Steve's surprise, eyes widening.

"I think you're right about everything and we need to figure our own shit out well before we even start to think about making something work between us" Billy says with a resolute nod and Steve gapes at him.

He really did change and Steve knows not all of it is because of them. They've been through so much already and Steve knows better than anyone that Billy losing his father is probably the straw that broke the camel's back and has really made him see the world differently.

"Besides, we've got a Mind Flayer to find and kill" Billy says with so much malice and conviction Steve actually gets chills down his spine as Billy walks past him to open the door as they walk back down the hallway to face whatever their future holds.
One of the main reasons this took so long to post was because of that final scene.

FUCK THAT SCENE.

I wrote 23 different versions people.

23.

I counted.

I could not decide how I wanted that scene to go to save my life because I have so much planned in future chapters I needed to really set the tone for their relationship and the events leading up to certain other events and yeah this took forever.

BUT ultimately I feel like I finally got out the vision I truly wanted because sometimes I gotta write some other scene to find out that's not how I wanted it to go at all.

23 times.

Also I wanted other scenes to segue into other scenes better to really capture the essence of how well Steve and Billy truly know each other at this point in the story and to get both sides of certain situations to really show the moments in which they have each other pegged completely as well hitting on the points in which they completely differ in how they perceive a situation.

Example being Steve knowing he was the one to instigate contact at the bleachers yet Billy thinks *he's* the one that fucked up.

Silly bois in love.

Also the shit with the bond and the foreshadowing and how I need it to be done correctly and gosh there's so much and it really is so much fun and I can't wait for you all to see what's in store.

Onto the next!
Chapter Notes

So right after Christmas day I got sick so here I am, sick with a cold and it sucks haha.

Anyway this was actually originally a lot longer but yeah reasons.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Two Day's Later

If someone had told Billy he'd one day be fearing for his life from Steve Harrington's father he'd tell them that's a damn good joke and that the sweet, pretty little doe eyed boy he loves couldn't ever have a father that makes Billy want to curl up into a ball and avert his gaze much like his own father had made him feel when he'd been alive.

Actually that's a lie because Neil had been easy to read and a raging torrent of uncontrolled emotions.

Neil was chaos lashing out in a way that Billy had been used to, in a way that Billy had adopted onto himself, untamed and vicious.

He doesn't think, he merely allows it to swallow him whole and consume himself as well as everything around him.

Steve's father is clearly the opposite.

He's all completely controlled unadulterated fury, there's an anger to him that is under his full command being held on a leash to be set free upon the unsuspecting and Billy knows this because he's witnessed it once, the look in his eyes, the way his jaw is set.

Much like his own son.

Billy has mentioned this to Steve before, that he's an anomaly.

Part of that is because there are different levels of anger to Steve and depending on how angry he is depends on the kind of Steve you're going to get.

Once.

It had only taken Billy once to learn to avoid Steve's absolute fury and that fury hadn't even been directed at him for the first time.

Thank fuck for that.

Some poor idiot from their high school had punched Dustin in the face at the arcade and when Steve had picked him up it had taken him days to get the full story out of the kid but when he did it hadn't been pretty.
When Steve had gotten his name apparently that's all it took.

Billy had told Steve they should just go find the fucker and beat the shit out of him but Steve's expression had changed into something Billy hadn't paid enough attention to until much later.

Steve had told him not to worry about it and it would be taken care of and Billy had too much going on at the time to question what that meant as he'd left to go grab Max.

The signs are obvious and clear to Billy now because Steve goes silent but everything is right there, he allows you to see the fury swirling in his eyes but he doesn't unleash it, he just gives a precursor of what's to come even if you may not know what exactly is coming.

Spoiler alert, it's nothing good.

It's what scares the shit out of Billy, he doesn't understand how he does it or why and you can tell the wheels begin to turn in his head because he's planning something and you will pay for what you've done. It might not be today, might not be tomorrow but you will end up regretting it and there's no saving you from it.

A few days later the kid who had punched Dustin hadn't shown up to school for a week and Billy asked him what he'd done.

"I didn't do anything" he had simply said but the tone in his voice suggested something that sent chills down Billy's spine.

Another week after that the kid finally returned to school with a broken arm and Billy had finally cornered Steve.

"Seriously, the fuck did you do?!" he'd asked, not expecting the kid to come back with a broken fucking arm.

"His dad is a mechanic and he helps him out at his shop when he gets the time, I needed some help with my car and he had a freak accident, poor guy" Steve says with a shrug, far off look in his eyes and for the first time in Billy's life he'd felt truly terrified of Steve.

That was the day he'd learned about a new side of Steve, the side of him that you don't fuck with.

It takes a lot to get him to that point but when you do it's your own fault, you should have stopped while you were ahead.

Billy has equated Steve's personality to that of a volcano, every single aspect of him is so closely intertwined with it that he doesn't know how he hadn't seen it before. Regardless you can't deny they're beautiful, can't help but be in awe of them from far away but up close when it's spewing death at you it's a terrifyingly deadly force of nature.

This is clearly where Steve had gotten that fury from because here Billy is like an idiot, face to face with a fucking volcano and he wants nothing more than to run as far away as he can before it erupts.
The day had started off simple enough as he'd gotten ready for school and gone through most of the day mindlessly.

He'd mostly been looking forward to it being over because then he'd get to see Steve 'so to speak'.

They have Steve hiding out at Alex's house until more information can be gathered on what exactly his parents seem to be doing if anything at all.

Naturally nobody can visit him because it's too risky but since learning their neat new projection trick it doesn't actually matter because Billy can pop in whenever he gets the time and Steve won't go completely insane from being cooped up.

Billy also finds it easier to project himself instead of physically being there because he feels less inclined to touch Steve which is not something he needs to be doing right now considering their mutual agreement of *not being together*.

Of course he's starting to have second thoughts on that whole thing because at this point Billy isn't sure how long he has left to live judging from all this shit they've been through already.

Also, that's based off of the fact that he's wondering if he's about to survive whatever is about to transpire in this room.

Life is way too short.

Billy is firmly on the side that's convinced that Steve's parents are up to some shady shit and the only person on the other side of that spectrum is Steve himself. Mostly that's because he's hoping against all hope that it's not as bad as they all think.

Judging from the fact that Steve's dad has him cornered right now like for once Billy is the prey he's thinking it's probably worse than they think.

By about 6th period Billy had been called to the principal's office and somehow within moments everyone had left the room, including some shady fuck in a tacky business suit with a bad haircut. Billy is assuming that's the guy that had been on the phone they couldn't hear when they'd been trying to get Steve to come back home the other day.

Within a couple of minutes Steve's dad has walked right back in.

Alone.

Not being one for policy and rules Billy isn't entirely sure what the protocol for non-family is in regards to being in a room alone without school faculty supervision.
He's pretty fucking sure it's not allowed.

Apparently the Harrington's can do whatever the fuck they want though which is something he's been fully aware of for quite some time due to when he'd done everything in his power to find out everything he could about 'King Steve' from Tommy when he'd first gotten to this place.

Billy should have seen this coming now that he really thinks about it. His preppy little rich school boy with rich parents, of course they can get away with bending some rules, they've probably got this whole school under their thumb.

It makes him wonder how many times Steve's parents have had to bail him out of trouble with bribes and money.

Odd that no police are present either even though they've filed the missing person's report on Steve as of two days ago.

Which means whatever is happening right now isn't by the book as if that hadn't already been clear enough.

Steve's father is intimidating to say the least and Billy can see why Steve isn't a fan of him, why Steve doesn't talk about him much.

They look alike though which for some reason surprises Billy but he supposes that's because he never resembled Neil very much himself.

He's always been a spitting image of his mother.

Steve however is a spitting image of his father and when he'd first heard the man speak when everyone had been present in the room a few moments ago he'd almost whipped his head up in recognition of his voice.

There were moments he swears they sound exactly alike and it was fucking creepy.

However the differences are incredibly massive as well, the man holds himself with a sophistication that takes years of mastering and a self righteous demeanor that indicates he feels like he's better than everyone else.

This must be how Steve used to be.

The bully who would hide his true intent he'd never gotten to see that Nancy had told him about at times during late nights of getting drunk together after Steve had fallen asleep.

That's the Steve from back before he'd ever moved to Hawkin's, when Billy had still been in California, before he'd ever met the man who would end up becoming the love of his life.

This must be where Steve had gotten the behavior he's tried so hard to bury, the part of himself he killed off a long time ago when he realized he didn't need to be like his father anymore and that he could rise above to become someone better.

Billy almost wishes he could have seen it, they'd have fucking hated each other, it would have been hilarious.
The man's eyes he's noticed are nothing like Steve's, he'd clearly gotten them from his mother. Those soft doe eyes that swirl like pools of molten copper that melt him to his core whenever he looks into them.

His father's however are a much darker shade of brown, almost black in a certain light that's not entirely unfamiliar, he's seen Steve's eyes go that dark before under different circumstances.

The man sits across from him after promptly locking the door and the click alone sounds menacing as Billy purses his lips.

"Hello sir, I'm-" Billy starts to say holding out his hand as he gets completely blown off like he's a cockroach that the older man is contemplating crushing under his shoe before deciding against it because then he'd just be getting his expensive shoes dirty and he clearly isn't worth the effort.

"I know who you are Billy" he says and for some reason the way he says it sends a chill down his spine.

He puts his hand back down as he rests his hands at his sides because there are a lot of implications being thrown around with just that one sentence that Billy doesn't fucking like at all.

"My condolences for your loss, I'm sure you miss your father very much" he says suddenly, lacking any sort of sincerity or warmth.

"Not really, but thank you" Billy says honestly because he doesn't really care what people think and it's partially a lie, right now he wishes Neil was the one in front of him instead because then he'd know how to handle whatever the fuck is currently happening.

The man's jaw clenches and Billy's stomach is in fucking knots because there's a part of him that had wanted his approval, this is Steve's father for fucks sake and he plans of spending the rest of his life with Steve regardless of whatever status they're at right now.

That goal has still not changed in the least bit and to see the guy looking at him like a particularly annoying thorn in his side is a bit crushing.

It's like he's not even trying to attempt to get to know him which is fair though because Billy knows he's not exactly the easiest person to get along with.

"I'm aware that your relationship to my son is more than what it seems Mr. Hargrove" he states and Billy is starting to wonder how the fuck he'd found that out if he's never around enough to know shit about Steve's life.

"It was something more at one point sir I won't lie to you. It's not what it was anymore though and I'm sorry he's missing. I wish I could help" Billy says, trying to gain at least a bit of respect between the two of them while lying through his teeth while also sprinkling in hints of truth to make it more believable.

He doesn't really know what Steve's father's stance is on being gay or anything other than straight and he's never asked but he's certainly about to find out.

"I thought you might say something like that" he says as he sighs like he's disappointed as he takes a-
Tape recorder?

From inside of his jacket and Billy really, really feels like he's just missed something important because that can't mean anything good.

Their eyes lock and it's like this man knows, in that moment Billy realizes he's not talking about the fact that he's gay because that look in his eyes betrays something so much more.

He's talking about the fucking bond.

The recorder gets placed onto the desk beside them as he hits play and Billy feels like he can't even breathe.

"I can get you those confidentiality forms, but while we wait do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?"

"I'm really not in the mood to play this game right now, Dick. Go bother someone else."

"Oh, well yes I already have. Mr. Harrington was fairly cooperative, in comparison to you of course."

"So sleeping beauty finally woke up, eh?"

"You weren't aware?"

"How the fuck would I know that when I'm strapped to a bed?"

"I'm just curious about the nature of the connection you and Mr. Harrington seem to share."

"Pretty boy and I don't have a connection unless we're talking about the fact that I had to suffer through his company in that god forsaken place."

"Well, I more meant when you started screaming his name as he started to scream yours while your heart rates matched together during the purging process at the exact same time."

Billy reaches over to stop the recording with shaky hands and there's too many thoughts swirling in his head and he knows he's shaking.

"I've seen the video's including the purge, I know who you are Billy" he says and that's not how Billy had expected this conversation to go by any means.

"How long?" Billy asks, needing to know and his voice is thick around the words.

"How long what?" He asks, confusion plastering itself onto his face.

"How long have you known?" Billy replies because he clearly hasn't known for very long otherwise this would have been brought up a long fucking time ago.

"Unfortunately not long enough, I should have paid more attention and seen the signs, I should have trusted my gut" he says and the wording is strange, the way he says all of that is just strange and
suddenly it clicks in his head.

No fucking way.

Is Steve's dad one of them?

"You worked for Brenner" Billy states, completely floored by this revelation, hoping he's wrong in some way.

"Indeed, I was part of his search and contain unit, my old colleague informed me of what has been happening under my nose but now we're getting off topic" he says as he pockets the recorder into his jacket.

"Whatever disease is inside the both of you needs to be eradicated but my old colleague disagrees, they want you both for experimentation" he tells him and Billy knows he needs to get the fuck out of here.

"Of course I'm not going to let that happen to my own flesh and blood. I know some people who can help and attempt to get this virus out of you and this can finally be over. After that you can stay out of my son's life forever" he states like that's just how things are going to be.

Fuck that.

"I don't know where he is" Billy says, still trying to keep up the facade even though he knows it's useless.

"I know you're lying and that's alright. I appreciate that you feel like you're protecting my son but what is inside of the both of you is clearly influencing-" he starts to say and Billy does not want to hear that shit.

"All due respect sir, I love your son and nothing is ever going to change that whether that bond is ripped out of us or not, I think you should know that" Billy tells him because it needs to be said, there's no way he's going to let this asshole sit here and tell him that this bond is corrupting them because that's clearly what he's trying to imply.

What a lousy fucking excuse.

Apparently he doesn't buy it because his expression hardens.

"What you two think you feel for each other is wrong but we can help you, just let us help you and tell me where my son is" he says and it sounds like he's pleading, it's the first emotion other than anger he's heard in the man's tone.

Whatever information he's being fed it's clearly wrong and he's being manipulated because these fucks don't know shit about their bond and Billy needs to get out of here, this is fucking insane and he's completely done at this point as he goes to stand.

The larger man stands as well and before Billy knows it he's being blocked from leaving and he half expects to get slammed into the wall but the man is trying to be smart and strategic, that much is apparent to Billy.

"Sir, you have no idea what you're talking about and I don't know where he is" Billy tells him, giving nothing away.

There's silence as they stare each other down like he's contemplating his next course of action and
trying to figure out what he can get away with which probably isn't much considering they're in the middle of the school and they're too out in the open for him to take Billy or harm him in some way.

"You still don't understand, it's not right or normal what this connection is doing to the both of you, have you thought about your own future?" he tries to ask.

"The hell is that supposed to mean?" Billy retorts, wondering what angle he's trying to hit this from now.

"Realistically have you considered what it's like to be hunted for the rest of your life and to be bound to another person until you die?" he asks and that's-

Where the hell is this coming from right now?

"Whatever you're trying to do sir I don't care, Steve is my future" he tells him even though he knows he's jumping the gun a bit and they're not actually together.

"You're both young and you have no idea what you're talking about. Get rid of the connection and stop making my son suffer through a life of exile in which he needs to go into hiding, that's no way for a person to live" he tells him and Billy honest to god is completely, absolutely shocked into silence.

He's right.

Holy fucking mother of god this asshole is actually right.

This bond is forcing Steve to give up everything for his sake, for the sake of their bond.

It's like they're holding each other hostage and they'd never actually been given a choice even though he'd wanted Steve before all of this it doesn't change the fact that they'd never asked for the bond, neither one of them had asked to be stuck like glue to one another.

Billy of course will always want this, will always want to be with him and have this bond but that can't be the same for Steve and if it is he's just lying to himself.

"You're robbing my son of choice, you're both forcing yourselves into a position in which you need to adjust to what you have to survive. How is that fair to him, how is it fair to you?" he asks and Billy stares down at his lap, can't believe he hadn't seen it before.

His love for Steve has blinded him, made him look away from the reality of what having this bond truly does to them, how much it actually limits them.

He's taking away Steve's opportunity to choose his own future, to make his own choices, to meet other people and decide who he truly wants to spend the rest of his life with.

The idea of it boils his blood but it's true, Billy has no right to owning Steve.
How are you supposed to meet other people and find out what you truly want when your soul is bound to another person?

Why would the person Steve ends up with honestly be Billy?

At the end of the day what does Billy have to offer to someone like Steve who has his whole life ahead of him and can do so much more?

If they hadn't had this bond as their buffer their relationship would have been shit, they'd have never loved each other the way they do now and it would have never lasted because Billy is too self destructive.

Even now they struggle so much with the kind of person Billy is. What right does Billy have to force him into spending the rest of his life with someone he doesn't deserve, someone as broken and battered as he is?

Sure, he's trying to change but it doesn't change the fact that he's still dragging Steve down along with him.

Steve deserves better, he deserves that white picket fence wife he'd tried to find in Nancy and a bunch of little children running around because Billy knows he loves kids, knows he wants to have some of his own one day because he's seen it in the back of his mind.

He probably can't have that with Billy and he can't have that with the bond still in place, they will be hunted down for the rest of their lives and that's just a fact and neither one of them will ever want to bring a child into a lifestyle like that.

With the bond still here Steve's stuck to Billy and he doesn't have a choice in the matter, it's Stockholm syndrome at its finest.

Billy had never thought of it that way until now.

"I-" he goes to say, completely unsure of what there is to say.

He doesn't get to find the words because suddenly the door is unlocking and Jim Hopper comes into the room and Billy would have been relieved a few moments ago but now he's stuck in resigned despair.

"Mr. Harrington I understand you're worried about your son but this is grossly inappropriate" the
Chief says without a care in the world shooting a strange look at Billy.

"It's fine, we were just finishing. Think about what I've said Billy and get back to me" he says and Billy can't even respond, can't even bring himself to say anything back and suddenly Hopper is in his face.

"Kid, hey come on we need to get you out of here" he says and Billy loses time after that.

When he's back in the present he's sitting next to Hopper in the hallway and there's absolute silence. Billy has no idea how he got here because he's been realizing so many things at once he'd just kind of gone on auto pilot.

"You back with me?" Hopper asks as Billy frowns, not knowing how to answer that particular question.

"Sorry, I just-" he says only to interrupt himself.

*I just realized Steve is my prisoner?*

*I just realized I can't have the love of my life?*

*I just realized I need to tell Steve we need to get rid of the bond for his sake?*

Billy already feels dead inside because he knows he's young too but he knows there will never be anyone else for him, he's never going to love someone the way he loves Steve Harrington and it's the most heartbreaking revelation he's ever had.

If he truly loves Steve though he can't keep living a lie like this, he can't keep pretending that they are somehow meant for each other because that's not real, it doesn't exist.

No one is *meant* for anyone, all you ever have in life are choices and by chaining Steve to his side his ability to make his own choices go out the window.

This is exactly what Steve had been talking about after Billy had used his compulsion, the importance of free will.

Steve had also left him but he can't *really* leave him, not truly. They're bound to each other.

Breaking up doesn't mean shit for them because somehow they'll just convince themselves to make it
work because what other choice do they have?

That's the problem, there isn't one.

"What did he say to you?" Hopper asks and Billy-

Billy tells him.

Steve sighs deeply, running a hand through his hair as he waits for the coffee pot to finish its intended job.

His nap had been nice but he's still tired and it seems Alex had done the exact same thing as he did as he'd walked past the living room to see him sprawled out on the couch also having fallen asleep.

He's been forced to go into hiding here at Alex's house which is nice, it's a pretty big place but the whole situation sucks in general.

He can't even go to school.

Steve has missed so much school this year he's starting to worry a bit but he just keeps telling himself it's senior year, the easiest year of them all. Luckily he'd done the smart thing and all he's got left at this point are mostly his electives. Other than that he's home free.

He'll probably still need to do quite a bit of groveling though with certain classes if he's being totally honest to keep his overall GPA from being total shit by the end of this. Also being here is better than being stuck in a run down storage shack like El so at least there's that.

Naturally no one can come to see him though because they can't risk anyone finding him. Steve feels a bit like a prisoner if he's being honest.

It has honestly kept him from going completely insane though to have Alex here and for Billy to pop in whenever he can so it's not all bad.

"Well aren't we just a couple of party animals" Alex says as he walks in to the kitchen as Steve gives him a small smile, waving absently.

"How you holdin' up kid?" He asks as Steve fills his coffee cup.

"Pretty good. Please tell me I can stop hiding out in this place soon" he pleads, wanting to just go back to school while hoping none of this is as bad as they all think it is. He just wants everything to go back to normal.

Hopper got his hands on the missing persons case his parents had reported on him so the only person
who's been in communication with them at this point is the chief the last he'd heard. So far they've just been trying to figure out what his parents have planned.

Nobody has told him anything though and he hates being out of the loop.

"Jim's waiting on information from Kali. They were stupid enough to bring around the guy they've been talking to everywhere even to the station and Hopper got to meet him" Alex says with a shrug as he grabs himself a cup to pour himself some coffee as well.

"What guy?" Steve asks as he frowns while grabbing some creamer out of the fridge.

"Don't know for sure yet, it's just speculation until we can get a hit. Kali really is a plethora of information" Alex says with a small smile on his face.

"You think he's one of Brenner's?" Steve asks, knowing what he's referring to in regards to the kind of information Kali has. If he's being honest he likes Kali but he's incredibly wary of her ever since that incident at the cabin.

_The sky changes back to normal, the illusion is broken but suddenly it's like a flicker, the sky turns dark and grey, the storm clouds roll in and he sees the lightning strike once more as it turns red after a few seconds and something snaps inside of his mind again._

_Another chain._

_He sees the Upside Down, he sees the Mind Flayer but it can't see him, can't feel him, can't find him._

_But Steve sees it, hears it, feels it, it's nearby and his mind reaches out for it, chasing it down without thinking and his eyes roll into the back of his head as he feels himself collapse onto the floor._

Steve grabs his coffee cup a bit more tight, the chains broke and ever since then coupled with the near death experience something has been building inside of him. He's been purposefully ignoring it.

Whatever it was it had almost come out that second time they'd woken after he'd almost drowned, the lights had flickered and shattered all around them but then Billy had pulled on his energy before it could go any further, using it instead for the compulsion.

Steve has no idea what would have happened if his energy had been turned inward instead.

He doesn't want to know.

"At this point? Absolutely" Alex says honestly and Steve can't help the grimace he gets on his face.

The mobile phone starts ringing and it makes Steve jump a bit, he's not used to how it sounds as Alex shoots him an apologetic look while answering it.

"Yellow?" he says and Steve snorts.

"Uh- yeah sure okay" he says next as he shoots Steve a strange look before going into his room.
It's almost fifteen minutes later when Alex finally comes out of the room and he isn't his usual carefree self.

"So- Hopper called me and he has some things to do but he's coming over soon. Your father cornered Billy at school and talked to him today" Alex informs him and there's something strange in his tone, something that worries Steve.

"Oh jeez- he hasn't ever officially met my parents" Steve says, absolutely horrified.

His dad can be an uptight asshole even at his best.

"Uh yeah, why don't you go get ready and we can wait for Hopper to fill you in on everything?" Alex says and now he's really worried.

"Is Billy alright?" he asks, worried that his dad may have done something to him.

"He's fine but he found out some interesting information after their talk that needs to be addressed" he tells him and that's-

Something isn't right.

Also, school is over by now and Billy still hasn't shown up to find out how he's doing.

Something isn't right.

Chapter End Notes

This is an interesting transitional point that I kind of wanted to have off on its own because it's going to span for multiple chapters for a while so it's shortened to kind of specify that things are about to be a bit different in quite a few ways.

I've been wanting to hit on this for a while now because I'm sure some of you had seen this coming, the whole realization of the reality of being bonded to someone but being stuck with them when it had never actually been a mutual agreement in the first place.

I also wanted to hit on how this is an ongoing trait that Steve got from his father.

He hits people exactly where he knows it's going to hurt and that's exactly where Steve got it from and now Steve's own father has turned it right at Billy to throw him off his game.

Alsoooo we once again get to see Billy and his idiotic nature surface in which he thinks he knows what's best for Steve and assumes he knows what Steve wants and bla, bla, bla, self sabotage.

Ugh these silly bois never learn.
It'll be interesting to see how our boys handle this hurdle ;)

Chapter Notes

I'm so sick of being sick.

As I post this I have a pounding headache and it feels like my brain is trying to come out through my nose and I need sleep but all I really want to do is write.

But sleep.

Also work has been crazy because I've been trying to function like a human and I've done a very bad job of it and it has been absolutely hilarious for everyone around me.

Whenever my throat gets sore and my voice changes I sound super pathetic so it's actually pretty funny so they felt bad for me and kept feeding me chocolate so that was nice <3

Anyway, I wrote this chapter and it had been completely different and then I scrapped the entire thing and rewrote it from scratch.

I hope you enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Steve pulls himself into the bond and re-watches the memory of Billy and his father over and over after locking himself away in the guest room.

His own father worked for Brenner.

Why?

"I have a plan" Alex tells him.

"Good, please tell me it's something I'll like" Steve says after he's done having his melt down from them telling him about his father.

"It involves you being bait" he says with a worried expression on his face like he's expecting Steve not to like that.

"I'm down, let's do it" Steve says without a second's hesitation.

All this time, all his father has ever done is lie. This isn't the first time he's caught his father in a lie either and it just seems to be par for the course.

"Are you sure because Billy-" Hopper says as Steve shakes his head.
"Let me handle Billy" he tells them.

By sixteen, just two years ago Steve had finally run through his list of doing everything in his power to get his father's attention to no avail, nothing had ever worked and he'd finally given up.

Back then he didn't care if it meant his dad being angry with him but he could barely even get him to that point anyway so it had just made him try even harder.

Steve wanted to be hit, to be yelled at and chastised because in his younger mind it meant his dad cared, any emotions from him meant that in some small way he gave a shit.

Nothing ever worked.

His dad is an emotionless, manipulative robot and no matter how hard Steve has tried he can't get the man to just give a shit about him.

If he's being honest the phone call from a few days ago when they had tried to get him to come home had been one of the few times he'd ever heard his dad genuinely upset and dare he say it...concerned.

That man sees through everything and it's the worst, absolute most annoying part about having a conversation with him ever.

Steve remembers being put down by hurtful words, being called a starved child whining for attention and a slew of other things.

His dad almost struck him once.

He'd been so close.

Steve tells everyone it was Nancy, she had been the catalyst for the change that had occurred inside of him and that's only partially true.

At fourteen he'd been called into his father's office because he'd gotten into five fights within a single month and looking back on it he feels like an idiot for even trying.

Why had he cared so much?

There's no point in getting through to his father, he is always going to be the way that he is and there's no changing that. It took Steve a while but eventually he learned that.

The catalyst for what caused his shitty behavior however had been him walking downstairs the day before his birthday and his mother had been home talking in the kitchen with a friend of hers from work.

Janet, he always liked Janet.
She treated him like her own and he'd never had a shortage of female influence in his life. If anything he'd been mostly raised by women and any harsh discipline had come in the form of his father pulling him into the office and showing him just how little he means to him.

"One day you're going to learn you aren't as important as you seem to think you are Steven"

No shit.

Steve knows that but all he'd wanted was the attention of his father and it's not like he had been trying to act like he was hot shit because he thinks he's hot shit.

All he'd ever wanted was for his dad to care.

Was that so hard to ask?

Apparently it was.

Turns out the 'gifts' he'd get for his birthday were never from his father, they'd only ever been from his mother and he'd been ready to turn the corner into the kitchen to let his mom know he was heading out but Janet had said something that stopped him dead in his tracks.

"Isn't that a bit cruel to lie to your own son like that?" Janet had asked.

"He's a busy man and he knows how much Stevie thinks the world of him" his mom had replied.

"It's his birthday, he can't even take the time to get his own son a gift?!" Janet had exclaimed angrily.

"He wouldn't know what to get him if he tried, it's better if I just do it" his mom had said with a snort like it's some sort of hilarious joke.

Steve had been pissed, he'd quietly left the room not being able to hear any more of the conversation.

How long had that been going on?

It seems stupid now but back then he'd been devastated and he'd locked himself away in his room sobbing like an idiot child.
"You're a child Steven"

"Maybe if you'd stop acting like a child"

"When you're done throwing a tantrum like you're a toddler we can talk"

He was just like his father always said he was which just made him hate himself even more.

Now he just hates his birthday, goes out of his way to have nothing to do with it and hides it from most everyone.

Very few people know his birthday, not even Tommy and Carol knew and he'd never gone out of his way to tell anyone at school, had kept it a secret because he fucking hates the day more than any other day of the year.

Nancy had found out and it had started a fight, he'd demanded she not get him anything and she hadn't taken him seriously.

"I know you said not to get you anything and you've been pretty grumpy all day today but-" Nancy says, big smile on her face as she holds a small neatly wrapped gift in her hand as Steve frowns down at it.

"Return it" he says as he unbuckles his seat belt, ready to leave the car as she grabs his arm.

"Steve- what the hell?!" she says as he averts his gaze.

"Nance, I told you not to get me anything, I'm not big on presents" he had told her as she gaped at him.

"You got me a gift on my birthday" she says with a pout.

"That's different. I just don't like my own birthday so thank you for the thought but please return it" he says pleadingly.

"No, I put time and effort into getting you this so take it" she demands, trying to stare him down and intimidate him.

He gives in about everything, finds it so easy to give in and just say yes or change all of his rules for her sake but this isn't one of those things.

"If you give me this gift I am going to get out of the car and throw it in the trash" he tells her and she gapes at him.

"You cannot be serious right now" she says in disbelief.

"I fucking hate this day Nancy so the greatest gift you could give me is pretending it doesn't exist, please can you do that for me?" he asks her as he takes her hand into his.

She searches his face like she's seeing him differently all of a sudden as she nods reluctantly.
"Can you tell me why?" she asks as he huffs out a sigh and runs a hand through his hair.

"I- I don't wanna talk about it" he mumbles.

"Ok- alright, that's fine you can tell me when you're ready" she says reassuringly as she puts the gift down in the back seat and pulls him in for a kiss.

He never told her.

Perhaps that's also why it never worked between them.

He'd never been fully willing to let her in and when it mattered most to show her vulnerability he'd closed himself off, pulled away because he didn't want her to think of him as weak.

Even now Billy doesn't know, it hasn't ever come up and he's dreading the day that it does because he's pointedly tried to keep his mouth shut about anything pertaining to his parents no matter how much prodding Billy has attempted on him in the past.

If Steve had to guess though he'd say his dad stopped getting him gifts around his tenth birthday because that's when things had changed and his mother would be the one to hand them over instead and say they were from him.

His dad was never around, he'd never get to celebrate his own birthday with his dad on his actual birthday, it was always before or after because he was always so busy.

Steve had never minded, at least he'd get to spend time with him at some point.

The only thing is after finding out that his own father couldn't even spare a thought to get him a gift himself he'd gone even further into a self destructive depression.

So, he'd acted out and gotten into fights whenever he could and eventually all of the bribing money in the world couldn't stop the forced confrontation with his father that he'd been wanting, that he'd been planning.

He'd used the talk as an excuse to bring it up, to call him out on it but his dad had deflected in the way that he always does about everything and found some way to turn it around on him.

Like he always does.

Somehow by the end of it Steve had felt like the wrong one, had felt like somehow it was all his fault.

At one point he'd taken a glass statue of some stupid fucking Labrador off the desk and thrown it against the wall and it had shattered into pieces.

Hit me, hit me, hit me.
Do something, anything.

That's what he remembers thinking at the time because he had wanted his dad to just do something instead of stare at him vacantly like Steve is a minor hindrance.

All his dad would ever do is stare him down and wait him out, let Steve throw his tantrums, scream in his face, demand a reaction but he'd never give one and it made him feel fucking worthless every single time. After he'd calm down his dad would tell him he's a child, put him down, tell him how unimportant he is and that the world doesn't revolve around him and how he's just a spoiled brat that can't appreciate what he has.

Maybe that's true, maybe he had taken it for granted but all he'd ever wanted was his dad's acceptance and approval but he could never get anything out of the man.

When the glass had shattered he'd seen his father's hand clench and unclench as he'd bolted up from his chair and Steve had been certain this was finally the moment he'd finally gotten his dad to snap.

Finally, a reaction.

Within the next few moments his dad had gone back to his calm demeanor as he stared at the glass scattered all over the floor before walking around the desk to lay a hand on his shoulder. It was probably supposed to be in comfort but it felt condescending more than anything.

"I'm done cleaning up your messes Steven. It's time to grow up" he'd said and after that he'd simply left the room.

His dad had seen right through him, clearly and knowing why he'd done it, knowing he'd only wanted attention.

To say it had hurt would be an understatement.

Steve had been crushed and part of himself had died that day when for some reason it had finally hit him that he's never going to get his dad to care about him in the way he needs him to.

So, eventually he'd given up on that pipe dream.

Instead of making his shitty behavior obvious so that he'd be forced to face his dad he started to get smart about it after he'd met Tommy and Carol and Steve had started to convince himself he didn't care, he had closed himself off and he'd put on a show, created a character for himself.

Hiding the shit things he did was easy, he'd merely taken pages out of his dad's book out of spite more than anything else.

He'd been 'King Steve' so any amount of money had been more than enough to be able to get him and his friends out of trouble when they'd found themselves in a little too deep at times.

As long as he stayed out of his dad's hair he quickly learned he could get anything he wanted.
That's it.
That's all it had taken.

As long as his dad didn't have to get involved all he had to do was ask and it was his, like an unspoken agreement.

Their relationship improved after that, he'd stopped talking back and his dad stopped saying hurtful things to him and getting on his back about shit. Mostly because they learned the less they talked to one another the better off it would be for everyone involved.

His dad didn't ask and he didn't tell.

It was a hollow existence but suddenly, something changed one day.

Nancy Wheeler waltzed into his life.

His eyes opened and he couldn't just pretend to not care anymore, he'd been enraptured with her and he'd felt so unbelievably alive.

Eventually he'd also learned that his dad had been right which he'd been loath to admit.

He isn't important, the world is a big fucking place with a lot going on and that realization had come to him in the form of a Demogorgon.

After those events Steve changed even more, the thoughts about wanting his father's love and approval had flown out the window, there were so many more important things to worry about.

His whole focus had been Nancy at the time, he'd fallen so deeply in love with her he'd remembered what it felt like to love and be loved and he'd been so devoted to pleasing her, so afraid of losing her that he'd held her on a pedestal, tried to use her to fill that empty unloved void inside of him.

Except what he had with Nancy had also been a lie all along.

Bullshit.

The void had grown after that but he'd refused to let it define him, refused to let it consume him.

There are people important to him to protect now, people who mean something to him like the kids, Joyce, Hopper.

Even Jon and Nancy regardless of his hard feelings with that whole situation.
The world is a big place.

Then he'd met Billy though.

Or rather Billy had crash landed into his life in the most violent way possible, knocking over everything on his way in like a bull in a china shop and Steve had felt alive.

*Truly alive.*

What he had with Nancy pales in comparison.

Steve hadn't felt it at first, hadn't realized it for what it was because he'd been so hung up on Nancy but before their little escapade into another dimension, before the fight at the Byer's house it had been so clear and apparent that he wonders how he hadn't noticed it before.

It's exactly like he'd told Dustin.

"*It's like before it's gonna storm, you can't see it but you can feel it. Like this uh- electricity*"

Everything about them is an oncoming storm, a current of electricity that never fucking turns off and it's all consuming to the point of making his head spin and it had always been there even if he hadn't been paying attention, even though he'd been refusing to acknowledge it.

It's insane how far they've come and Steve can't even look back anymore, can only keep moving forward.

As for his dad?

He had started seeing the changes, started giving his approval more often than not and one day he'd offered him a fairly back handed compliment and opportunity.

"*We both know you aren't academically inclined Steven*" his dad had told him.

"*Gee thanks*" he replied, crossing his arms over his chest while tapping his foot.

"*I know that you and I don't get along but I'm proud of the man you're becoming and Nancy is a nice girl, she's good for you*" he said and it had actually sounded sincere for once.

"*Thanks*" he said, trying to keep the annoyance out of his tone.

"*She has one more year left of school, I'd like to offer you a job opportunity if you choose not to go to college*" he'd said and Steve had been surprised to say the least.
“Wait- really?” Steve had asked, suddenly suspicious.

“Yes, obviously you have plenty of time to decide but the offer is open should you choose to accept it. Think about it” his dad had said and he'd been floored.

Later he'd tried to get more information on what kind of job but his dad had been tight lipped, kept it close to his chest and told him to just think it over and kept deflecting the question while still pushing him towards the choice, saying exactly what he knew he needed to say in order to get Steve right where he wanted him.

Now he's starting to wonder if that job had involved whatever government work he'd been doing.

Everything his father had said to Billy is obviously a flat out lie and he's clearly just doing what he does best as Steve watches the memory for about the fifth time.

His dad is manipulating Billy.

Steve groans for what seems like the hundredth time when he sees the expression on Billy's face change near the end it's the most telling part of this entire memory.

Billy still hasn't come to see him today and Steve knows why.

He's fallen for the trap, the seed of doubt has been planted in his mind and he's fallen for it because he doesn't know, doesn't understand the kind of man his father is.

Steve can't really be upset with him about it because he's fallen for it multiple times before as well.

The man is subtle, pushes you a certain way and before you know it you've done exactly what he'd wanted you to do in the first place.

His dad has Billy exactly where he wants him and Steve wonders how the fuck he even knows exactly what to say to get Billy second guessing himself like this, how he'd pinned Billy down so quickly.

He doesn't even know Billy and they've never met before now, it's just strange.

Yet here he is in all his glory saying exactly what's going to make Billy get insecure, question the bond, make him think twice about if this is what they really want.

*God fucking damn it.*

When Steve pulls himself out of the bond he flops down onto the bed and screams into his pillow.

*Fan-fucking-tastic.*
Why does his father have to somehow go out of his way to ruin things for him?

Why can't he just mind his own fucking business and fuck off like he always has before?

This is where that whole not giving a shit would have come in handy for once in Steve's life.

Now he wants to start to get involved in his life?

Now he feels like he should sit there and try to put in his two cents and pretend to give a shit?

How dare he.

How fucking dare he.

After he gets it all out of his system he sighs, closes his eyes and braces himself for the inevitable conversation he's about to have, the one he's been planning for carefully in his head.

He won't let his dad fuck things up up.

Projecting himself to Billy is easy at this point and when Steve opens his eyes he sees him laying on his bed, cigarette in his mouth staring off into space up at the ceiling like he's in deep thought.

"This whole projection thing is dangerous, I could have caught you wanking off" Steve says jokingly, keeping the tone light for now.

Billy snorts as he keeps staring up at the ceiling, taking a puff from his cigarette.

"If you want a show all you gotta do is ask pretty boy" he replies and Steve can't help but smile fondly.

"Well I didn't come here for one but thanks for the offer" he retorts as Billy tilts his head up, raising a brow.

"Have you come to ask me to rescue you from your lonely castle tower?" he asks, wagging his brows as he puts out his cigarette before sitting at the edge of his bed to stare up at him with a smug smirk on his face.

"Tempting but no" Steve says as he snorts.

They stare each other down for a moment and Steve isn't sure how to bring it up or how to address
the elephant in the room, isn't entirely sure if Billy even wants to address it.

Eventually Billy seems to pick up on the mood as he sighs, expression turning into a look of resigned annoyance.

"Your dad is pleasant" Billy grumbles out as he taps a finger on his leg absently.

"Ain't he just the greatest. Did you know he's a government agent too?" Steve says sarcastically, feeling the anger start to resurface.

"That's pretty cool, right?" he asks rhetorically as Billy looks at him with a pained expression.

"I mean it would have been nice to know back in elementary school when dad's would come in and talk about their professions to all the other little children" Steve continues to say as he plasters a fake smile on his face while waving his fingers in an exaggerated manner.

"Steve-"

"Oh wait!" he says as he holds his hands up in fake surprise as he ignores Billy's attempt at interjecting.

"It wouldn't have mattered anyway because he never showed up to them, my mistake" he says with a hollow laugh.

"You done?" Billy asks and at some point he seems to have folded his hands into his lap as Steve lets out a frustrated huff, crossing his arms over his chest as he nods.

"I can come over if you want but I'm pretty sure I'm being watched like a hawk" Billy offers and it's sweet of him to say but that's definitely not why he's here.

"I watched the memory over and over and I'm pretty sure I can recite it at this point" Steve says instead, changing the topic abruptly because he's getting a little tired of dancing around the subject that needs addressing.

Billy inhales deeply as he interlocks his fingers together while pulling his thumbs up to his face to rub them up the bridge of his nose, over his brows and to his temples as he buries his face in his hands soon after.

"Take this from someone who's had to deal with him their whole life. He's not always right" Steve tells him, hoping he's getting his point across and that there won't need to be a conversation.

"Okay but he has a point Steve-" Billy starts to say as he looks back up at him while folding his hands back down into his lap and Steve just shakes his head.

"He always has a point Billy, all he ever does is talk" Steve informs him angrily.

Of course, of course he's already made up his mind this fucking idiot.
"There's always something he feels like he needs to say and he's playing you, you are straight up being played right now Billy" Steve tells him as he points an accusing finger at him.

"I know he's full of shit Steve and he clearly still works for them I'm not that fucking dense, give me a bit more credit than that" Billy says with a glare.

"I'm not talking about his fake sob story Billy" Steve tells him as he gives him a look that he hopes conveys 'you're an idiot'.

Billy just gives him a look like he has no idea what's going on.

"I'm talking about how he has you wrapped around his finger thinking we should break the bond. That was clearly his main goal anyway which was to make us doubt each other" Steve hisses out as he starts pacing the room.

Billy just blinks in surprise as he gapes for a moment before recovering except he gets a look of confusion on his face within the next moment.

"The fact that you even put that together so quickly is a bit scary" Billy says with a frown.

"That's how you know that I know what I'm talking about then" Steve says as he points a thumb to himself.

"Your creepy father aside, the bond-" Billy starts to say as Steve wags his finger in his face to interrupt him.

"The look on your face said it all, I don't even need to look inside of your soul to decipher what dumb shit you've got swirling around in that head right now" Steve says as he taps his own head for emphasis after Billy swats his finger away.

"Hold up, you're putting words in my mouth" Billy says as he shakes his head and goes to stand so they're face to face with one another.

"Am I? Correct me then" Steve says, tone challenging.

"I think we should consider the idea of breaking the bond should the chance arise" Billy 'clarifies' rather poorly.

"No" Steve says as he goes to stand before Billy defiantly.

"I- what?" Billy says suddenly very clearly confused.

"I won't play his game and I won't play yours either" Steve tells him.

"Steve listen-" Billy starts to say.

"No"

"You aren't even letting me talk-"
"No"

"Seriously?"

"Sit the fuck down Billy" Steve finally says as Billy purses his lips but inevitably obliges.

"You and I need this bond right now so whatever opinions you have in regards to our personal relationship-" Steve pauses as he looks down at Billy and he feels his jaw clench because the anger surges and he's so fucking pissed at how stupid all of this is, that he even needs to be having this conversation right now.

"Keep them to yourself, I don't fucking care if you want the bond or you don't because you think it's what's best for me or blah, blah, blah" He says as he rolls his eyes because he knows, Steve knows that's what Billy is going to try to get at.

They both want this bond, he knows that for a fact because he'd felt it for himself and he knows it's not that Billy doesn't want it.

He just happens to be a self sabotaging idiot.

Honestly, his points are most likely valid but Steve doesn't care about that right now because those points don't matter right now.

They've got shit to take care of first.

"Look-"

"Don't fucking speak until I am finished" Steve growls out as Billy promptly shuts the fuck up for the first time ever.

"Whatever dumb shit you think about how I deserve better or whatever. Keep it to yourself, I don't wanna hear it" Steve says because he wants to reiterate how much he knows Billy, wants to really make sure he gets his point across with this.

This is Billy's problem, he gets stuck in his own head thinking he knows what's best when he doesn't know shit and Steve knows this because he's the same way.

They both do this and he's done playing this game, he's done falling for traps and being manipulated by everyone

It's all really old at this point and they've got untapped potential they need to stop being so afraid of.

Fuck his dad, fuck everyone, he's taking this shit into his own hands.

"I'm done listening to you, to Hopper, to my father, to every other fucking idiot who wants to sit here and hold me back because you're all a bunch of overprotective dip shits" Steve says as he pauses, wanting that to really sink in.

He needs Billy to really understand that.

"Well, other than my father who's more like an evil villain with some sort of fucked up master plan" Steve says with a shrug as Billy raises a brow.
"Anyway the point-" he says, waving a hand to get back on track.

"The point is that you and I are going to do whatever is needed to take care of this" Steve goes on to say as he points a finger from himself to Billy and back again.

"The Mind Flayer, my dad, all of it" he clarifies.

"You will not fight me on this. If I need to go take a bullet shut your fucking mouth, if I need to be bait shut the fuck up" Steve demands because this isn't up for discussion anymore, he's done sitting back and sticking his thumb up his ass.

Billy starts to give him a suspicious look like he's starting to catch on to what's happening and Steve knows he needs to act quickly to really drive the point home.

"When this is all over then we can talk but for now keep your head in the game, we clear?" he asks as Billy purses his lips looking like he's about to get defiant and fight him on this but Steve refuses to relent.

Billy must see it in his eyes because his shoulders drop in defeat soon after as he sighs.

"Crystal" he says reluctantly.

"Good, Alex has a plan and he'll let you know what it is in the morning" Steve tells him as Billy's eyes widen and he goes to open his dumb ass mouth as Steve holds his hand up to stop him before he can say anything.

"Don't fight him on this or I swear to fucking god I will make your life a living hell, you'll wish you were back in the fucking Upside Down" he promises.

"Do. Not. Tempt. Me." Steve says viciously because he can still see it in Billy's eyes, knows there's nothing he can say to truly keep Billy from doing what he feels is necessary to keep him safe and alive.

Billy gets that pained expression on his face again as he runs a hand through his hair.

"Okay" he says quietly as he looks down at his lap and Steve almost doesn't hear him.

"I'm serious Billy" he says because he doesn't trust him to keep his fucking mouth shut.

This isn't going to be simple and they're going to be against each other every step of the way which is something he's already accepted.

"I know, I get it" Billy grumbles out.

"You don't, but I'm giving you a friendly warning here" he informs him.

"This is your idea of friendly?" he asks incredulously.

"When it comes to you? Absolutely"

"That's fair. We're handing you over and Alex is making you into bait isn't he?" Billy asks as he crosses his arms over his chest.
"Yep" Steve says as he puts his hands into his pockets.

Billy's jaw clenches but he says nothing as they stare each other down.

"Look Billy, do what you do best and protect me but we need to work together, this needs to happen and you have your compulsion which we're going to need" Steve says.

"We don't even know how to control it or use it" Billy says as he raises a brow.

"Somehow I get the feeling with what's going to happen you'll figure it out" Steve says as he averts his gaze and Billy's eyes widen.

"Steve I don't like-"

"Enough, this is what's happening. Aren't you tired of feeling helpless?" Steve asks him.

"Of course I am but I won't risk-"

"Good, Alex will fill you in on the details tomorrow" he says.

Within the next moment Steve is gone, clearly done with the conversation as Billy makes a noise in the back of his throat.

_That fucker._

Technically Billy could just project himself to Steve but the fight has honestly gone out of him and he had lost the moment Steve mentioned that they _need_ the bond.

Steve's not wrong.

They _do_ need it because as things are right now they're defenseless without it Billy's swirling thoughts be damned.

Also Billy might be an idiot but he does have _some_ self preservation instincts.

Pushing Steve too far is not a chance he's willing to take and Billy knows he'll follow up on his threats because during that conversation he'd felt Steve push his own emotions onto him to prove his point.

He's not fucking around and he had meant _every_ word.

Billy is fully aware it's his turn to bite the bullet on this but he hadn't wanted it to be _so soon._

The feeling that he's ruined Steve's life already with the bond at this point hasn't left him and if anything the guilt has increased ten fold.
It's not important though.

Steve is completely right, they have work to do and they'd already agreed to talking things over after they'd gotten their shit straight and here Billy is trying to make this complicated.

It's not acceptable.

The message has been received loud and clear as he thinks of his father murdered in cold blood, as he thinks of Steve's father, an agent with some sort of strange agenda, of Owen's, and Richard's remaining men, the fucking Mind Flayer and whatever else pops up along the way.

They don't get to have the luxury of second guessing anything right now and he's no use to Steve as a basket case.

It's time to get the ball rolling and it's time to finally take control of their lives back.

Billy just hopes at the end of all of this if they survive he'll still have Steve.

Chapter End Notes

This one is far more introspective and I wanted to get into Steve's head for once because I haven't done that in a while.

I also wanted to show the contrast between how Steve feels about everything because we know how Billy feels from the prior chapter but how does Steve feel?

That's more or less what I wanted to play with in this chapter which was a lot of fun because we get a good look into the kind of person he was as well as the one he's become.

Also, I wanted to show how they clash on quite a few things yet come together on others and how even though they have a mutual goal in mind there's still that underlying doubt inside of Billy now.

Should be fun to play with as our boys start to go on the offensive for once. :D
Chapter Notes

I'd have had this chapter posted yesterday except I had to go into work so now I get to have Saturday off instead of Wednesday.

I'm finally not deathly sick but I still have a pretty bad cough and now my allergies are acting up and I want to punch myself in the face but at least I can function like a normal human now.

Sorry for delays in posting I've been trying to sleep a lot of this off and when I'm not sleeping I've been working and guess who has Jury duty coming up?!

It's me!

Hopefully I won't actually have to go in, I'm not looking forward to it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Steve stares at the coffee pot thoughtlessly as it fills slowly, just standing there listening to the sound of it while smelling the aroma reach his nostrils and inhaling the scent gently.

When his mind wakes up a bit more the first thing he thinks about is Billy.

His poor, precious Billy that he'd just ripped into last night without a single care in the world like he's some sort of heartless asshole.

He'd been expecting to feel bad in the morning for the way he had spoken to him but he actually feels pretty good about how it went, all things considered.

It's not something he enjoys, yelling at Billy like he's a simpleton or something.

Sure, he's yelled at him before and they fight all the damn time but this had been different, he had needed to put his foot down for once.

Mostly it just makes him think of all of the awful things the guy has had to endure in his life from when Neil had been alive because Billy had caved and clammed up so damn quickly that it makes his heart clench painfully in his chest.

At least it's not like he's bashing Billy's face in with some random object.

That's a memory he's still never going to get out of his head from when he'd been shattered across Billy's mind.

Regardless it felt necessary because the only thing that would have held them back from this plan is Billy himself and honestly it probably still is the only thing that's going to hold them back.
Steve always expects him to pull some crazy shit because that's all he ever does.

Billy is going to fight them on this in his own ways and if anything Steve is forcing him to try a different tactic at this point, that's pretty much all he's probably accomplished with that conversation.

If Billy sees a chance to protect him, he'll take it and he will definitely risk whatever consequences come with it because that's just the way he is and always has been.

Alternatively it sucks being stuck in a house for days on end and he's starting to get stir crazy so he's glad he has something to look forward to in the form of Alex's plan.

Steve is pulled out of his thoughts as Alex walks into the kitchen like he's been summoned.

"Mornin'" Alex says, looking more groggy than he should since it looks like he's been up and about for a couple hours already.

"Morning, you going to see Billy?" he asks as he puts two spoons of sugar into the cup and swirls it until he's satisfied.

"Later today. I'm being called in as a substitute at the school so my time table has changed slightly" he says absently as he goes into his fridge to pull out creamer as he places it on the counter.

"We've got more dirt on some guy named Terry" he goes on to say with a shrug as he grabs himself a cup to pour himself some coffee as well.

"Oh?" Steve asks.

Terry had been there in the room with them before his dad had cornered Billy alone, he remembers that from the memory.

"He's one of my dad's friends but I don't know anything about him" he tells Alex because before all of this he hadn't even known his own father was some sort of government agent either.

Terry on the other hand was just some man he'd seen whenever his dad would have big dinners at the house and invite family over, he's known of Terry's existence since he was a kid.

He's never liked the man but he's also never really talked to him, he's like a badly dressed lawyer with an awful haircut and judging from the memory he'd watched none of that had changed over the years.

"How did you know it was him though?" Alex asks, visibly confused and Steve realizes that he shouldn't know that considering he's been cooped up inside of this place and the only information he technically had gotten all came from Alex and Hopper.

"Oh- I can see Billy's memories" he tells him as he taps his head gently, leaving out any unnecessary information and keeping it simple.

The jury is still out on Alex, he feels like he can trust him but at this point he's not going to be as stupid as he has been in the past like he was with Owen's.

"That's neat, and you can project yourselves to each other, is there anything this bond can't do?" he asks as he chuckles lightly and Steve can't help but squint at him.

"How did you know about the projection thing?"
"Billy told me" he says simply like that's just a *thing* that Billy does.

Steve honest to god gapes at Alex and almost drops his damn coffee cup.

"Does- does Billy *confide* in you?" Steve asks incredulously, suddenly seeing him in a different light.

"You ask me that like it's some sort of shocking revelation, I think-" he pauses, nodding his head like he's deciding on something. "Yep, I'm starting to feel flattered, that's flattery I'm feeling. Am I really getting through to the kid?" Alex asks, putting a hand to his chest mockingly.

"I don't know, you tell me" Steve says, still looking at him suspiciously.

"Well there's not much prodding involved, he loves to talk about you and after that everything else flows out like *water*" Alex says smugly as he uses his hand to imitate a wave.

"Who are you?" Steve asks, feeling a bit uncomfortable all of a sudden.

"Funny, Billy asked me the same thing" Alex says as he snorts.

"What lie did you tell him?" Steve asks, not buying into whatever this guy is selling, so to speak.

"I didn't lie. I told him I recruit people like us that have gifts, it's part of my job description" Alex tells him and Steve isn't sure if it's because he's gone through a lot but he's finding it harder to trust people so he's not sure if he believes him.

His plan is solid though and for once having someone who isn't afraid to get shit done and isn't telling him to step back and take a seat is refreshing so he's been keeping close to Alex as much as he can.

This could be a trap though.

Also he felt like he could trust Maggie when he'd met her but that doesn't mean he should trust those that are under her employ.

Hell, it doesn't mean he should trust Maggie either.

Still, someone that can get Billy to open up?

He hasn't seen anyone do that before, even *he* had struggled to get him to open up for such a long time and he'd ended up *bonded* to the guy.

"How many people have you recruited?" Steve asks, genuinely curious even though he's still not entirely sure what he's being recruited *for*.

"Interesting question. Personally, without any assistance the answer is three" he says thoughtfully as he sips from his cup.

"Alright, what's the real reason for recruiting people with gifts?" Steve asks next, finally trying to get to the heart of whatever their little clubhouse is.
"See that's what I thought you'd ask first. It's to give people a place to hide and feel safe, like they can actually make a difference with what they have if that's what they truly want" Alex tells him plainly like he's done this spiel a million times.

"Make a difference in what?" Steve asks, raising a brow as he takes a large gulp of his coffee.

"The war" Alex says, tone suddenly dark.

_War?

That's a strange wording and Steve isn't sure if he's just being dramatic or not.

"What war?" he asks, wondering if he'll even get a straight answer.

"The war against the other side" Alex says simply and he'd been expecting more of an answer that leaned more toward what Kali does but they don't seem to care much about revenge against the people that harmed them.

"What's your stance on Brenner's men, the ones that tortured and experimented on all of you that are scattered around everywhere like roaches?" he asks, wondering if there are others in his group that seek vengeance.

"That differs depending on who you talk to but Maggie surrounds herself with a team that doesn't seek out a fight against other human's. We should all be working together against the real threat otherwise what's the point if we're all dead and eradicated?" Alex asks and it's a good question.

"What about those that disagree but Maggie takes in anyway?" Steve asks next because he knows those people exist.

Kali can't be the only one going on a killing spree.

"Those outside of the core team are taken care of and free to do as they please, we merely give them access to safety should they need it" Alex tells him and that just opens up a whole new can of worms.

"How many are inside of the core team willing to fight the war?" he asks, as Alex purses his lips into a grim, thin line.

"Not enough" he says and there's something in his tone that Steve doesn't like, something impossibly sad.

"How many have you lost?"

"You're very intuitive Steve, both of you are" Alex says instead of answering the question and Steve is fully aware he won't be getting an answer.

"I imagine the lines are blurred for you right now, you mentioned one of your brother's is in
Steve says, trying to hit another angle that had been in the back of his mind.

Alex gets a different look on his face, one that Steve doesn't know how to read and he wishes Billy was here because he's much better at this than he is.

"It's why I'm in Indiana, I got a tip that Richard's had taken him here and the rest is history" he says and when he goes to drink out of his coffee mug he grimaces as he turns to put it in the microwave to heat it for a few moments.

"Who is he?" Steve asks, noticing his own coffee is starting to get cold as well.

"One of my recruits, it's my fault he got captured so yeah the lines are blurred and I-" Alex sighs as he runs a hand through his hair.

"If this ends up being what I think it is and we get a match on Terry and he's who I think he is then I think they could lead us to him" he says as Steve frowns.

"Huh"

It's a lot to take in.

Terry might have something to do with the person Alex is looking for?

Interesting.

Small world.

"Richard's is dead but they're still operating, do you think someone else really took charge after he got killed?" Steve asks, wondering how something like that even works.

"Of course, there had been someone before Richard's and at the heart of it had been Brenner and he's dead now too so what does that tell you?" Alex asks him imploringly.

"That you can't cut off the head, it'll just grow back?" Steve replies as Alex nods in confirmation.

"Exactly and regardless, if this ends up being a way to get to Ca-" Alex pauses as he scratches at his head lightly.

"Look- I may have an opportunity here that I can't pass up" Alex says, clearly trying to keep as much information as close to his chest as possible.

"I've already agreed to the plan" Steve says flippantly not really caring either way.

"Which wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be by the way" Alex says as he laughs in disbelief.

"I'm not your problem, Billy is" Steve tells him as he looks down at his now cold coffee in disgust, partially from the fact that he knows it's in Billy's nature to want him safe.

Alex holds out his hand, staring at his coffee as he hands it over while Alex puts it in the microwave for him.

"Any advice for when I tell him the plan?" Alex asks.
"Not really, the absolute worst parts of Billy come out if he thinks I'm in danger, there's nobody that can talk to him and have this turn out well" he tells him as the microwave beeps and Alex hands his coffee back to him.

He'd already mentioned this to Billy.

They need to be willing to put themselves and each other into danger and usually Steve would agree with just letting everyone else handle things but with their new found ability to compel others he doesn't feel as powerless as he did before.

The only tough thing is after that whole Lake Michigan incident they still haven't even given themselves time to truly recover from it.

Steve knows there's no talking some real sense into Billy and he doesn't exactly blame him.

Honestly, they haven't given themselves time to recover from anything, not even that first time they'd gotten stuck in the Upside Down.

The moment that had started this whole shitfest.

It's just all there, festering underneath the surface being repressed by both of them and it's unhealthy but every time they try to get some sort of normalcy back into their lives something else comes around to fuck up any progress they've made.

Steve is done rolling with the punches and letting this shit walk all over him, he's ready to fight and take back control of his own life instead of letting it control him.

Sure, there are just things you can't control but at this point it's time to take the precautions that need to be taken and eliminate their threats once and for all so they can get on with their lives.

Mostly so that he can actually have a shot at building a future with Billy.

If he can actually somehow survive to at least forty.

Forty is a good number he likes to think, even though that seems a bit generous.

It's sad that he's expecting to die young, he feels like that shouldn't be a thought in his mind for someone his age but it is and this just happens to be his life now and he needs to accept that fact.

"Wish me luck" Alex tells him as he comes to walk past him, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder before he goes to grab his keys from the hook on the wall across the room.

"I've got to go substitute for Mrs. Carter, any tips?" Alex asks and Steve can't help the laugh that comes out of him as he gives Alex a smug smile.

"You know that's one of Billy's classes right?" he informs him and Alex gets an evil glint in his eyes as he turns to leave.
Billy's day can't get any worse.

He's been internally freaking the fuck out about *everything* all day and usually he's better at hiding it but he can't seem to focus on *anything*.

At one point he'd slammed right into some poor unsuspecting Freshman and the kid looked ready to piss himself and Billy of course has a reputation to uphold so he'd merely glared the kid down until he'd scrambled away.

In reality he just hadn't been paying attention to where he'd been going.

There's too much going on in his head, too many scenario's.

Mostly he keeps having awful thoughts about whatever plan Alex seems to have concocted.

Also he's been thinking irrationally about if Steve gets found and they try to take him while he's *all alone*.

Billy knows he's being a bit obsessive about it and it's not helping anyone, especially not himself but he hates this, he hates being apart from Steve like this.

It has him on edge even though he knows he has no right to it but he also sort of does because that's his bonded, this is the man he shares his soul with and the idea of-

"*The point is that you and I are going to do whatever is needed to take care of this*"

He hears Steve say, remembering his words from last night as he stops his own train of thought, kills the worry and anxiety because it's just not productive as he makes his way to his next class.

Steve had warned him to back off and he needs to back off, needs to find some self control, wants to fight back just like Steve does but he's finding it difficult to get over his own fears and insecurities.

It's not easy.

Billy quickly finds out his day actually *can* get worse as he watches Alex saunter into his fifth period classroom like he owns the place and he hears the girl sitting in front of him gasp in excitement.

Honestly he can't remember her name but he does recognize her from the back, mostly her hair.

He's definitely fucked her once and he remembers curling his fingers into the long blonde locks as he'd taken her from behind while she had squealed like a damn pig and he'd told her to shut the fuck up because it had seriously been a turn off.

She hadn't appreciated the feedback afterwards.

That's about all that he remembers though because he's pretty sure he'd been shitfaced that night.

The memory in his mind morphs into soft brown locks, a firmer body beneath him and some of the
most delicious sounds he's ever heard in his life that can make him rock solid within an instant.

He thinks of one of the times he'd taken Steve like that and how fucking hot it had been, he thinks about how insatiable Steve gets and how he begs so fucking well for it.

It had been rough and passionate but divulged into lovemaking afterwards because Billy couldn't help himself, can never seem to help himself when it comes to Steve.

Making love to him reduces Steve into an absolute sobbing mess and he makes the prettiest sounds, he goes wild with it and his eyes roll into the back of his head every time because of how good it is.

You'd think Billy would prefer their rough sex and he certainly does enjoy it and sometimes they just need a good fuck but in all actuality it's Steve that has a preference for it more often than not.

Billy prefers making love to him, making him feel wanted and needed because he gets to see a side of Steve that's intoxicating, a side no one else gets to see.

Certainly not a side Nancy fucking Wheeler ever got to see or any of those other women he'd been with because he knows Steve had been too busy thinking about their pleasure every time instead of his own.

It's nice to tear him apart, show him what it's like to have a partner that's responsive to what he needs, show him what it's like to just give in to the pleasure and actually take something for himself for once instead of getting himself so caught up on what the other person wants.

Steve isn't used to being shown such raw affection so when it does happen it's a sure fire way to really get him going and he never knows what to do with himself.

It also barely takes much to get him going if Billy presses the right buttons, says the right things and he always knows exactly what to say.

Billy's not an idiot, he knows how much power his voice holds over Steve and time and again he tries to hide it so pitifully every time.

Steve will positively melt.

It's in the way his body goes lax, his shoulders drop and his breathing picks up.

Or when he's inside of Steve and he whispers the sweetest things to him, tells him how good he is it's in the way Steve tightens around him, arches his back, thrashes his head like if Billy keeps talking he'll come right on the spot.

Which he has, Billy had gotten him keyed up to that point a couple of times.

At first it had been difficult to get him to open up, to accept it for what it was.

Even now it's a bit of a struggle at times.

It still boggles Billy's mind that Steve had thought their first time making love had been a pity fuck and that still makes him bristle a bit but not at Steve, never at him.

He doesn't know any better.

The neglect he's been shown all his life has taught him to give so much of himself yet expect nothing in return.
Billy had a shitty upbringing but he still knows what real love looks like, knows that there needs to be a certain balance to the push and pull.

Steve has never had that, doesn't know how to ask for what he needs, doesn't understand what true love looks and feels like because it hasn't ever really been shown or taught to him.

Billy assumes that's because of his upbringing, of being told what he wants, to have his opinions belittled and to just appreciate what he has with no complaint and to question nothing.

It's not like he knows Steve's parents but he assumes they aren't exactly loving to one another if his encounter with Steve's father had been any sort of indication.

Regardless things had gotten better but Steve still tends to revert back at times to closing himself off, to not voicing what it is he truly wants and Billy has to coax things out of him at times.

It's a constant struggle.

Granted in the bedroom it can be fun to coax things out of him at times and-

It's-

They're not together.

Thinking about it makes him feel sorrowful because he keeps having to remind himself they're not together.

It's like cold water being dumped all over him and he'd been getting himself a bit excited there for a second before that thought had suddenly hit him.

It fucking sucks no matter how much he knows they need it, how much he knows this is good for them to keep as much of a separation as possible.

Even though they both know it's too late.

They've become far too close and it's not going to last, Billy isn't stupid but he's more than willing to entertain Steve's notions of trying to gain some form of stability between them.

Perhaps it'll actually do them some good and he's more than willing to give it a try.

Instead he thinks of Neil which probably isn't a better option if he's looking to cheer himself up.

He can't help himself though.

It's strange that he finds himself missing Neil a little bit now that he's dead, there had been a method to his madness and generally he was easy to read and Billy knew what to expect from him and knew when there would be a fight.
Sometimes it helped Billy feel better to get the shit beat out of him because of how much he'd hated himself.

Of course he still hates himself quite a bit but not as much as he had about a year ago, he likes to think he's improved as a person in certain aspects.

He certainly cares a hell of a lot more about way too many people.

*That* right there is what scares him.

The fact that he's starting to care about people *other* than Steve is a terrifying prospect.

Will comes to mind and he knows he'd kill anyone in a heartbeat if someone tried to start shit with the kid, there's a protectiveness he feels for him that rivals what he feels for Steve and he's not sure how that happened or why.

He's like the little brother he'd never had.

Perhaps he's projecting that onto Will though.

His mom and dad had been trying for another one before she had died and if she were still alive today he'd probably have a brother or sister to call his own to join him in this shit hole world.

Maybe it's best that he doesn't have a real sibling though.

Of course, he *does* have Max.

Max has really grown on him too, she's still a bitch but he also feels guilty for the way he's treated her since knowing her.

She never deserved his ire and he'd only taken shit out on her because he couldn't do it to Neil.

It's not her fault she tends to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and doesn't know how to keep her damn mouth shut.

She's just a kid.

*Jesus.*

When Billy really breaks it down he is truly just the absolute *worst* fucking piece of shit.

*Baby steps Hargrove, baby steps.*

He repeats to himself once more.

Billy knows he doesn't deserve forgiveness from quite a lot of people but he can certainly try to be better in the future.

Easier said than done.
Billy focuses on class and wills himself to calm down as he watches Alex fumble around everywhere trying to see what notes Mrs. Carter has left him.

All the girls in the room seem to be devouring the guy with their eyes at this point.

This thing about Alex has been an ongoing thing ever since he'd started showing up as a substitute. A lot of the cows here at school have started fawning over him like crazy, he even wears glasses.

Why the fuck does he wear glasses when he's teaching but not at any other time?

It all makes Billy want to throw up in his mouth and eventually after introducing himself Alex does roll call and Billy tunes him out until his name is called.

It's not like Alex isn't good looking it's just that he's not Billy's type and he might be slightly terrified of the guy more than he's willing to admit.

There's something about him.

"Mr. Hargrove?" he hears Alex's voice chime out in that annoyingly happy tone.

"Present" he says with as much annoyance as he can muster.

Alex doesn't act like they know each other which is great because Billy doesn't need people knowing that he actually knows this absolute idiot and just looking at Alex reminds him that Steve is at the mans house alone.

Unprotected.

All by himself.

Billy's jaw clenches involuntarily as he props his legs up onto the desk, leaning back in his chair to lounge because he can and nobody gives a shit when he does, not even Mrs. Carter.

He gets good grades regardless.

At one point Alex is trying to find what page they've left off on since yesterday because apparently no notes were left for him, or maybe he can't find them from the clutter on the desk because Mrs. Carter is scatterbrained.

Billy can't help himself.

"Chapter five" he says, lying through his teeth and surprisingly nobody gives away that he's pulling his leg.

It's probably because the school is terrified of him and the teachers love him.

He's got Mrs. Carter wrapped around his finger as well as all of his other teachers because he's not an idiot.

He knows how to turn on the charm because if his father would ever catch wind of his teachers complaining about him he'd get slammed into a wall so eventually he'd learned how to play them.
One of the girls glares at him a few seats to his left, another girl he's fucked before that had been pretty forgettable.

She certainly wasn't good at sucking cock.

Abby? Addison?

Her name starts with an A, he remembers that much.

He thinks of the way Steve sucks his cock and how it should be fucking illegal, he thinks of the way pretty boy takes him all the way down his throat to come back up and lick at the tip of his head in that signature way that's so inherently Steve.

Always so fucking eager to please.

Billy thinks of the way he does it while looking up at him with those big gorgeous brown, watery doe eyes while he tilts his head to the side and Billy can see those moles on his face-

_Fucking Christ Hargrove, control yourself._

He thinks to himself as he lets out a shaky breath while clenching his jaw.

Alex looks up and raises a brow.

"Oh thank you Mr. Hargrove that's very helpful of you, why don't you start us off?" He says as Billy raises a brow back at him, coming back from his heated daydream as he clears his throat.

"Excuse me?" He asks, not knowing if he heard that right.

"Start us off, why don't you start reading the chapter for me?" He asks and Billy just stares at him in disbelief.

"No offense Mr. Brenton but we aren't middle schoolers" he chides.

"Ah forgive me, sometimes it's hard to tell when you choose to act like one" Alex says as he holds up a sticky note that probably says what chapter they're really on.

Billy can't see it though because he's too far away as he shrugs.

"Oh sorry Mr. Brenton, I meant that one" he says, giving him a smug smile as he points to him while still leaning back in his chair not giving a fuck.

"What one?" Alex asks, turning the paper toward himself. "What one, what?" Billy asks not knowing where he's going with this.

"What chapter are we really on?" He asks clearly knowing the writing is too small for him to see from where he's at.

_That little_-

Billy has no idea, he doesn't actually pay attention in this class. He's good at testing and the class is easy for him so he doesn't even need to try.
Also Mrs. Carter puts him the fuck to sleep half the time.

"Feels like you're singling me out here sir, isn't that a bit unfair?" he asks, going for the moderately respectful route even though in his head he’s cursing him the fuck out.

"You're the one that spoke up Mr. Hargrove. Alternatively you could have simply kept your mouth shut" Alex retorts and he can tell the other kids are suddenly unsure of him.

Billy's still unsure of him too.

It's fun to fuck with the substitute but he should have known trying it on Alex was not a wise choice aside from the fact that the guy can kill him without moving a muscle if he really wanted to.

"Well since you don't seem to know, why don't you stand for us and start on chapter eight?" Alex says, evil fucking smile on his face.

"You're joking" Billy says, not believing what he's hearing.

"It's not going to read itself Mr. Hargrove" he says, tone still sickly sweet to the point of being unnerving as his face goes completely deadpan in the next moment.

This guy is straight up insane and that's saying something considering Billy knows he's a few cards short of a full deck himself.

They stare each other down for an awkwardly long amount of time when suddenly Alex gets a creepy happy smile back on his face.

"I'm actually joking. Lighten up Mr. Hargrove and get your feet off the desk if you don't mind and everyone turn to chapter eight please" he says sternly.

Billy can't help himself as he plants his feet firmly on the ground, not really wanting to destroy his own reputation in on fell swoop because of some fake glasses wearing asshole.

He's tried underestimating Alex before and it hasn't gone well for him in the past, definitely not a good time to start again now.

For once Billy actually pays partial attention to the lecture in case Alex wants to take a jab at him again just to be a dick.

He can't help himself in the end as he keeps prodding though.

By the end of class he's already pissed Alex off enough to be asked to stay after but he'd kind of decided on doing it on purpose anyway.

Partially because it's fun and partially because he needs an excuse to talk to him.

When class is over Billy stays in his seat and waits for everyone to file out as he just sits there unmoving, watching Alex like a hawk.
Alex gets his things together and finally when he looks ready to leave he looks up at him, grim look on his face and Billy frowns from the sudden change in expression.

"I'll see you at your place after school, we can't talk here" Alex says, clearly being able to tell that it had all been a bit of a rouse so they could touch base.

Billy inhales deeply as the anxiety slams back into him full force as Alex comes to stand next to him, putting a hand on his shoulder in what is probably supposed to be comfort.

It doesn't help.

He's dreading the conversation even more and Alex can clearly tell as he shoots him an apologetic look before promptly leaving.

Billy leaves the classroom quickly after that and hurries to his car, locking himself inside as he closes his eyes while breathing in and out.

He needs to see Steve, needs to know he's alright.

When he opens his eyes he sees Steve lounging on the couch watching TV and the fondness he feels is immense as his heart clenches at the sight.

His shirt is riding up a bit to show some of his stomach and his hair is a bit wild, he looks like he's fresh off of a nap.

It makes Billy want to climb on top of him and bury his face into his neck and just breathe him in, drag him into the room and feel Steve curled up around him.

He doesn't move though, doesn't do it, doesn't indulge himself because he hates the way it feels to touch Steve when it's like this, when it's only a projection of himself.

The memory of a touch.

It's like a cruel cosmic joke or something and it just makes him yearn for Steve even more than he already does.

Except he can't do that anyway, can't just touch him with abandon like he used to and he feels his hands clench at his side.

The conversation from last night has left him restless and usually Steve is his comfort, is what grounds him, is what he goes to when things become too much.

Regardless Billy still thinks this is good for them even if he does miss what they used to have.

Or maybe he's just trying to convince himself of it at this point to keep from going insane.

He also needs to keep his head in the game if they're going to survive not only those government assholes but the Mind Flayer as well.

Threats from all sides.

It's starting to get really old.
Steve's head perks up like he's noticing that Billy is here as he turns his head and their eyes lock.

"Oh- hey is it free period already?" Steve asks as he turns down the TV, turning over and more of his shirt rides up to show even more skin.

It makes Billy groan internally.

"Yeah" he says as he goes to sit on the couch next to him, not knowing what to say.

"You seem tense" Steve points out unhelpfully.

"Alex is going over to my place after school and I'm dreading the plan" he tells him honestly because that's pretty much what's really bothering him at this point.

"Billy" Steve says sternly as Billy shakes his head.

"Don't worry, I won't try to sabotage anything I'm just trying to mentally prepare myself" he says which is partially true.

He'll sabotage this in a heartbeat if he sees a chance.

"That's fair" Steve says as he shrugs but he still looks slightly suspicious and Billy really hates how well they know each other sometimes.

Things divulge into a comfortable silence after that as they both watch TV but he doesn't bring the volume back up.

Steve clearly has something to say because he's tapping his finger on his leg absently now which is always a precursor to him wanting to say something that's on his mind.

Billy waits him out, let's him find the words because he's in no rush and being here to make sure he's safe helps alleviate some of the anxiety he'd been feeling that had built itself up throughout the day.

"So, you like Alex" Steve finally says except it's a statement and not a question.

There's no tone indicating any sort of jealousy so he can tell that Steve is referring to what he thinks of him in a more generalized sense.

"Honestly I don't know, he's fucking weird" Billy says with a snort.

Alex is hard to peg, puts on too many different personalities at once and it makes Billy wonder if he has some sort of mental disorder but he still pulls off being socially acceptable and charming effortlessly so maybe Billy just isn't used to it.

The thing about Alex is that you can't tell if what you're seeing is the real Alex or just him putting up a front.

"I think we can trust him but I know I'm not the best judge of character" Steve says like he's just personally offended himself and Billy knows he feels guilty about the Owen's thing.

They haven't really talked about it.

It hits him in that moment that they're trusting Alex with Steve's life at this point, whatever plan he has is what's going to set the scene for whatever events are going to transpire.
Billy also finds himself inherently trusting the man but this is Steve's life on the line and Billy isn't as inclined to be taking any chances if he doesn't need to.

The conversation should be rather interesting to say the least because he's ready to fight him tooth and nail on all of this should he see an opportunity for it.

It's better to make Steve think he's going to be a willing participant that's going to keep his mouth shut but he can't, he can't not try.

"Remember that I can watch your memories Billy" Steve says to him and it sounds far more threatening than anything else as he stares at him like he knows exactly what Billy is thinking so he does his best to give nothing away.

"Yes dear" he says while giving him a toothy smile and Steve frowns before going back to watching TV rather reluctantly.

When Billy finally leaves Steve can't help but be concerned.

It's not like he blames Billy for his overprotective nature, the reality isn't lost on him that Billy had lost his mother by drowning and Steve had died for a moment by drowning.

That's just fucked up.

Billy is clearly going through some serious anxiety that he's clearly not wanting to address which makes sense, he probably has it all blocked out of his mind to the best of his ability.

Steve doesn't know what he'd do if he had to deal with something that hits far too close to home in way too many different ways.

The signs are all there and Steve can see them clear as day like he usually can with everything else pertaining to the love of his life and he knows that Billy feels like he's losing control.

There's a storm coming.

If they could just learn to control their ability that would probably placate Billy, make him feel more in control of the situation and that's probably all he really needs which is to feel in control.

As of right now it's all being taken away from him and it's simmering underneath the surface waiting to lash out and he doesn't know what he can do to help, to make this more of a smooth transition.

Steve puts it out of his mind as he picks up the mobile phone that Alex had left him so he can make phone calls after they'd spent an hour with Steve trying to learn how the damn thing works because he's not exactly good with technology and he dials Nancy's number.

It takes about four rings before someone answers.

"Yes, hello?" he hears Nancy say and it's good to hear her voice but it makes him realize just how much of a prisoner he is right now.

"Nance, it's Steve" he says rather cheerfully.
"Are you alright?" she asks and he snorts.

Everyone is always so damn worried about him it's so silly.

"I'm fine, is Jon with you?" he asks her and there's a long pause and the sound of a frustrated sigh.

_Uh oh._

"No, he's probably at his house" she says and it sounds clipped and angry like she's trying to hide the fact that she's upset but is failing terribly at it.

"What did he do?" Steve asks, slightly amused because they generally don't get upset with each other to the point of Nancy not wanting to see him or have him around.

"I'm glad you assume it's something he did" she says as he snorts again.

"I've learned it's never your fault" he says teasingly as she laughs.

It's funny but it's also true, you don't tell Nancy Wheeler she's wrong because it will never end well.

"He's just- he gets into these moods sometimes and it's so hard to pull him out of it" she says with an exasperated sigh and Steve can relate.

Him and Billy do the same thing.

"Anyway, he's probably at his house so if you need to speak with him I'd try to call there" she says which is unlike her, usually she's more nosy than that, more forthcoming.

"Alright, thanks Nance" he says taking the hint for what it is and before he can hang up he barely hears her call out to him.

"Are you alright?" she asks after he puts the phone back up to his ear as he smiles fondly.

"I'm good, don't worry" he says and they find themselves talking a bit more to touch base before finally hanging up about twenty minutes later.

Steve dials the Byer's house soon after that as he goes into the kitchen.

He's hungry and hasn't really eaten very much today because he's been mostly vegging out like a lazy piece of shit.

"Hello?" he hears Jon say when he finally picks up.

"Jonathan, hey it's Steve" he says as he tries to juggle the phone, a macaroni TV dinner and a bag of chips in his hands.

"Steve- are you alright?" he asks immediately and Steve can't help but roll his eyes.

"Yes, I'm fine. Jesus you people are impossible" he says as Jon huffs a sigh of relief.

"What's up?" Jon asks as Steve puts the chips onto the counter as he rips open the TV dinner to put it into the microwave.

"I was wondering if you could do me a solid and get me some things from the store since I'm stuck
here and can't go anywhere" Steve says as he rips open the chips and realizes he never got himself anything to hold the damn chips in.

"I'd ask Billy but they're watching him and it's too risky" Steve tells him as he searches every cupboard to find himself a bowl.

"Oh- sure what do you need?" Jon asks as Steve finally finds one as he does a little victory fist pump.

"Thanks man, give me a second here and I'll give you a list" he tells him.

It had been a rather long list but he'd offered to pay Jon back and the guy hadn't seemed to mind. Perhaps he needs something to do to keep his mind off of Nancy and Steve finds himself wondering what had started their fight or what it's even really about.

When Jon finally gets there he lets him inside and he's about to walk out the door to help him unload the rest of the bags when Jon puts a hand on his chest.

"You can't just walk outside like that, what if someone sees you?" he says and Steve just gives him a sheepish look as he scratches the back of his head.

"Sorry, didn't think" he admits as he turns around suddenly unsure of what he should do with himself.

Jonathan loads everything into the kitchen and Steve starts unpacking the bags.

It's food, cleaning supplies, and some toiletries because Alex barely has anything in this place.

Steve doesn't blame him, it's not like the guy is going to stay in Hawkins.

It's clearly a temporary home and Steve absently wonders how they finagled a nice looking house such as this one.

When everything is inside he notices Jon standing awkwardly by the archway as he shakes his head.

"You alright man?" he asks as Jonathan just shrugs his shoulders.

"Yeah, I'm good" he says which is obviously a lie.

"A little birdy told me you're fighting with Nancy" Steve says and he hears Jon shuffle behind him like he's uncomfortable all of a sudden.

He's not exactly a talkative person and he prefers to keep quiet but Steve is pretty sure he can get it out of him, he's usually pretty good at it.

"A little birdy?" Jon asks suspiciously.

"Nancy, I called her thinking you'd be at her place" Steve admits as he turns around to smile at him
knowingly.

"It's- she's upset with me because I don't express what I'm feeling enough" Jonathan tells him and that's not shocking at all but Steve can tell there's more to it than that.

"If you keep everything inside you'll explode, she's not wrong" he says even though he knows he's not one to talk.

Kind of a pot, kettle, black sort of situation.

Well, not kind of.

"I know but sometimes I just don't know how to convey- it's not always easy to say what I'm thinking" he says as he puts his hands in his pockets.

Steve can tell he's in full on 'Jonathan mode' and there's no getting through to him when he's like this so he thinks of a different tactic instead.

"Well let's not stress about it, why don't we break out a couple of beers and just not worry about anything for once?" Steve asks because he honestly needs the company right now and he's tired of being wound up and this is partly for himself as well.

He also had Jon grab beer on purpose in case this is what he needed to do for the guy.

Fighting with Nancy is not fun and he knows this from personal experience.

Unfortunately Jon can be such a prude, he never let's loose and he can be an overall stick in the mud nearly all the damn time so this might be difficult.

There's nothing wrong with letting go and having some damn fun once in a while.

"Yeah alright, that sounds good" Jon says and that surprises Steve as he gapes.

Usually it's like pulling teeth to get the guy to agree to anything.

It must have been quite the fight.

---

Somehow Steve has managed to get Jon completely shitfaced and he's not really sure how he'd managed it as they sit on the couch together and bullshit.

There should be an award for this sort of thing or anything pertaining to Jonathan in general because of how closed off he is.

Steve personally has a nice buzz going because his stomach is full of macaroni from earlier and Jon definitely talks far more when he's drunk off his ass.

"I just- I don't know how she- why did she choose me?" Jonathan asks and somehow Steve feels like maybe he's not the best person to talk to about this but it's his own fault for opening this can of worms by giving Jonathan alcohol in the first place.

"She loves you, I always knew in the back of my head that you're all she could see but I just ignored
"I'm sorry- I'm sorry about everything that happened Steve" Jon says as he puts a firm hand on his arm and Steve appreciates the apology, knows that he means it but it really doesn't bother him anymore if he's being honest.

"Don't worry about it, you two are meant for each other" Steve tells him as he gives him a friendly pat on the back while taking a sip of his beer.

"You- you fucked Billy again already didn't you?" Jon asks out of the blue and Steve chokes on his beer as he feels it travel up his nose and it fucking burns as he coughs up a damn lung.

"Sorry" Jon says he pats him on the back apologetically.

"What- what makes you say that?" Steve asks and he can tell he's flushing as he gives a few more aborted coughs.

"You're an ass when you haven't been laid but you've been nothing but pleasant this whole time" Jonathan tells him and Steve can't help but laugh.

"Damn Byer's, you have no fucking filter when you get some beer in you" he says as he clinks their cans together.

"Ah- it's kind of why I don't drink much but seriously, you two back together again already?" Jon asks, changing the subject.

"No, we agreed it's best to keep things simple so we're still broken up" Steve says with a shrug even though it kind of feels like that's not really all that true.

"You don't seem very certain" Jon says, calling him out as Steve sighs.

"I dunno, it's tough with the bond but I think we can manage some distance"

As long as Steve doesn't fuck it all up again and act the way he'd been acting before with how touchy he'd been it should be fine, otherwise he's just inviting disaster.

"You deserve better than that asshole Steve, you don't need to be with him" Jonathan says as he gets a look of disgust on his face while patting at Steve's thigh absently and Steve can't help but roll his eyes as he swats his hand away.

"Yes thank you, I know how much you don't like Billy but can you stop with that shit please?" he asks because it's getting really old and Jon seriously doesn't know what he's talking about.

"I'm serious, I bet he treats you great behind closed doors but- but why does it have to be in private?" Jon asks as he gets a far off look on his face.

"Why does he always gotta act like an ass in public?" he continues on to say as Steve frowns at him.

"I get that it's delicate but he goes out of his way to make you feel bad"

"He doesn't always make me feel bad" Steve says with a frown.

"What about that waitress? He just flirts with anyone and that's not fair to you" Jon says after he downs the rest of his beer.

"That was just him being a jerk, he didn't mean it" Steve assures him even though it's still not any of
his business.

"You make excuses for him" Jon says as he goes to grab another beer on wobbly feet.

Maybe it's time to cut him off.

"I really don't but thank you for your input" Steve says as Jon sits back down as he plucks the beer from his hands before he can open it.

Jon flails and looks to be getting pissed off as he huffs in frustration.

"He's bad news and that juvenile criminal record from Cali proves he'll always be- he's never going to change" Jon says as Steve looks at him like he's grown two heads.

"I'm sorry hold up- you got a hold of his criminal record?!" He asks in disbelief.

The fuck?

"Wasn't hard, buttered Hopp up and got him distracted using Nance" he says with a shrug.

"You illegally looked up his record and Nancy helped?!!" Steve exclaims, quickly becoming increasingly more upset.

"Nancy doesn't know, she'd have scolded me about privacy and stuff" he says with an absent wave of his hand.

"The fuck is wrong with you?!!"

"I'm protecting you!" Jon yells out as they glare each other down.

"No, you've crossed a line just like when you took those pictures of Nancy!" Steve says as he stands up to point a finger at him.

"That's different, that - it was wrong but Billy-

"Look, I get that from the outside it looks bad, he's done some fucked up shit but you don't know him" Steve says as he runs a hand through his hair.

"There was a potential murder charge and he got off because he's a juvenile. The guy died by car crash but he killed him I know he did" Jon says with conviction.

This is too much, who the fuck does Jonathan think he is making these kinds of claims?

"You two think about each other way too much, maybe I should just hook the two of you up instead" Steve says jokingly but apparently that's the wrong thing to say as Jon's expression turns murderous as he whips his head up so they're locking eyes.

Jon gets up, reaches over gracelessly to grab Steve's beer probably because it's open except he hits the lamp that's on the side table and it falls onto the carpet.

Apparently it's the most delicate lamp ever because it falls onto its side wrong and breaks apart into large chunks of porcelain and the bulb shatters as a result of the impact.

"Damnit- Jonathan!" Steve yells out as he puts a hand over his face.

Now he'll need to pay Alex back for breaking his damn lamp.
Jon doesn't seem to care or doesn't notice because he just starts drinking from his beer can, downing a large majority of it.

After that he uses his free hand and grabs Steve's arm tight like he's about to tell him something important as his jaw clenches like he's trying to find the right words.

Steve leans away, not really sure what's happening all of a sudden, he's never dealt with this side of Jonathan before.

"He's going to kill you one day or he'll at least be responsible for you dying" he says, tone dark as Steve tries to pull his arm away except Jon is way fucking stronger than he looks as he holds fast.

"I saw- I saw it when he was choking the life out of you, you let him" Jon says and Steve suddenly feels impossibly angry as he wrenches his arm out of Jonathan's grasp.

He's about to beat the shit out of Jon.

"I'm getting real tired of you opening your mouth about things you don't understand. That was not Billy, it was the Mind Flayer you fucking prick" Steve hisses out.

"Who fucking cares, he's unhinged and he tortured a man to death aside from everything else he's done in his shit life!" Jon yells out as he flails the beer around and almost tips it over but Steve goes to grab it before it can get onto the carpet.

He's pretty sure Alex wouldn't appreciate that very much on top of having a broken fucking lamp.

"Alright enough drinking for you, let's go" Steve says, wanting very much for this conversation to end because Jonathan is just an idiot.

"No- no I'm telling you he's no good and you won't- you never listen, nobody ever fucking listens" Jonathan hisses out as Steve ignores him and grabs him by his arm to move him toward the guest room except Jonathan suddenly grabs him by his shirt instead.

Jon starts backing him up and the back of his knees hit the couch, forcing him to sit down and all of Jonathan's body weight is on him from where he's gripping at his shirt and pushing against his chest.

Steve doesn't generally feel claustrophobic but right now he certainly does and suddenly he's feeling caged in and it's really fucking uncomfortable as he grabs at Jon's wrists while glaring him down.

"Jon-" he goes to say as Jonathan shakes his head violently and starts shaking him.

"Nance and I we- we take care of you, we care for you and give a shit about- about what happens to you and she's stupid because she likes him and you're wrong, you're both wrong" Jonathan starts to say and Steve starts trying to push Jonathan off of him.

Instead Jonathan's hands come up to grip at his face with both hands and Steve's own hands are just up in the air as he gapes in disbelief.

What in the fucking shit is happening right now?!

"Jonathan stop-" Steve starts to say as he feels his own fear skyrocket, he goes back to gripping Jon's wrists as he tries to turn his face away.

Jon is off his god damn rocker and this is the last time Steve ever gets him drunk off his ass.

It's only about three or four, why did he think this was a good idea?!
"Guys like him-" Jon starts to say and Steve has honestly heard enough of this shit as he brings his foot up, putting it flat to Jon's stomach as he pushes hard with no tact or finesse.

It's an automatic reaction more than anything because this is becoming way too much, way too fast.

Jonathan stumbles backwards, losing his grip as he falls flat on his ass as he somehow manages to knock over everything that had been on the coffee table on his way down as it all falls onto the carpet.

Steve groans as he puts his hands in his face before he hauls Jon up and starts dragging him down the hallway and Jon can't seem to right himself completely anymore from how disoriented he's become.

When Steve gets to the guest room he essentially throws Jon onto the bed and he's so fucking pissed right now he can barely think straight.

"Go the fuck to sleep, sleep this shit off and apologize to me when you're sober you insane fucking psychopath" Steve hisses out to him and before Jon can get up he walks out the door and slams it shut.

The fuck is wrong with him?!

Steve tries to remind himself Jon is drunk and not in his right mind but even sober he tends to try and rip into Billy any chance he gets.

Not only that but Jon had grabbed his face and he'd seen the look in Jonathan's eyes for a split second, had seen how his eyes had moved down to his lips for a moment and that's ultimately what made Steve panic and freak the fuck out.

Maybe he's looking into it too deep.

Also people do seriously stupid shit when they're drunk, his escapades with Nancy had proven that to him before and he knows people are capable of crazy shit with a bit of liquid courage, he does stupid shit too when he's drunk.

Fuck.

Steve stares at the living room that looks a lot like there was an actual fist fight and he's seriously glad he had Jonathan pick up cleaning supplies now as he stomps into the kitchen.

He's starting to wish he had punched Jonathan at this point as he sighs.

There's only one thought that clouds his mind.

Billy can never know this happened, he'll fucking murder Jonathan.

Chapter End Notes

Come on ya'll, you can't honestly think I was going to make it all THAT simple and easy for the boys?
Jonathan has been a growing side plot for quite a while so I figured it was finally time to address it once more.

Ugh, doesn't he know they have more important shit to worry about?!

Silly Jon.
So Jury Duty was today.

I was due at 7:30am and I got a lot of writing done.

I didn't finally get released until nearly Noon and that was due to the fact that when we finally got pulled into a court room we didn't have to be selected for Jury because it WAS going to be for a murder trial.

A murder trial that would have been about 2 weeks long.

Thank.

God.

The man pled guilty while we all waited to go inside the court room.

I think my life is finally calming back down and I can finally get back into my usual routine but knock on wood, I don't want to jinx anything!

"Are you alright?" Max asks him when they're in his camaro together and he's on his way from school to drop her at Wheelers.

Billy taps his finger on the wheel thoughtfully.

It's kind of a loaded question with a loaded answer.

"Dunno Max, I take it all a day at a time" he says honestly.

"Oh, yeah me too" she says as he glances at her and sighs.

"You holdin' up alright? Anyone giving you trouble?" He asks her as she rolls her eyes.

"I'm good Billy, you don't always need to be looking for a fight" she tells him but that sorta logic doesn't compute for him.

"Well just let me know and if Sinclair pisses you off I'm your guy" he offers because he feels like he needs to make that known.

"I will not be sicking you on someone like you're my guard dog" she says as she shakes her head.

"Woof" he barks out as he turns to her with a toothy grin, causing her to throw her hands up in exasperation.

"I'm serious Billy, is everything okay?" She asks once more seeing through his diversionary tactic completely.
She's too smart for her own good.

"You were right about the Steve thing" he tells her reluctantly.

"Oh- shit Billy I'm sorry" she says sounding genuinely apologetic.

"Nah it's my own fault and we- we're working it out" he says as he runs a hand through his hair.

He can tell Max is surprised at how candid he's being but he figures maybe it's time to actually start building something back up with her.

After everything they've been through together it's only fair he let's down some of his walls around her of all people.

"That's good though right?" She asks like she's walking on eggshells around him.

Which is his own fault as well, after their last conversation he can see why she'd be coming into this one with trepidation.

"Yeah, I've got- look I know the past few years have been rough for you and I made them worse" he says as he takes a deep breath.

"I've blamed you for shit that was never your fault and done things I shouldn't have and I won't say sorry because I know it means jack shit" he admits, wondering where his sudden courage is coming from.

"But I will say I know what I did wrong and I'm not asking you to forgive me, I don't think you should but I'm going to try and be better from now on" he continues to say as she looks at him like he's grown two heads.

"Billy I-" she says as she gapes at him like a fish looking utterly speechless.

"Damn, thanks I guess" she says and he can still sense the suspicion in her voice.

"Max I- I don't wanna be like him, I can't let myself be like he was anymore" he says as he grips the steering wheel tight.

"I- I understand, sometimes I feel like I do it too and it scares me" she says as she puts her arms around herself.

"Why don't we make a pact, if either one of us starts being like Neil we call each other out?" He says, mostly as a peace offering.

Max actually smiles at that as she turns her head and nods.

"You've got a deal, we gotta shake on it though" she says as she spits into her hand and holds it out.

"Yeah alright" Billy says with a shrug as he spits into his, holding it out to take her hand as they shake on it, solidifying the deal.

For once Billy feels like he's making progress but he still sees how wary she is of him even now. He doesn't blame her.
When they make it to the Wheeler house Nancy answers the door and he's kind of glad for it.
Karen is always all over him when she catches wind of him being nearby and it drives Steve crazy.
Not that it's any of Steve's business now.
Still, he has no intention of being with anyone else, still sees Steve as his be all, end all.

How had it come to this?

When had that happened?

Max runs inside and Billy lights a cigarette as Nancy says her hellos.
"Billy, my mom isn't here unfortunately for you" she says when it's just them and her tone is amused.
"Haha, very funny Wheeler. How is your ugly ass related to her again?" He says to ruffle her feathers as she rolls her eyes.
"Don't you have something to do?" She says as she glares at him.
"Don't you have a boyfriend you should be tying up and making your bitch?" Billy says as he blows smoke out of his mouth, projecting it towards her as she waves her hand in disgust.
Her demeanor changes and suddenly there's genuine anger on her face as she just looks at him in a way that indicates her ire isn't towards him.
If anything she's looking through him.
"Oh shit, you two fighting? What'd our Jonny boy do now?" He teases as her lips purse.
"Steve asked me the same thing. I feel like that says something that we all know Jon is the one at fault" she huffs out as he raises a brow at her.
"Steve?" Billy asks in confusion.
"He called earlier looking for him" she says, leaning against the door frame.
"What, why?"
"Steve needed some things from the store" she says simply.
"He couldn't have asked me?" Billy questions as he takes a long drag from his cigarette, hissing as he lets it out.
"You're being watched Billy, pretty counterproductive" she informs him which okay, that's fair.
"Whatever, just don't let my sister get into trouble" he says as he turns around, not waiting for a response.
She clearly has nothing left to say because he hears the door close firmly behind him as he puts out
his cigarette and throws it onto their lawn.

The more he thinks about it the more he fucking hates it and it's when he's back in his car that he sits there for a moment and just stares.

Stupid fucking Jonathan.

A Jonathan that's fighting with Nancy, all alone with Steve, going out of his way to be 'helpful'.

Yeah fucking right.

Billy doesn't buy it, if there's one person on this shit planet he doesn't trust it's Jonathan motherfucking Byer's and he wouldn't put it past the guy to take advantage of the situation in whatever creepy little way he deems fit.

What a nice little coincidence that he just so happens to be broken up with Steve right now and here Jonny boy comes to swoop in and save the day.

Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit.

Billy should be on his way back to his own house right now meeting with Alex but he needs-

He needs to alleviate his own worries, just pop in real quick and make sure nothing is happening and maybe nothing is happening.

Unlikely.

He'd tried underestimating Jon once before and he'd gotten a nail in his damn leg for it.

Not much thought is put into it as he breathes out and closes his eyes, latching onto that part of Steve inside of himself as he pulls.

Alex can wait, Susan is home and can entertain the guy for a while.

When Billy opens his eyes he's staring at what looks like the scene of a fucking crime.

There's a tacky lamp knocked over and broken into pieces and beer cans on the side tables, a few are on the floor along with a bunch of other shit that looks like it got knocked over from the coffee table.

Billy's blood runs cold and about several different scenarios play out in his head, none of which are good as he sees Steve coming out of the kitchen with a bag and some cleaning supplies looking positively pissed.

He doesn't even get to say anything as Steve spots him, eyes widening as they dart towards what's probably the hallway and he looks like he's been spooked as he puts a hand to his chest.

"Billy what- shouldn't you be with Alex right now?!!" He hisses angrily like Billy has somehow done something wrong.

Oh hell no.

"Oh I'm sorry, have I interrupted something?" He says back, matching his tone.

"Don't change the subject, why are you here?" Steve asks.
“No particular reason, just thought I'd pop in” Billy tells him, faking nonchalance.

"It has only been like- two hours since you last 'popped' in" Steve says in air quotes, almost dropping the spray bottle in his right hand.

"You got a fuckin' problem with that?” Billy asks as he takes a step closer searching his face because something doesn't feel right.

His body language is off and he's already on the defensive for no reason.

"Don't keep Alex waiting" Steve huffs out, ignoring his question completely as he goes to pick things up, throwing them into the bag like they've personally offended him.

Someone is giving in a little too easily and clearly trying to get rid of him.

Over my dead fucking body.

"Mm, you get drunk and stumble around by yourself or did you have company to help you trash this place?” Billy asks knowing full well Jonathan is either here or was here.

The scene laid out before him is a bit strange though like there had been some form of a struggle or possibly a fight.

Which is odd.

"Ok you know what, I'm done playing this game. How the fuck do you even know Jonathan is here right now?” Steve asks as Billy tilts his head.

“So he's still here, where you got him stashed away?” He asks, glad that they're past trying to dance around each other on the subject.

"I- so I may have gotten him drunk to attempt to make him feel better" Steve admits sheepishly.

"Because of the fight with Nancy” Billy states, knowing that's the only reason he'd be doing something like that when it's only the middle of the day.

"Because- yes, how do you even-? Nevermind" Steve says waving his hand in the air that has the bag in it as he hears it rustle loudly.

"Anyway, he got himself thrashed and got up and knocked a bunch of shit over so I dragged him into the guest room" Steve says with a sigh and a grimace as he looks over the damage that has been done.

"The guest room" Billy says plainly, feeling anger start to boil up inside of him like scalding hot water before it spills from a pot.

"The room you're staying in, the one you've been sleeping in?” Billy asks, trying to clarify.

"Yes Billy that's the one. I didn't fuck him and tuck him in all nice and snug if that's what you're implying” Steve says, a look of disgust on his face.

"Oh no of course not, any sex would have clearly happened out here. Always knew he liked it rough, was he any good?” Billy asks and he doesn't mean it.
Clearly there had been no fucking.

If anything Steve seems legitimately upset about something.

_Stupid piece of shit Jonathan._

The guy is always running his mouth and if it was enough to get sweet little Harrington worked up it must have been quite the show.

It just makes Billy want to throw Jon over a cliff or something, they'd been cool for a minute but he knew it wouldn't last, the _'for now'_ had been more than enough of an indicator that their beef wasn't going to end, merely go into a stalemate for the greater good.

Eventually Byers was going to slip up in some way.

Looks like today is that day.

"Fuck off" Steve hisses out with a roll of his eyes.

"Yeesh touchy, I mean obviously it's none of my business or anything since we're not together and all" Billy says, sounding bitter and he's not sure why.

Probably because of Jonathan if he's being honest.

It's hard enough trying to keep Steve's eyes solely on him, he doesn't need someone else trying to swoop in and take away his attention during their separation and he knows now is the prime opportunity, finds himself being even more on his toes than usual because of it.

Billy is aware it sounds childish but he can't help the crippling jealousy he feels especially when it involves the one single guy he begrudgingly feels threatened by.

Steve is too damn nice, has that damn guilt like he's mentioned before so he's more lenient with Jonathan than he would be with virtually _anyone else_ and Jon knows how to prey on that side of him.

Billy fucking _hates_ it.

Jonathan clearly knows this, Billy can't see how he wouldn't and if he doesn't he's a god damn liar.

"You done? Did you need something?" Steve asks as he starts tapping his foot impatiently.

__Wow, already.__

_Damn, he's actually upset._

"I dunno you tell me, what are you hiding?" Billy asks, knowing there's more to this story than what Steve has _barely_ told him.

"I'm not hiding anything" he tells him.

Steve is a shit liar, always has been and his tells are painfully obvious, he doesn't like to lie either so he ends up giving himself away regardless.

"Well, it feels like you are" Billy says trying not to come off too strong which isn't saying much considering he knows how domineering he can appear to be at times.
"Well, you're mistaken" Steve says as he stands his ground.

"Alright Harrington, show me the memory then" Billy demands as he crosses his arms over his chest while shooting him a smug smile.

Check.

"The sorry- what?" Steve asks like he has no idea what Billy is talking about.

"The harmless memory of Jonathan knocking shit over, I'd love to see it. It'll be fantastic blackmail" Billy says and he kind of means that actually.

"Don't be an ass, he's feeling vulnerable right now and capitalizing on that would be fucked up and you have somewhere to be" Steve tells him and if he hadn't been sure before...He's damn fucking certain now.

Whatever transpired here, Steve doesn't want him to see it and for some reason he feels pretty smug about it, about being able to read this shit like a book.

It's not like he wants to be right, doesn't enjoy the idea of Steve being caused some form of distress or harm or whatever the hell this was but it's still a pretty big ego boost.

"Oh so now we're defending him? Sweet, poor defenseless, sad little Jonny boy" Billy says trying to be as condescending as he possibly can.

"Billy-

"Nah, you're right how silly of me to assume the worst" he says, staring Steve in the eyes, trying to get his point across.

"Ok you know what? The two of you are fucking perfect for each other, you're both literally insane and I'm so fucking done" Steve says rather angrily.

"Oh now I'm the bad guy? I wasn't born yesterday sweetheart" Billy hisses out, teeth clenching.

Billy doesn't like the implications of that statement, doesn't know what that means in regards to Jonathan and it makes him come up with some awful ideas.

"The hell does that mean?" Steve asks as he goes to put the bag and spray bottle onto the coffee table.

"You're protecting him. What did he do?"

"Serious-

"No, I know I'm insane but Jon pissed you off? What'd he do that's going to make me kill him?" Billy can't help asking because he's pretty sure whatever happened has something to do with them. Or himself.

Jon would throw him under a bus in a heartbeat, try to turn Steve against him.

There's no doubt in his mind about that.

Even if it isn't something like that it doesn't matter if he hates Steve, doesn't matter if they're fighting, he'll fuck up anyone who tries to fuck with him.
"Jesus- we have more important things to worry about right now than this" Steve says as he runs a hand through his hair.

"Oh this, so now there's a this. I was under the impression that he just knocked some shit over" he says trying to pressure Steve into fessing up and caving in.

"Billy, go away"

"No"

"I'm not showing you the memory"

"Hey, it's no skin off my back if this plan falls apart because I ditched Alex" Billy tries for, knowing it's a dirty tactic but he really doesn't care right now.

"The plan is happening with or without you" Steve informs him which he had assumed anyway.

"Let's make a deal-" Billy says instead.

Steve groans as he puts his face in his hands like a petulant child as Billy ignores him.

"I'll play nice if you show me the memory" he offers up.

Steve crosses his arms over his chest and becomes contemplative, like he's actually considering it and Billy had assumed he wouldn't even consider it in all honesty, he can be pretty rough to convince at times.

"You won't fight the plan, you won't do a damn thing to sabotage it if I show you the memory?" Steve clarifies.

He'd be giving up a lot but there are certainly ways around all of this if he can ultimately get his way.

"Yep, pinky promise" he says, holding his pinky up before putting it back down as Steve looks at him with obvious distrust.

"One condition"

Billy tilts his head in inquiry, waiting for him to continue.

"You stay the fuck away from Jonathan" Steve says with conviction.

"Wow, this should be good. You've got a deal" he tells him, becoming increasingly more curious about what really went down.

Again, Billy has other ways and he doesn't need to be near Jonathan to fucking kill him.

_________________________________________

Five minutes.

It had taken only five minutes for Billy to suddenly show up for the aftermath of his fight with Jonathan like he's some sort of omniscient being.
Honestly, Steve is still trying to figure out how Billy knows Jon is here.

He's still at a loss on that one.

There had been an inkling of a thought inside of his mind that told him he wouldn't be able to keep this from Billy but he hadn't expected it to be immediately after the events had transpired.

He still hasn't even given himself enough time to figure out what to say to Jonathan, hasn't fully comprehended what happened yet.

His life is suddenly like a shitty melodrama and it's so stupid.

As Steve watches Billy watch the memory it becomes even more increasingly uncomfortable as the whole thing starts to settle.

Billy's expression gives nothing away upon learning that Jonathan had looked up his criminal record, he still gives no indication of what he's feeling.

There had been no reaction.

Perhaps he's not surprised.

It's not until they get to the point that Jonathan pins him to the couch that Steve wishes he had just told Billy to fuck off and leave, had told him it's none of his business and put his foot down.

This isn't the first time that Billy has taken it upon himself to be as nosy as possible, to feel privy to information, feelings, or memories that he really has no right to having such an insight into.

It had been a big part of their sessions with Owen's, giving each other space and privacy.

Clearly that had all gone out the window, not that Steve is surprised because he knows Billy is clearly less inclined to be following any rules now that there's the loophole of them being broken up hanging over their heads.

Before all of this he'd had the decent excuse of them being together but now that they're not together there's no real excuse and in this particular situation it's in regards to Jonathan which is a known trigger for Billy.

The problem is the alternative is Billy confronting Jonathan and making the situation worse if Steve chooses to deny Billy and ignore him.

It'll just cause more issues and if Steve's attention isn't solely on Billy he'll lash out like an idiot.

They don't need that shit right now.

Jonathan pinning him down looks way more incriminating from the outside looking in.

It had felt more threatening than anything but from this 'angle' it's a bit more undeniably intimate
when Jon grabs his face and he can't help but grimace because if it were Billy.

If Steve were in his shoes right now he'd be *fucking livid.*

That finally gets a reaction though.

Billy's hand clenches slowly and his teeth grind together.

There's water pooling around their ankles but for the most part it's not rising and Billy seems to have himself well enough under control.

Steve doesn't need to turn around to know that the ocean is manifesting itself, looming behind them menacingly.

It's waiting for an excuse to lash out, *Billy* is waiting for an excuse to lash out.

Jonathan leans closer as 'Memory Steve' starts to turn his face away and Billy's knuckles are white but the water still doesn't rise.

Steve is honestly impressed, he usually doesn't show this much restraint.

'Memory Steve' brings up his feet and pushes Jonathan off.

There's an immediate drop to Billy's shoulders, his hand unclenches as he breathes out an audible sigh of relief.

The tide pulls back in and Steve notices that the ocean fades away when he turns his head to glance behind himself.

After the rest of the memory plays out Steve pulls them both back out of the bond as they stand face to face and stare at each other and it's impressive how good Billy has gotten at this whole 'projection' thing.

Regardless it's time for the moment of truth.

Steve truly doesn't know what Billy is thinking or feeling and it feels like he's in the middle of a field of landmines so he chooses to wait him out instead, not wanting to set something off, to set *him* off in some way.

"I imagine you have questions" Billy says looking completely dejected.

Wait what?

Questions?

"Like- about your criminal record?" Steve asks, confused all of a sudden.
"Yes"

"Well I mean- yeah but that's for you to tell me when you're ready" Steve says because he figures that should be obvious.

"That's- it's not the same as my past with my mother, this is a different ball game entirely" Billy tells him.

"Uh, I don't understand what you mean" Steve says honestly, feeling like he's completely lost all of a sudden.

"You have a right to know about my criminal record, it's nothing good I can tell you that much" Billy informs him and he's not sure how this became the sudden topic of discussion.

"Obviously, it's your call and I'm not going to force you to talk about it" Steve lets him know.

It's really not important.

Well, it is.

Just...not right now.

He knows Billy isn't going to deliberately hide it from him, has always been forthcoming no matter how uncomfortable it has been.

Also Steve has seen some shit already, he's aware it's nothing good and he's pretty sure if he can handle watching Billy beat and torture a man to death he can handle whatever past he has buried deep within him.

Billy just stares at him, doesn't say anything and Steve can't help but sigh.

"Billy it's fine- we can talk about this later. Can you please go and talk to Alex now?" He asks of him, it's not a simple subject and they've already wasted too much time.

All of this is nothing in comparison to their current problems and he just wants this to be over, it can be addressed when this is all over, they can talk later.

"I don't like Jonathan being here while you're alone" Billy says, eyes going a dark blue-grey like an oncoming storm.

"Okay first of all I can handle Jonathan and second of all it's not actually any of your business" Steve finally says, getting impatient with all of this.

He'd already given Billy more than he should have, has shown him too much.

"I-"
"Seriously, you're lucky I even entertained showing you the memory" he tells him.

"We just saw the same thing right?" Billy asks, gesturing behind him frantically, obviously in regards to the memory they'd both just seen and Steve pinches the bridge of his nose.

This isn't a place he'd wanted to be pushed to because in the next moment he closes himself off, hardens his own expression for the sake of getting his point across.

"Billy, you are not my boyfriend"

"Yeah I fucking know" he says angrily, averting his gaze.

"Feels like you don't, it has nothing to do with you" Steve feels the need to remind him since it looks like he's just going to get defensive at this point.

"Alright Harrington, you've got me there" Billy says with a shrug, expression now clearly that of begrudging acceptance.

"This is a good opportunity for you to build some trust between us" Steve tells him.

It's easy, this situation can be used to keep Billy in check, extra incentive to make sure he doesn't fuck everything up.

"Sorry what?" Billy asks, not catching on just yet.

"You've promised me two things: no sabotage and staying away from Jonathan" Steve states, putting one finger up and then another in emphasis.

"Obviously I don't think you'll follow through on either one of those things but perhaps you'll prove me wrong" he says and he knows he's being unfair, unreasonable and a bit heartless, not taking Billy's own feelings into consideration on the whole thing but he can't give in to him.

There's just no option at this point, they've got a job to do.

"That's a bit manipulative" Billy says which is fair but it doesn't change the truth.

"So is promising something and lying about it" Steve retorts because no matter how inconsiderate he's being that's still a very real problem between them.

"God damn it, Steve" Billy hisses out, running a hand over his face.

"It's your life, do whatever you want but I don't trust you and I sure as fuck don't want to be with you if your word is going to continue to mean nothing" he lets him know and it sounds a lot like an ultimatum.

Steve actually finds himself feeling kind of bad for saying it but it's probably one of the few things he doesn't want to keep having to go through, it had gotten old really fast.

"Now if you don't mind I've got a mess to clean up as usual" Steve says, not letting Billy respond as he walks over to the coffee table and starts cleaning everything up, just wanting all of this to finally
be over.

When Steve turns his head back up Billy is gone wordlessly within the next instant and Steve feels the regret begin to settle deep inside of his stomach.

---

_Damnit._

His hands are tied and maybe Steve doesn't know he's gone checkmate, maybe he's not aware but he definitely knows that Billy is _not_ going to risk losing him.

_Conning little shit._

Somehow Billy had come out of that whole ordeal having lost completely and it _fucking sucks._

The worst part is that Steve's not wrong.

Billy has a lot to answer for still and their biggest problem has always been his word needing to mean something only for him to turn around and grind it into the dirt, disregarding Steve's feeling completely.

It's just yet another example of Billy dropping the ball and making Steve feel like he has to treat him like a child.

Even worse is that it's clear that Steve doesn't even view him as an ally, the look in his eyes is far too close to that look he'd always had when they had first met.

Steve _does not_ trust him.

It hurts, it really fucking hurts because _he_ should be the one Steve _views_ as his ally, _he_ should be the one Steve feels like he can run to but _he's not._

Billy is probably the absolute _last_ person on that list.

Steve shouldn't have to feel so alone in all of this, should be able to view the man he's bonded to as the _one person_ he can cling to when it all becomes _too much._

Billy feels over overwhelmed by it as he lets out a shaky breath and presses his forehead against the steering wheel.

The issue with Jonathan is-

Thinking about it makes Billy want to fucking smash something, makes him want to take Steve far away from here, from all of it and lock him away, makes him want to erase Jonathan from _existence._

The worst part is he understands Jonathan's point of view, he gets it, knows _why_ Jon did it.
It looks bad, Billy is a monster and always has been.

The thing is that he has Steve and he knows Steve will always keep him straight and-

That's the point.

The point is that Steve shouldn't have to be the one to keep him right.

Billy should be the one doing that himself, taking it upon himself to be better instead of throwing all of that onto Steve.

He can't lose him.

That's not an option.

For once in Billy's pathetic life he has something worth keeping, worth fighting for and he'll be damned if he lets himself get in the way of that or Jonathan fucking Byer's.

Steve can take care of himself and right now he needs Billy to be his ally and he needs to allow him space and not be his usual overbearing self.

Right now it's Billy's job to show Steve that he can be trusted, that they can build something and start at the bottom again, give themselves a bit more of a stable foundation instead of the shaky one they'd been standing on for so long.

It's not easy, everything Billy has learned, has been taught, has taught himself is screaming at him, warring against him.

The voice in his head is telling him to drive to Alex's house and rip Jonathan out of that fucking bed, beat the ever living shit out of him for putting Steve into this position.

Billy wants to show Jonathan that Steve is his and only his.

No one else.

MineMineMine.
Except he's not, Steve is not his and he is not Steve's and it's so stupid and cheesy.

It's corny even and nothing that Billy is used to but he needs to get used to it, knows it's the truth.

If he can't allow himself to get used to it he will lose Steve, they'll be at opposite ends of a spectrum and he will never get him back.

Billy steels himself as he starts his car back up and drives towards his house where Alex is waiting.

He'll show them, he'll show all of them that he doesn't need to be defined by his past, doesn't need to be like his father.

Mostly he wants to show himself he's capable of being more, of rising above his shitty past, of learning from his mistakes.

Billy is the one that is in control of his darkness, doesn't want it to control him anymore.

He's done.

He's done letting his own fears and insecurities swallow him whole, of letting it all drown him and take everyone he's ever loved and cared about down with him as he thinks of poor Steve being shattered across his mind.

If he'd had more control it would have never happened, Steve wouldn't still wake up at night having nightmares about memories that aren't even his own.

It's not fair that Steve should have to suffer so much for him, to defend him when he doesn't ever deserve to be defended, to have Steve in his corner no matter what he does.

That's a heavy and overbearing responsibility to have, to be loved so unconditionally by another person that no matter what you do they will always love you.

That's not fair to Steve, not one bit to have taken advantage of that, to treat his love like it's something to be used and thrown around as if it isn't something precious to be held and protected at all costs.

Billy has taken Steve's love for granted for far too long.

No more.

Chapter End Notes

Aw man I actually had the full outline of this chapter done, I'd written it a bit differently
than any of the other chapters I've done.

I knew all of the dialogue I wanted so I wrote dialogue first and filled in the blanks, fleshed it out and added more substance to it.

I just can't bring myself to believe that I can only address Billy 'Agreeing' to things and making definitive decisions about changing in a single chapter, I've been trying to build it up over time and make it realistic.

We are all imperfect and while he's clearly resolved more than he had been before he is still our Billy and he's still going to struggle.

I also enjoy writing this sudden switch in dynamic where Billy is clearly trying and working to make himself better and if we're being honest Steve is really being annoying.

I understand punishing someone but I feel like he's just being an asshole at this point but I also know why he's being an asshole.

As a reader I'm just like "UGH SHUT UP AND GET BACK TOGETHER" but as the writer I'm rubbing my hands together and cackling maniacally.

;D
Steve turns his head as he hears movement coming from the hallway. He'd heard Jonathan get up and start a shower for himself about twenty minutes ago and now that he's seen him the guy looks like drenched shit but he seems to have slept most of it off. Probably threw a bit of it up too if he was smart. "Hey" Jon says as he wobbles into the now spotless living room as he sits down on the couch next to him. Steve is ready to punch something if this is another instance of someone forgetting everything they've said while drunk. If that's the case he worries for both Jon and Nancy. So, he says nothing. Doesn't respond. Jonathan looks uncomfortable upon hearing complete silence as Steve ignores him. "Look, I don't take back what I said but I'm sorry I crossed a line" Jonathan finally says. "A line?" Steve says after barking out a laugh. "Try multiple lines, many of them were crossed" he informs him. "I- the only thing I want is for you to stop being so blind" Jon says as he lets out a shaky breath. "To what?" Steve asks angrily as he rests his elbow on the arm of the couch, propping his head up using his hand as he watches Jonathan warily.
"To Billy and the signs he exhibits" Jon says like he's already said this before and is upset that he needs to explain it again.

"What exactly are you afraid of from him?" Steve asks, really wanting to get into Jon's mind about all of this.

"I'm afraid he's going to kill you"

"He won't" Steve assures him.

"You don't know that, one day he could fly off the handle and you end up being the collateral damage" Jon says.

"I'm bonded to him and he has never wrongfully put his hands on me ever since that moment" Steve tells him.

Truly, that's just honesty.

If anything Steve had punched Billy that one time before their first kiss because he had thought the amnesia had been Billy's fault.

The regret and guilt he's been feeling lately swirls around in his gut even more upon that thought.

It's agonizing not being able to touch Billy, to not be able to tell him how much he loves him, to be unable to tell him how proud he is and just feel his arms around him again.

Instead he's stuck being the bad guy, the asshole, the heartless piece of shit that says such awful things to him and he's starting to hate it, it's starting to get to him.

All he wants to do is find Billy, leave this house and kiss his face all over, be surrounded in his scent, run his hands through Billy's hair, listen to him talk, tell him how much he appreciates how hard he's been working to make things better because he knows it, has seen it already.

Billy is actually trying.

The fact that things had gone off so well with this whole Jonathan shiftest is still a bit shocking. Billy had handled it so much better than Steve thought he ever would.

It's refreshing.

Billy had told him he'd suffer for as long as Steve allots it but he *doesn't want him to suffer*, doesn't want to keep getting on his ass like a damn nag and tell him what he needs to do for them to be together again.
It feels...he doesn't like it.

Who is Steve to act so damn self righteous like he knows Billy will just always be there, will always want to be with him?

What if-

What if he's just pushing Billy away?

What if Billy finally gets tired of him?

What if he gets tired of waiting, of doing so much to please him that he finally realizes he's not worth it?

Steve isn't worth all of this trouble he puts Billy through, it's-

He's doing that thing he does again, his thoughts are spiraling out of control and he *always* does this, *always* ends up becoming insecure at some point and he hates it, hates this about himself.

There's only so much a person can take before they snap though in regards to Billy but he knows he's being unreasonable.

Billy loves him, they love each other and no matter what happens they'll work things out and learn to co-exist with one another in some facet.

*Shut up, stop being an idiot.*

He tells himself, trying to will the fear and insecurity away as he puts it out of his mind for now.

Except he knows himself too well.

The seed has been planted but he can't think about that right now, has no choice but to ignore it.

There's more important things to worry about.

Like this dumbass sitting next to him.
"One day he'll snap, he'll put his hands on you and hurt you because that's just who he is" Jonathan says and this guy is seriously so far into his own mind it's pissing him off.

"Alright you know what?" Steve finally says, getting tired of explaining things to Jon because every single time he has tried it has not mattered, he refuses to see any side other than his own.

"What?" Jonathan says, brows furrowing.

"Get out"

"I- what?" Jon says, blinking in surprise.

"Get. Out." he says once more, with more conviction.

"You're still not listening-" Jon starts to say as Steve puts his hand up to stop him before he can start that shit again.

"I don't really know you like that for you to be trying to give me love advice Jonathan. I care about you, don't get me wrong but you have no right to my personal life" he says, trying to make this as clear as possible.

Jonathan just stares at him like there are multiple thoughts swirling in his head as his jaw clenches.

"If you care about me you won't get back together with him" Jonathan finally says and Steve blinks a few times before breaking out into hysterical laughter.

"What I choose to do or not do is my fucking choice" Steve says as he rubs a hand over his face.

"Just- before you let yourself get emotional please be rational for once, don't make rash decisions" Jonathan says pleadingly.

"You don't know me well enough to be saying this shit Jonathan, you don't see me interfering with your relationship with Nancy" Steve says as he adjusts himself on the couch so his arms are across his chest.

"Billy is a cold blooded killer, he's hot headed and if you didn't have this bond it never would have worked, things would have never gotten as far as they have" Jonathan says as he shakes his head in what looks to be frustration.

"He's changing, he's becoming better and he's actually attempting to-" Steve starts to say.

"The problems that Billy has cannot be fixed through willpower alone, he needs professional help and even then I don't think he's ever going to be fixable" Jonathan says flippantly.

Steve has had enough as he bolts up off the couch and hauls Jonathan off of it to slam him against the wall.

"Who do you think you are to talk about him like you know him?" Steve hisses out at him, getting up close and personal.
"You don't know what he's been through. Who are you to talk? You've done some fucked up shit and you are just as broken, try looking in a fucking mirror for once Jonathan" he goes on to say as he pulls Jon forward to slam him into the wall again.

"I don't get pleasure from killing people. If you want to keep wearing your rose colored glasses be my guest, you can't say I didn't try though" Jonathan grunts out and there's no fight in him, he's just standing there like a wet rag doll.

He looks dejected more than anything.

Steve steps away and wants nothing more than to just punch Jon in his stupid fucking face but he knows that's not productive, there's no point.

"I'll be the judge of my own life and I appreciate the concern but you need to stay in your own corner and fuck right off" Steve tells him as he steps away to cross his arms over his chest defiantly.

"Just- if it becomes too much, if he does something- don't hesitate to come to me alright?" Jonathan says and it's the first genuine emotion he's seen cross over Jonathan's face since this conversation had even started.

"Do you- Jonathan I need you to be honest with me right now alright?" Steve asks as he steps closer, letting his hands rest down at his sides and Jonathan suddenly looks wary.

"Okay?"

"Do you have feelings for me?" he asks, and he hadn't wanted to bring it up or address it at all but there's just- in the back of his mind it's a lingering question.

Jonathan physically startles as he suddenly looks angry.

"I'm with Nancy" he says with conviction.

"You literally didn't even answer my question just now" Steve says as he pinches the bridge of his nose.

"I care about you" Jonathan says instead.

"I care about you too but I don't pin you to a couch and grab your face" Steve says as he raises a brow and he actually sees Jonathan flush and avert his gaze.

"I was drunk" he says which alright, that's fair.

"You're sure?" Steve asks, wanting to be absolutely certain.

"I'm sure" Jonathan says but there's something in his eyes, something that Steve can't quite place.

"Seriously Steve, I'm here if you need me and so is Nancy- don't be afraid to ask us for help if it becomes too much"

*If he becomes too much.*

Steve hears unspoken between them.

"I can handle Billy, don't worry"
When Jonathan gets into his car he can’t help but stare off into space.

_Fuck._

He'd lied.

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure"

_I'm sure that I was drunk._

He had thought in his head to himself.

It's not like he'd had any intentions to do anything other than try to get Steve to listen, he hadn't been trying to force himself onto Steve sexually but he knows that's probably what it looked like.

All he wanted to know was that Steve was _paying attention_ and he'd gone about it _all wrong._

His hands had moved without him thinking, the drunken haze had clouded his mind and his judgement.

The problem is that he _does_ have feelings for Steve, has come to give a shit about what happens to him and it hadn't really hit him until Lake Michigan.

He'd seen Steve's motionless body being held by Billy and pulled him away, had tried to breathe life back into him after seeing Billy try to choke the life _out._

Jonathan had been certain that Billy had succeeded.

Mind Flayer or not he can't get the image out of his head of Billy trying to kill Steve, it's forever inside of his mind like a cancer, he was certain that the last thing he'd see before he died was going to be of Billy killing Steve.

_Don't die, don't die, don't die._

He still has nightmares about it that he tells Nancy about as she soothes him back to sleep sometimes, they soothe each other.

"I get them too" _she had told him._
It gets him so angry that Billy had just sat there like a fucking basket case doing nothing.

Billy clearly can't take care of Steve the way that he can, the way that Nancy can and he's just not fit for it, he's too unstable as a person.

Jonathan hates to think about what would have happened if they hadn't been there, if Lee and his men hadn't shown up to bring Steve back.

He hadn't even been able to bring him back and it kills him, it fucking kills him inside.

Steve had been dead, his skin had been cold and clammy and his lips had been firm when he'd been pressing his own to them to get some air into his lungs uselessly.

They'd turned a pale purple and it's-

It's too much.

Jonathan imagines it sometimes, thinks about what his lips would feel like now that there's life to them but he doesn't let himself think about it too much, he loves Nancy.

He's not gay.

It's only because he'd seen Steve dead, held his body in his arms and it had been awful.

That's why he thinks about it.

It had been a traumatic experience and perhaps that's how his mind had rationalized the whole situation.

Jonathan hasn't actually ever wanted to fuck Steve or be fucked by him, the idea of it twists in his gut and he feels disgusted by the thought of it.

He's dreamed of it but that doesn't mean anything, he's had wet dreams about teachers and random strangers, people he knows plenty of times before but it doesn't mean he'd actually fuck them.

It's the same thing with Steve, he doesn't actually want to be with him, doesn't want to do anything with him sexually.

That's never going to happen.

He'd never do that to Nancy.

He does care about him though, he has feelings for him that he can't fully explain but it's not- it's not like that.

Mostly he sees Lonnie whenever he looks at Billy.

All he sees is Lonnie and his mother when he looks at them.

Steve and Billy are doomed and Billy is going to be that asshole living in a trailer caring only about
himself five to ten years from now.

Lonnie is a sick man, enjoys inflicting pain onto others, called Will a fag and had done things-

He doesn't think about it, doesn't let himself think about it because it's-

Honestly, he's still never fully dealt with the things Lonnie had done to him when he'd been a child and he's glad Will had never been subjected to it, he's glad his mom had pulled them out of there before it ever could start happening to him.

After a certain age he'd stood up to Lonnie and he remembers the day well.

He remembers watching some kid show that had told him to say no to bullies and tell a parent and his young mind had taken that to heart as he'd felt the first tickle of resolve settle into him.

Even if Lonnie was going to kill him for it he was going to stand up to him, it had been better than the alternative in his mind.

He couldn't tell his mom but he could say no, could try to fight back.

That night when Lonnie had come into his room like many times before he'd told him to stop, threatened to tell his mom what was going on.

It's the first time he'd ever stood up to Lonnie and for some reason he had respected it.

Perhaps he'd merely lost interest because Jonathan had become too old, maybe it's a combination of things.

Sick fuck.

"Damn, my little boy's all grown up"

"Let's make a deal, I'll stop if you promise not to tell your mom"

"You can't touch Will either"

"Yeah alright kid, fair enough"

He'd have killed Lonnie if that ever happened and maybe the guy could see it in his eyes or something in that moment that he was not fucking around.

Or maybe Lonnie was afraid of someone finding out and it finally spooked him into keeping his fucking hands to himself.

Honestly he might still kill Lonnie one day and not only for the things he's experienced but for everything else as well.

It helps not having to see the guy though.
His mother still doesn't know, probably won't ever know and with everything that has happened to Will he doesn't want to trouble his mom with it, his problems are nothing compared to what his little brother has gone through.

Also he feels disgusted with himself at anyone knowing.

Nancy knows, has told him to get help and she's been perfect and understanding through all of it no matter what.

Whenever things become too much she's so gentle with him, just gives him space or comfort, whatever he needs.

Eventually though it became too much, he's been feeling insecure lately, like he's not enough.

Nancy deserves someone who can give her what she needs, someone who isn't broken and has to stop in the middle of making love because it's too much at times, that's not fair to her.

Yet she never makes him feel bad for it, looks at him like she's just falling deeper in love and it's- that's too much sometimes too.

She doesn't let him pull away and hide like he usually does, she's always there pulling him back out and it's nice to have someone like that in his life for once.

She's truly his best friend, his constant and he would do anything for her.

His fight with Nancy had just made him- he's just being stupid.

The only thing he wants to do right now is see Nancy, see her face and tell her he's sorry and that he'll make it right, whatever it takes he can make things right between them again.

He resolves to drive straight to the Wheeler house and beg on his hands and knees if he has to as he starts his car and drives off.

"Billy, are you alright?" Susan asks him the moment he walks through the door.

"Sorry, I had something to take care of" he says to her as he throws his keys into the jar by the door.

"Well- alright I'll be going out since I know you both wanted to talk privately, I'll grab Max so don't worry about that" she tells him.

"It's fine, I can grab her" he offers.

"You're sure?" She asks, surprise evident in her tone.
"Just enjoy yourself Susan, I've got it" he says.

The older woman has done so much for him already, she could have kicked him out but she hasn't, she's good to him and it boggles his mind.

Neil is dead so she certainly doesn't need to keep him around like dead weight, he can manage elsewhere but she just keeps telling him he can stay as long as he'd like.

It's only fair he returns the favor.

"Oh- well thank you Billy that means a lot" she says, shock settling in before she turns to say goodbye to Alex who is watching the whole exchange with what looks like amusement.

When Susan leaves Billy turns to look at him, waiting for this shit to begin.

"Wow, someone is being quite the boy scout today" Alex says, bright smile on his face.

"Fuck off" Billy tells him as he rolls his eyes and goes to sit across from him in the living room.

"What crawled up your ass and died?" Alex asks, wagging his brows like he wants the juicy details. This guy is way too intuitive, it's creepy.

"Can we just get this over with?" Billy asks, avoiding the question completely.

"Steve told me you'd be difficult" Alex says with a shrug and a sigh as he stretches himself out on the couch.

Is this guy twelve?

"I'm not- I won't fight you on it I'm just-" he says stupidly, trying to remember that he made a promise to Steve.

"Billy, it's fine. You're allowed to voice your thoughts and if there's something less risky we can do let me know" Alex tells him and it sounds genuine.

But...

"How do I know I can trust you?" He asks the older man, still not sure if this is a good idea.

"I figured you'd ask me that" Alex says as he pulls out a rock.

An ordinary ugly looking rock that looks like it was picked up from a playground that's a bit larger than a quarter as he holds it out for Billy to take except he just looks from the rock to Alex and back again.

"Is this another joke like the pocket watch thing?" he asks, not wanting to fall for that shit again.

"No actually but that would be hilarious" Alex says as he chuckles, pushing the rock closer to him as it starts to change color into a crystal blue.

"It's a rock though" he says tilting his head as he watches it change.

Okay, rocks don't do that.

"An enchanted rock" Alex says excitedly like it's full of magic and wonder or some shit.
"What does it do?" Billy asks, entertaining this dumb shit in case he's actually telling the truth.

"It finds the truth"

"Wait really?" Billy asks incredulously except he'd just seen it change before his very eyes so it must be true.

"Yep, hold it in your palm and say a statement or something, factual or untrue" Alex says as Billy finally takes it into his own hand and it changes back into an ugly normal rock in the palm of his hand.

"Like what?" Billy asks, suddenly unsure of what to do or say.

"Something that you know is a lie"

"Seriously?" Billy asks with a grimace as he looks at him.

"Yes, if you don't do it yourself you won't believe me" the older man tells him which is true, he's gotta do it for himself.

"I don't know-" he says, still unsure.

"Try saying I don't love Steve Harrington" Alex says, holding his finger up as his smile becomes mischievous.

"You're an asshole" Billy tells him as he glares at the man across from him, wanting to throw the rock straight at his face all of a sudden.

"Truly, try saying it and see what happens"

"This is stupid"

Alex just looks at him like they're not going anywhere until Billy does this as he groans out in frustration and watches the rock like a hawk, not wanting to miss anything.

"Ugh fine"

"I don't love Steve"

The rock changes in his hand from an earthy grey-brown and crystallizes, becoming transparent and clear instead of the clear blue from before when Alex had been holding it.
"When it becomes a clear crystal it means you're lying" Alex informs him which seems pretty obvious as he gives him a look he hopes indicates 'No way, really?' with as much attitude and sarcasm as he can muster.

"Why?" he asks.

"Why does it become clear you mean?" Alex clarifies.

Billy nods, it could have been anything else but instead it had gone clear which is an interesting choice.

"I asked her that too and she said it's symbolic" he says with a shrug like he's just as confused by it.

"Symbolic how?"

"She said 'it's the stone showing you a reflection of yourself, it's telling you to look in the mirror and try again'" Alex says like he's probably had that conversation more than once.

"So the stone wants you to see a reflection of yourself when you lie" Billy asks as he places the rock down on the table between them as it goes back to normal.

"Because at the end of the day you're only lying to yourself, exactly" Alex says, looking impressed like he didn't realize Billy is capable of rubbing two brain cells together.

"Crystal blue, the one you saw when I was holding it is the color of truth" he tells him which seemed pretty obvious as Billy just gives him a look.

"Could just make it simple and go with grey and blue or red and green" Billy says with a shrug.

"I suggested red and green but she got upset and yelled at me and told me 'it's not a fucking traffic light Xander' after hitting me rather hard on my arm" Alex says as he chuckles lightly.

"Xander?" Billy asks in surprise.

"Oh- my full name is Alexander, some people call me Xander" he tells him which is-

Huh.

Interesting.

"Sounds fucking dumb" he says instead just to be an ass.

"Nobody is actually asking you but thank you for your sparkling input as per usual" the man says as he rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

"Oh did I hurt your feelings Xander?" Billy says, voice dripping with sarcasm now as he gives him his signature shit eating grin.

"Ew, it sounds weird when you say it" Alex says with a look of disgust on his face.

"Yeah, that felt gross" Billy says as he shakes like he's gotten a chill.

"Anyway, shall we get down to business?" Alex says as he drums his hands on the coffee table.

"Please, let's just do this and take your damn stone" Billy says as he picks it up and lobbs it at him as he catches it effortlessly.
This guy is just full of surprises.

"So, here's what I'm thinking" he says as he starts threading the rock between his fingers, face becoming serious.

It's a good plan.

Billy finds himself liking it more and more as it settles like a second skin and Alex had actually taken his concerns into mind and adjusted it to make him feel more comfortable.

The stone being there had helped a lot.

At least he knows he can trust Alex now, he'd even asked him if he has any ill intentions toward any of them and the stone had gone definitively blue.

It's nice to know they've actually got a guy like that in their corner, the guy is really starting to grow on him.

When Billy is done hashing out details with Alex and gets to the Wheeler house to pick up Max he sees Jonathan's car in the driveway.

Motherfucker.

He'd almost forgotten about all of that.

It's tempting, he's tempted to just drag him out of the house and beat the shit out of him, throw caution to the wind as he feels the jealousy rise up inside of him ugly and unforgiving.

Instead he does the next best thing.

When he's finally let inside the house by Nancy and is waiting by the door he sees Jonathan coming down the stairs.

"Byer's" he calls out and Jonathan stops mid step, going stalk still as they lock eyes.

"Hargrove" Jonathan responds as Nancy turns around to watch them. She'd been about to go grab Max.

"Give us a minute, come with me" Billy says as he looks over at Nancy, then back to Jonathan as he jerks his head at him then turns around to open the front door.

"Oh my god, what now?" Nancy hisses out, making him stop with his back turned to them.

"I'm not going to kill him Wheeler, don't worry" he says as he glances over his shoulder at them.

"Nance, it's fine" Jonathan reassures her.

So Jonny boy grew some balls, how nice.

He thinks to himself and when they get outside Billy lights a cigarette and stares Jonathan down with
as much indifference as he can muster.

"Thought we were cool Byer's" he says when he knows Jonathan is starting to feel uncomfortable.

"Sorry?" Jon says, eyes widening like he knows what Billy is talking about but doesn't want to assume.

"You go and get touchy with Steve and here I was thinking we didn't have a problem anymore" Billy says with a light, dark chuckle as he sniffs, looking at the cigarette in his hand and then back at Jonathan again.

"How do you- it wasn't like that" Jonathan says, getting defensive like Billy had been expecting him to do.

"I saw the memory for myself you dip shit, I'm bonded to him" he reminds the guy.

"Wha- without his fucking permission or something?" Jonathan asks and-

Why does Billy always gotta somehow be the bad guy?

Why does Jonathan always assume the absolute worst of him?

Well, he knows why but it's still really annoying.

"No- not without his fucking permission you- that's not even- I cut a deal with him" Billy says in frustration as he runs his free hand through his hair.

"A deal, when the hell did you find the time to cut a deal with Steve?" Jon asks, clearly not believing him.

"You wouldn't understand. Anyway I promised to stay the fuck away from you" Billy says, keeping it simple because he doesn't feel like explaining the ins and outs of his bond with this guy.

"You're doing a great job so far" Jonathan chides.

"We both know what he means when he says that" Billy says as he rolls his eyes after taking another large puff of his cigarette.

"Is this the part where you break that promise?" Jon asks, clearly preparing himself for a fight as Billy just laughs at him.

"I thought about it but then I realized something" Billy says as he throws the cigarette onto the ground and twists the heel of his shoe to put it out before stalking up to Jonathan so they can get nice and close to one another.

He's inches from Jonathan's face who seems totally unaffected.

For now.
"What's that?" Jon asks, all big and bad.

"Who the fuck are you?" Billy asks, looking him up and down.

"Huh?" Jon asks, suddenly confused.

"Seriously, who the fuck are you to think you hold some sort of importance in Steve's life?" Billy asks him, tone amused and he sees Jon take a step back.

"Wha- go fuck yourself" he says as he just glares, getting a bit of distance between them.

Pussy.

"Of people Steve would go out of his way for you are probably pretty low on that list, nearly at the bottom actually, closer to his shit father" Billy informs him, wants to make sure Jonathan knows where he stands, wants to dig it in deep.

"All of those kids certainly beat you out" he goes on to say and Jonathan just starts to gape at him.

"Hopper may actually be lower, I'll give you that one, you probably beat him out" Billy says with a shrug as he puts his hands in his pockets.

"Your mother is league's above you, she's a lovely woman" he goes on to say, Joyce is amazing and he finds Steve to be pretty similar to her if he's being totally honest, it's probably another reason why he likes her as well as the fact that she treats him well which most people don't tend to do.

"I get the impression that everyone likes your mother more than they like you" Billy says just to be an ass because he can and fuck Jonathan.

"Anyway, I realized it's sad watching you pine after him like a little bitch in heat" he finishes off by saying with an indifferent shrug and he expects Jonathan to get pissed, to start yelling and screaming at him.

To his disappointment Jonathan just starts laughing as he shakes his head.

"What're you laughing at?" Billy hisses out as he takes his hands out of his pockets and stalks closer to him.

"Are those all of the things you needed to tell yourself so you could feel better?" Jon asks him and Billy just snarls at him.

"Excuse you?" he growls out, getting chest to chest with him.

"I know you feel threatened by me Billy, it's flattering and pretty damn enjoyable to watch you freak out and lose your mind over this" Jon says, refusing to back down and oh yeah, Billy can feel the tension in the air.

It's about to be a fight.

But...

He promised Steve so he can't throw the first punch, needs to goad Jonathan into it, make him look like the asshole for once.

"You wish" Billy says angrily.
"Why else would you be here?" Jon asks, calling him out on his bluff.

"I'm here to pick up my sister you retard"

"You could have grabbed her and left but instead you feel like you gotta be the big man and warn me away" Jonathan says like Billy is a child and yeah, okay so maybe he's being a little bit childish but he doesn't care at this point.

"I don't gotta warn you away, Steve is never going to want you" Billy says and he knows that's true.

"I don't need him to want me, I'm not interested in him like that" Jon says like that should be obvious.

"Bullshit"

"Say what you want-" Jon starts to say as Billy shakes his head.

"That's a fucking lie, you repressed and creepy little fuck" he hisses out, he's seen the way Jonathan looks at Steve sometimes, he wasn't born yesterday.

"I don't need to listen to this" Jonathan says as he looks fed up with the conversation, fight going out of him as he turns around to start walking away.

"Walk away, I know your type" Billy says, feeling like he's won.

"My type?" Jon says as he stops to turn back around.

"Bet you got all kinds of daddy issues, did he touch you when you were younger too?" Billy says before he can even think about what he's saying and he knows it's the wrong thing to say the moment it comes out of his stupid fucking mouth.

Shit, god damn it.

Jonathan's eyes-

Oh.

Jonathan loses it and is on him within seconds and he's on the ground before he can catch up with what's going on as Jon just wails on him.

He could fight back but now he feels like an absolute asshole.

If he's being honest it had been a half thought, not really something he'd assumed to be right about for a while now from the way Jonathan acts.

He'd known quite a few guys back in California who went through shit like that so he's seen the way they hold themselves and Jonathan seems to hold himself in the same way.

It had been a complete guess and he didn't think he'd actually be right and hit a nerve.

Fuck.
Here he goes again being the biggest douche bag of the year opening his damn mouth.

Well he'd intended to be a douche but not like this.

So much for progress and change.

It fucking hurts and he's not sure how his face is going to look when this is over but he figures he owes it to Jon at this point to just let him get it all out but he can hear Nancy's shrill voice screaming all of a sudden.

"Jonathan, Jonathan stop!" he hears through the fog of all of it and she somehow gets Jonathan off of him and Billy gets up to a crouch and all of the kids have come outside with her.

He's glad their parents aren't home or else Hopper would probably have been called.

"It's fine, it's fine. I crossed a line, I crossed a line Jon" Billy says as he holds up his hand to placate an angry looking Nancy.

"Fuck you, don't ever try to assume you know what I've been through" Jonathan hisses out, moving to get back at him as Nancy grabs hold of his arm and he actually stops.

"I'm sorry Jon" Billy says even though he knows it won't do any good, the damage is done.

This definitely wasn't his intention, he'd just wanted to intimidate the guy, wanted to make him throw the first punch and- he'd let it get out of hand.

Fuck you're so god damn worthless, you stupid piece of shit.

No point in feeling sorry for himself now though, at least he's playing his part in the plan so at least there's that.

"I-! What?" Jon says, completely taken off guard.

"Huh?" Nancy says at the same time and all of the kids look just as shocked.

"Oh fuck off, I wasn't thinking and I shouldn't have said that shit" Billy says as he rolls his eyes, he is capable of apologizing even though he knows he's isn't very good at it.

"Now- now you wanna say sorry?" Jon says as he barks out a laugh.

"Whatever, I don't care if you accept it or not. Max?" Billy says as he gets up and brushes at his jeans.

"Uh-" she says, suddenly unsure.

"Let's go. You're lucky I made a promise to Steve but I'll consider us squared away again. This was my fuck-up, I'll own that" Billy tells Jon as he starts to walk away, motioning for Max to follow him as she runs to catch up.

"Unbelievable" he hears Jon say from behind him.

"Take it or leave it, don't care" Billy yells out as he waves his hand to them.

When he gets into the car with Max he wipes the blood from his bottom lip where it got cut from one of the punches as well as the blood from his nose.
He looks in his rear view mirror and is a bit glad, could have been far worse and Jonathan seems to have pulled back his punches for some reason.

"Billy..." Max says quietly after he starts the car and they begin to drive away and it speaks volumes.

Regret and guilt settle deep inside his stomach as he sighs and shoots her an apologetic look.

"I know Max...I know"

Chapter End Notes

Man, Billy upset me so much during this chapter I wanted to pull my hair out but it's Billy so...I'm not sure what I'd been expecting.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say that sometimes you don't know what another person is going through, sometimes they are going through some awful stuff so when you choose to be an asshole just maybe take a step back and think before you speak.

Also Billy is a jerk.

I still love my trash baby though and I also wanted to use this opportunity to show how Steve has rubbed off on Billy in a pretty bad way.

Before in the beginning he was never one for biting words and digging his heel in, he merely punched first and asked questions later.

With Steve's influence he has taken on that bad habit of wanting his words to cut deep and hurt someone else because Steve has done it to him so many times even though he doesn't really realize it yet.

I swear, anything with character analysis and development on the two of these boys is like my guilty pleasure. LOL
Billy is a comforting weight on top of him, a familiar weight as Steve cards his fingers through his hair and it feels like home.

"Miss you so fucking much" Billy whispers to him as they stare at one another and Billy touches his side, trails his fingers up over his chest and all the way up to his neck.

It's feather light and he's getting all kinds of worked up at this point and the hunger is starting to coil deep in his gut.

"God- Miss you too" Steve whispers back, pulling him in to press a light kiss under his jaw before pressing another one to the side of his face as he inhales deeply, feels Billy's curls against his face.

Billy grips his hip tight and grinds down as they both sigh and Steve can't help but grip his hair tighter, press his forehead to the side of his head.

"I feel lost without you" Steve admits to him like a secret, can't help himself because he feels like he's losing his mind, wishes things weren't so fucking complicated.

"Me too love, me too" Billy says back and Steve can feel his eyes start to water from the overwhelming feeling of longing that washes over him.

Why is he longing for him?

Billy's right here, he's touching him right now but it's like he feels far away, like there's something he's missing or forgetting.

He'd been half hard before but now all of the blood has rushed south, filling him completely as he pulls Billy in for a kiss, memorizing the feel of it, the soft taste and firm grip.

Steve never wants to be anywhere but here surrounded in this, surrounded by Billy and his gentle words and soft yet confident touches.

It's so freeing, kissing Billy is like taking in a deep breathe of air he didn't know he needed, it's grounding yet he feels like he's free falling all at the same time, it's unexplainable.

It's Billy.

Naturally when they pull away Billy latches onto his neck and licks at it, nips gently before biting down hard.

"Ah-" Steve feels the moan come out of him unbidden as he arches up while Billy just holds him down and goes to town, marking him as much as he can.

"Oh fu-" he chokes out as Billy bears down on top of him, grinding at the right angle as Steve bites his lower lip to keep from crying out.
"None of that, wanna hear you- wanna hear your pretty voice" Billy says, his own voice impossibly deep before going back to kissing him all over his neck, moving to the other side to give it attention.

Steve can't help himself as he cries out, it's too much yet not enough and he feels like he's gonna go insane from it, wants nothing more than to just-

"I love you- love you so damn much you have no idea Billy" he says to him as he runs his hands over Billy's back, rakes his nails down it soon after because he feels like he's going to lose it from how strongly he feels about the man above him.

How do people do this?

There's never going to be another person that is ever going to make him feel so out of his mind in all of the best and worst ways.

Love is terrifying, Steve has come to find out yet it's so fucking powerful and makes him feel absolutely invincible.

It feels right.

"Love you too" Billy says as he chuckles, clearly realizing how desperate Steve's becoming and he'll probably start begging soon if he doesn't just do something more.

When Billy finally pulls away and Steve opens his eyes, not even realizing they had fluttered shut he stares into those crystal blue eyes and he-

It hits him then that he's dreaming this.

Wait-

There's a tickling in the back of his mind, a familiar melding of emotion-

Oh my god.

They're both dreaming this.

Billy looks down on him like he's coming to the same realization as the hazy dream like fog begins to lift and surprise is very clear and apparent on Billy's face.

"Steve-" Billy starts to say as he cups his face and it feels-

His expression turns desperate and for some reason it scares the shit out of Steve and he's not sure
Jolting awake hurts like a motherfucker as Steve clutches at his head in pain, groaning from how hard it's pounding.

Shit.

It's his own fault and now poor Billy's going to get a damn migraine too.

He'd panicked and fuck-

It startled him and he didn't think, he'd merely pulled away immediately because he wasn't sure what Billy had been about to say.

God damn it.

Now Steve feels like an asshole, he can't tell which one of them had manifested this, they'd never actually shared dreams before.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

The sudden onset of immense pain had killed his mood completely and when he gets into the bathroom there's nausea rolling in his stomach.

He feels cold and clammy as he wobbles in to grip the sink so he can keep himself upright.

This is not fun, this is not what he needs right now and it's certainly not what Billy needs.

When he lifts his head to look at himself in the mirror he touches his neck with shaky fingers realizing how pale he looks.

He can still feel Billy's touch on him, can feel all of it and he feels where there would be marks, where there should be marks and he can feel them on his skin but they're not there.

The feeling of it is there though as if Billy had truly been touching him, it's not like when they project themselves to each other and it feels like a memory.

This- it feels like it really happened but there's absolutely no evidence of it.

The heat, the pain, the frustration of it makes him hang his head as he runs a hand through his hair, getting it tangled in the knots that have formed from his night of sleep.

It's- Steve finds himself feeling a bit disappointed to see his neck completely unmarred, like it had never even happened.

The alarm blaring in the other room makes him jump out of his skin as he slowly wobbles back over to the bed so he can reach over and turn it off.

Fuck.

He needs to get ready for school.
Today's the day.

Billy jolts awake to falling off his bed as he clutches his head with both hands.

"Fucking shit- son of a bitch" he hisses out as he curls up into a ball on the floor, feeling all kinds of emotions wash over him upon waking so violently.

He's not even sure what he'd been about to say and had merely realized Steve was really there, they were both dreaming that.

All he'd wanted to say in that moment was how much he wants him, how much he's sorry and doesn't want to lose Steve.

Honestly he had been about to stupidly open his mouth like an idiot to spout out his hearts desires.

"Let's get back together"

That had been the thought swirling around in his mind and then some.

He could feel Steve's emotions pooling out all around them, felt the longing and emotions that Steve had been feeling that had been surrounding him with such ferocity, he had been urged on to answer his call, to respond in kind but the words wouldn't come out, couldn't come out.

Billy's actually thankful that Steve had startled and pulled away because it probably wouldn't have gone very well.

It's not Billy's call, he can't just ask that of Steve, can't pressure him into it and certainly not when they're both so vulnerable and being laid out bare to one another in a way that had been relatively unwilling from both sides.

They can love each other as much as they fucking want but it doesn't change their reality.

Steve needs to decide things on his own time when every part of him is completely in harmony to make a definitive decision.

Billy will wait as long as he needs to wait for him, he's actually starting to get used to this whole not being together thing.

It's actually kind of nice in a way because in certain ways he feels better about himself now.

Reflecting on how he'd been with Steve has been good for him, made him realize the things he'd been doing wrong and how he can come back to Steve a better man now that he knows how truly controlling and overbearing he'd been.

In retrospect he still is, his fight with Jonathan had proven that...he couldn't help himself-
The jealousy had taken over his brain, he'd gotten irrational and that fear of not knowing if he's ever going to truly be with Steve again had propelled him forward without a single thought towards just walking away instead.

Now there's an even deeper fear swirling inside of him.

He broke his promise with Steve.

The same day he'd made the promise, the same day Steve had told him to use it as an opportunity to build trust between them he'd ignored it, took a giant shit all over it.

Steve's not going to like this when he hears about it.

"Billy, you could have just left, we could have just gone and you didn't have to talk to him" Max says as she looks unsure of herself, clearly not knowing how far she can take her criticisms.

"I know Max- It was stupid" he says, not really caring if she rips into him.

They'd made a deal.

"I'm glad you didn't hit him back" she says, going for the 'let's make him feel better' tactic.

"Don't go all soft on me now you little shit, there's not really any excuse- shoulda just fuckin' walked away" he says as he hits the steering wheel in anger and Max shoots him with a look of pity.

Any other time it'd make him angry to have someone feel pity for him but he doesn't even care, he'd fucked up.

"Steve's gonna be fucking pissed" Billy says, running a hand through his hair.

"Probably but you didn't hit him back, that counts for something right?" she says with a shrug.

"In Steve's mind? Probably not" Billy says honestly, already knows all of the things Steve is going to say to him.

"It won't be that bad, don't sweat it" she says reassuringly as she waves her hand in the air nonchalantly.

"You don't understand" he says in an almost whisper as she looks at him and frowns.

The gravity of it starts to hit him, the aftermath starts settling deep inside of his bones and he's really putting together what he's just done on multiple levels.

"I promised him and I- this was my chance and I fucked it all up like I do with every other god damn thing in my life!" Billy says as he pulls over to the side of the road, emotions cresting and becoming too much as he puts the car into park and rests his head down onto the wheel as he covers his face with his arms.

He doesn't want to do this, not in front of Max but he's so god damn angry with himself and he feels the hot tears form in the corners of his eyes.

God, he's become such a fucking pussy.
“Billy, it's going to be alright” he hears Max say as she places a tentative shaky hand on his arm in comfort.

It's-

She's never done that before.

He turns his head as he looks at her and he sees fear, she's worried he's going to fly off the handle and he can see that she's worried he might hit her or something, can see it in those eyes.

He feels disgust toward himself for putting that look into her eyes, for all of the things he's done and said to her, for the way he's treated her to make her feel this way.

Yet she's still trying to make him feel better.

Him, after everything they've been through she's actually feeling bad for him.

It's not something he ever thought he'd get back from her.

"I love you Max, I'm sorry" he says and it just comes tumbling out of his mouth without his permission as he sees her eyes go wide as she jerks her hand away like she's been burned.

It's a promise now.

Before Steve, before he'd been taught the importance of the words 'sorry' and 'I love you' he'd hated them, had refused to speak them because they'd always been a lie, a way to give him a false sense of security only for Neil to turn around and hit him again instead.

Now, he doesn't feel that way about those words anymore, hasn't felt that way for a while now.

Saying it to Max is his promise to her now, he won't be like Neil and say that dumb shit and then turn around and put his hands on her, make her feel like those words don't mean anything, doesn't want her to ever get to that point in her life with anyone.

Especially not himself.

She doesn't get it, she probably won't ever understand but he's holding himself to this now, holding himself to his promises of changing, of being a different person than the one he was yesterday.

He may have fucked up just now and he's probably going to lose Steve but he doesn't need to lose Max too, doesn't need to keep pushing everyone away when they go out of their way to show him basic human decency.

Certainly not when he doesn't deserve it, he has never given her a reason to comfort him, he's only ever done the opposite to her.

Maybe she's just feeling more sensitive than usual because he's lost his dad.

Regardless he doesn't want her to feel blown off and like her gestures mean nothing.

He refuses to do that to her anymore.
“I- what?” she says, like she must have misheard.

Well, he already said it so no turning back now.

“I just- thanks for being here for me” he says as he wipes his nose, steels his expression and wipes at his eyes like he's swiping away a stray lash.

“Billy I uh-” she starts to say, suspicion very evident on her face as he shakes his head to stop her.

“It's good, we're good, I'm good. You hungry?” he asks her, not wanting things to get awkward between them, not wanting her to feel like she needs to say anything back to him.

She looks like she's getting emotional whiplash and under different circumstances he'd laugh but he'd just laid a lot onto her just now, probably quite a bit that she doesn't fully comprehend and he can see her brain short circuiting.

“Uh- yeah I'm- food sounds good” she finally settles on saying.

“Burgers?” he asks because he feels himself craving one.

“Yeah, sounds good” she says, still looking at him suspiciously like the moment will be broken in an instant.

“Do you think your mom will want something for later?” he asks her, not really knowing if Susan has a tendency to grab something for herself after going out with her friends.

Max continues to look at him like she's seeing him differently for the first time and he's starting to feel a little uncomfortable under her gaze as she gapes for a moment before recovering.

“Uhm she may- I mean it won't hurt to get her something, is that okay?” she asks and Billy- He feels his heart clench in his chest at the implications of that question, of the way she said it.

“Yeah of course it's okay” he says quietly.

After a while the ride had fallen into comfortable conversation and after getting food into her the awkwardness had gone away completely.

Billy finds himself dreading going to school though.

Today is the day.

Steve will be there and he's going to see his face, going to know there had been a fight.

Stupid, you're so stupid, stupid fucking idiot.

He repeats to himself as he finally gets up off his floor and makes his way out of his room and into the bathroom.

The raging migraine that is pounding in his head causes him to wobble a bit and he's glad he has
some pain pills in case this shit ever happens as he pops them as quickly as he can.

After he takes them and splashes some water on his face with hands that are twitching like he's been taking drugs and going through withdrawal he finds himself dreading everything, all of the anxiety slams right back into him as he feels the nausea from the migraine do most of the work as he lifts the lid of his toilet, emptying the contents of his stomach out into it and he's pretty pissed at himself.

He'd just taken some damn meds and now they're right back out and he has no choice but to try again after he brushes his teeth after giving himself a moment to recover.

The shared dream, the plan that he's agreed to that could go so many wrong ways and now Steve is going to know about what happened yesterday-

Billy's so fucked.

Alex drives Steve to school and they go over everything for what feels like the millionth time before he gets dropped off and he watches the fire user drive away as it settles that this is finally happening.

It's a mix of dread and relief, a strange combination as he turns toward the school and walks inside, preparing himself mentally for anything that might possibly happen should things go terribly wrong.

His migraine had finally gone away after he'd gotten some pills into him which he's glad for because he would not be able to get through this day with his whole body rebelling against itself.

The first person he talks to is Jonathan who looks at him in surprise and pushes his way through the throng of kids to get to him.

"Why-? You aren't supposed to be here" Jonathan says as he walks up to him at his locker.

"Don't sweat it" Steve tells him and a large majority of the kids around them are looking at him strange which is to be expected and he doesn't need to be talking to anyone right now where people are clearly listening in.

People know he's being searched for and it's only a matter of time before the plan is in motion, someone's going to open their mouth.

"Seriously-" Jon goes to say.

"Okay Jon, do me a favor and fuck off" Steve says as he slams his locker shut.

He doesn't have time to deal with him right now and his overbearing judgemental bullshit.

In that moment he sees Billy coming towards them as he sees the guy go stalk still, looking between him and Jon in surprise about ten feet away, clearly having heard his outburst.

Billy is-
It takes Steve a moment to catch up, his brain is lagging behind due to the painful wake up from this morning as well as the fact that he never ate anything due to his nervousness and his first thought is that Neil hit Billy again and-

Steve will need to let Billy stay over at Alex's, he's going to need to find a way to let-

Except Neil's dead.

Within the next moment he's coming to the realization he probably stressed far too much over Billy back when Neil was alive if his first thought had been the usual damage control he'd gotten so used to with Billy coming over to his house injured or seeing him at school or pulling them into the bond to help calm him down, to help him escape the awful things Neil would put him through.

That also means it happened far too much and far too often, he's glad Neil is finally dead and they can put that stress out of their lives.

Now they have a whole list of other shit to worry about though, oh joy.

Regardless it all makes him want to pull Billy into his arms and hold him, hide him from any sort of harm but he can't, he can't.

"What the fuck happened?" He bites out, eyes going wide as he sees Billy's face when his brain finally catches up with everything.

Looks like he'd gotten into a damn fight.

Steve looks at Jon and sees no injuries and feels himself becoming even more confused.

When Billy makes it up to them he looks like a kicked puppy, like he's waiting to be yelled at.

Steve can't help himself as he reaches his hand up, grips Billy's jaw and runs his finger over the cut on his lip making Billy hiss out in what he assumes is pain at first until he watches as his eyes go dark and heated.

Billy's tongue darts out and he feels it brush against his thumb lightly and he can tell that he's about to take it into his mouth-

Steve strategically pulls his hand away, resting it at his side like nothing had happened as he feels himself flush, the dream from this morning still fresh in his mind.

The way Billy is looking at him isn't helping either like they're thinking the exact same thing.

"What did you do?" Steve asks him as he glares, schooling his expression and features within the next moment which probably sounds far more accusing and rude than he'd intended but he's trying really hard not to jump Billy and pull him into a supply closet to have his way with him.

Honestly Steve had felt unsure of how to act with that whole shared dream thing but now he feels like he's about to get pissed off instead which he's kind of glad for so that he can keep it out of his mind which seems silly in retrospect but he's so fucking close to caving.

The only thing he wants to do is tell Billy that he wants to be with him, wants to make things work but he knows neither one of them is ready and it's a worthless conversation to have because they've
got no time for it and it means nothing if they're constantly trying to keep themselves and each other alive.

Hard to have a working relationship or to even put effort into it if there's no way to actually do so.

Also this is the first time he's physically seen Billy in days and it's making him ache in so many different ways.

This is not how he'd wanted any of this to go at all.

It's almost like reality kicks back in for Billy as his expression turns into a carefully schooled mask of lesser emotion, the usual flippant and brass demeanor they're all used to from him falling back into place like a second skin.

"I broke our promise" Billy says, locking eyes with him like he's ready for whatever punishment Steve chooses to unleash upon him.

Steve can tell it's something he feels awful about, there's a childlike vulnerability that he can see in Billy's eyes betraying his confident bravado he's trying to output right now.

It's a soul deep fear that Steve now recognizes from this morning that had been in the back of his mind when they had shared emotions during the dream but he'd been so caught up in everything it had been buried further back, harder to pick out.

"Which one?" He asks Billy, disappointment lacing his voice because this is what he had expected but he was hoping it wouldn't have been so damn soon.

He assumed that maybe there had just been a school fight, maybe Billy had gotten into it with someone else here but clearly that's asking too much.

"I said shit I shouldn't have to Byer's yesterday" Billy admits and Steve is so fucking confused.

"You look totally fine, why the fuck do you look totally fine?" Steve asks a surprised looking Jon that's staring at Billy like he's grown two heads.

That's not like Billy to come out of a fight looking like the definitive loser and for the other person to look completely unmarked.

"I- it was me I laid into him and he didn't fight back" Jon says, frowning as he turns his face from Billy to Steve so they locks eyes with one another.

"Wha-" Steve starts to say as he scratches the back of his head.

"I said shit and I deserved it" Billy clarifies poorly.

"No stop- you don't deserve that, I'm not understanding" Steve says as he shakes his head, disagreeing completely with how black and while he can get at times.

Steve doesn't like to see Billy hurt like this, doesn't like him getting the shit beat out of him because he's too used to it, a physical fight doesn't need to be the answer to something every fucking time.

It's far too normal for him and Steve hates his nonchalance toward it like he somehow will always have deserved to have been caused some form of physical harm.

Steve hates that shit and feels himself wanting to slam Jonathan's face into a locker which he realizes would be pretty hypocritical.
"It's between us and we resolved it, don't worry" Jon says as Billy looks at him like he's grown two heads now.

Steve is seriously missing something right now and there's clearly a lot more going on that he hasn't been privy to but he doesn't have the time for this right now as he rubs a hand over his face and points Billy with a serious look and brings his index finger up to press against his chest.

It's unnecessary but it gives him an excuse to touch Billy because he's feeling pretty touch starved from not being able to be near him and he can still feel the marks on his neck that aren't actually there.

The whole thing is kind of driving him mad.

"We'll talk later" he tells Billy and before either one of them can say anything to him or stop him he turns around and walks away to his first class.

"You kinda defended me there, why?" Billy asks Jon as they watch Steve's retreating figure.

That was not how he had expected that to go at all, he also knows they're on a bit of a time frame.

It's also very clearly the calm before a storm between them personally and he's not looking forward to it.

Also to see Steve so upset with Jon had been strange, he didn't know they still weren't on very good terms and he should be happy but he feels more concerned than anything because Steve is usually forgiving of everything and everyone pretty quickly.

That probably isn't a good sign for him, he's probably not going to be forgiven anytime soon in that case.

Billy holds out hope for himself though, resolves to make it up to Steve in any possible way he can even though he knows this was probably the final nail in his coffin.

Except maybe not, he knows how Steve feels and had felt the crushing longing emanating off of him.

"I don't accept your apology" Jonathan tells him, pulling him from his thoughts and Billy can't help but snort in response as he turns to look at him so they're facing each other.

"Didn't think you would" Billy says with a shrug, not really caring if Jonathan forgives him or not in the long run, it's not like he gains anything from it either way.

"Steve's being a dick lately" Jon says out of the blue which-

Yeah okay this is true, he's far more irritable than normal but that goes without saying and it makes Billy a bit upset because it's not like he's being a dick for no reason.

Steve's reasons are pretty warranted and the fact that Jon is trying to talk shit on him is pretty rich coming from him.

"Oh because he won't suck your dick?" Billy teases him with because that's kind of how it feels judging from what he'd seen from the memory.
"Very funny, I find myself tolerating you more lately so that's saying something" Jon says which is strange, usually he'd get angry at a comment like that or maybe he's finally used to Billy's form of crass humor.

It's probably the latter.

"It's my fault, he's upset with me and he's stressed out" Billy says, trying to defend Steve at least a little bit.

"He doesn't need to take it out on everyone else though" Jonathan huffs out as Billy raises a brow.

"Says the guy that was giving him shit about his ex and saying stuff like 'oh he's going to kill you one day' thanks for that by the way you fucking douche" Billy says as he rolls his eyes.

It's preposterous, he knows why people assume the worst of him but it's still frustrating to hear someone just flat out try to convince Steve to drop him like a wet rag.

He already feels enough guilt about the Mind Flayer-

For the most part Billy can handle a lot of his own emotions pretty well but when it comes to what happened at Lake Michigan he has to actively block it from his brain to keep from turning into a mess.

The nightmares fucking suck and it's the only thing he sees when he closes his eyes is Steve's motionless body in his arms, his hands around his throat-

The bruises.

_God, the bruises._

"Wow you called yourself his ex, I'm impressed" Jonathan says sarcastically.

"Only for now, don't get too excited Byer's" Billy assures him as Jon rolls his eyes.

"Anyway whatever, I know we don't get along but we've all been through a lot together" Billy says when it looks like the guy is about to walk away.

Jonathan just looks at him suspiciously but waits for him to go on.

"I like to think that counts for something and I ain't your friend but-" Billy stops, takes a deep breath and isn't really sure how to say this, how to make it come across right but he's going to try.

"If you ever gotta take care of business I'm your guy" he offers to him, extends the olive branch because he knows Jon won't and this is something he'd be willing to do for the guy in a heartbeat.

"Wait, what?" Jon asks after taking a physical step back as he lets that sink in.

"I say this mostly for Will- did he ever?" Billy asks, not really wanting to know but he alsonow because if Will was ever touched-

He'll do it himself, he'll find this guy and he'll fucking make it look like a damn accident.

"N- no, we left- mom got us out before- no" Jon says looking more vulnerable than Billy has ever seen him and it makes him want to fucking hit something, it's not right.

That shit's just not right.
Billy isn't a perfect guy but that sort of shit- he doesn't understand how a person could do shit like that to someone, a kid, their own kid.

"Good- but still, if you find yourself in a bad spot and something happens let me know" Billy says and this is probably the most awkward conversation he's ever had in his life.

"Are you-?" Jon starts to ask something and Billy's pretty much at his limit for how nice he can bring himself to be towards the one guy he can barely tolerate.

"We got somewhere to be Byer's, stop fucking holding me up and go to damn class" he says as he walks away without letting him finish.

That is the absolute last thing Jon had ever expected to hear come out of Billy as he stands in the hallway and gapes at his retreating back in complete and utter disbelief.

It was subtle but the message was clear.

"If you ever gotta kill your dad I'll help you bury the body"

Actually he's pretty sure Billy is more for the killing part.

He's not sure if he should feel grateful or concerned but it is certainly not computing in his brain.

It's obvious that Billy is showing him pity which is annoying as fuck, he doesn't need his pity but hearing that he'd do it for Will, seeing the fire in his eyes at the thought of anyone harming Will had been reassuring to see.

Doesn't matter if Jon doesn't like Billy, he has an ally in him when it comes to Will and he can't help but feel a bit of comfort at the thought because Billy's like a fucking savage beast.

The things he'd done to that man Reece...

Billy's fucking insane and the fact that Jon could simply mention that Will's in trouble and Billy will come running is the first time he's ever been grateful for that insanity.

Jonathan's pretty sure nothing bad is ever going to happen to Will at this point because if anything does there's a long line of crazy motherfuckers ready to jump to his defense to protect him.

Regardless he still doesn't trust Billy at all, doesn't forgive him but for the first time he hadn't seen Lonnie when looking at him.

He'd seen Billy.

A guy that is hurting, is just trying to get his boyfriend back and-

Whatever.

Billy is still an asshole and always will be, there's no point in assuming anything different.
Fuck that guy.

He thinks before shaking his head in disbelief and chalking it all up to a strange occurrence while he walks himself to class and absently wonders...

Why the fuck is Steve here?

Chapter End Notes

Still had a bit of setup to do before we get into the main event so I wanted to get this bit out before we jump right into it.

I promise we've finally got plot advancement happening but you guys know how I get, I like to write introspective character driven chapters if I see a chance to do so.

Technically this is a plot chapter considering Steve is suddenly at school BUT don't worry, you'll all soon find out 'The plan'
Chapter Notes

Guess who's getting a new car?!

It's me!

Sorry I took so long to post this it was a very rowdy chapter that became one thing before becoming another and it's one of those chapters I've rewritten in a million different ways far too many times.

At first this was going to be plot heavy but the beginning scene started getting longer and longer and so the whole damn chapter is just this one singular scene instead.

Oh well, you guys know I like to cover all my bases before jumping into the crazy shit so I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They need to talk.

It's fourth period and Steve finds himself standing in the AV room which isn't large but it's still larger than the one at the middle school that the kids like to hide in.

Steve absently finds himself missing them and wishing everything could be normal again.

Billy is on the other side of the room looking ready for anything Steve's about to throw at him which is probably a good thing and they really don't need to be in close proximity with each other.

Being far apart from him physically for an extended period of time has taken a toll on him and the shared dream was only proof of that, if he doesn't stay away from Billy he's going to do something stupid.

He wishes he could blame it on the bond, wishes he could chalk it up to blaming something else or someone else but he can't.

It's them.

They miss each other and it's driving Steve mad on top of everything else that has been going on.

"You could have projected, why are we here?" Billy asks looking perturbed like Steve is taking up his precious time which just adds to the annoyance he already feels at himself and Billy.

"I want to know what you said to Jon" Steve says, wanting to get this over with before everything pops off and they don't have the time to address it anymore.

This was probably a bad idea he's beginning to realize.
Being in a room alone with Billy never ends in them just talking and walking right back out and they're either going to fight or fuck.

Or both.

Steve's money is on both.

Granted they're not exactly on the greatest terms with one another so it ending in a fight is probably far more likely in all reality.

Regardless it's too late now and Steve has effectively dug his own grave at this point and he refuses to own up to that fact, is trying to stay blissfully ignorant to it.

"Seriously Harrington, right now?" Billy asks as he crosses his arms over his chest and rolls his eyes.

"Yes Hargrove, right now" Steve replies with an eye roll of his own due to Billy's already shitty attitude.

They're off to a fan-fucking-tastic start it seems.

Wonderful.

"Fucking Christ- alright, I guessed about his shitty childhood trauma and threw it in his face" Billy says looking even more defensive than before.

"What does that even mean?" Steve asks feeling more and more like he's missing a lot of whatever happened between them.

"If you're really so damn curious just go watch the fucking memory" Billy bites back at him as he leans against the shelf that's behind him.

"We don't have time for that" Steve retorts, sounding clipped and impatient even to himself as he hugs his arms to his chest.

Why did he even do this?

Why is he trying to start a fight with Billy right now?

They shouldn't be at odd ends with one another, they're supposed to be working together and here Steve is acting like a grade-A asshole.

Granted he's pretty sure he's allowed to considering Billy went and did some dumb shit as per usual.

"Then don't get a fucking attitude with me" Billy says rudely which just ignites Steve's anger even
more as he purses his lips, sympathy from seconds ago quickly beginning to fizzle out.

"Say again?" he asks in disbelief, raising a brow at him.

"Look, I get that you're pissy and I know I fucked up but can you make me feel like shit later?" Billy asks him as he takes out a cigarette, frown on his face.

*What the hell?*

Steve makes a noise in the back of his throat and stalks toward him before he can take out a lighter.

He can't really be this stupid to light up in a damn AV room where people will smell the smoke within seconds and probably set off the fucking *fire alarm.*

"Billy- are you kidding me? Put that shit away" he hisses out at him as he makes it across the room in record time and plucks the cigarette from between his fingers and throws it off to the side somewhere.

The asshole just tilts his head and looks up at him through those long lashes with a smug look on his face.

*Oh.*

He's being played right now.

*Fine.*

Two can play at that game.

Billy proceeds to take out the lighter from his pocket like it's an offering and Steve deliberately reaches out to grab it from him as he scoffs.

Apparently he's not the only one struggling with this whole 'having some distance'.

Not that Billy truly needs to be using underhanded tactics with him so they're closer to one another due to the fact that Steve is like a fucking moth to the flame when it comes to him.

They lock eyes for a moment as Billy pushes himself up so they're standing face to face, inches from one another.

There's a challenge in his eyes.

Steve isn't one to back down from a challenge as he pockets the lighter and steps forward which
catches Billy off guard for some reason as he backs up, hitting the shelf hard enough to make it rattle which makes Steve snort in amusement.

"Damn, see something you like sweet thing?" Billy drawls out, predatory grin on his face and there's a fire in his eyes that Steve can't bring himself to match just yet.

Billy hooks his thumbs into his belt loops and pulls him forward as he nearly crashes right into him, using Billy's chest as leverage with one of his hands while the other finds purchase on his hip.

Why can't this prick ever button up his damn shirt?

"This isn't why I'm here Billy" he says, averting his gaze as he goes to pull away.

Steve's fingers spread out to feel his skin in that moment, to reach under his shirt and brush them lightly against it and in that moment he craves, feels the want wash over him.

"You're wound up so tight" Billy says with a frown and he's still got a hold on him, still ready to pull him right back in.

Part of Steve wants him to, wants to just lick him all over and make him squirm, get him all worked up but the other part wants nothing to do with him, wants to scream at him for being such an idiot.

"I can help if you'll let me" Billy whispers, finally yanking him back in and Steve has no choice but to step forward or risk falling right on top of him.

He can feel Billy's breath against his face and it's far too much of a temptation, Billy is a walking temptation that's always trying his damn patience.

"We were talking, it's important" Steve says in a near whisper, trying to get control back of whatever the fuck is even happening right now.

It feels nice to touch Billy again though and to be near him, to just be held.

It's grounding.

If Steve is being honest he's been feeling that strange energy pooling deep inside him since he woke up this morning, the same one from Lake Michigan.

The feeling terrifies him because there's something there that he's missing, something more.

Something he doesn't fully comprehend nor understand just yet which seems to be the usual in regards to abilities they seem to have as well as the new ones they have no idea about just yet.

They're so fucking far out of their depth with all of this it's not even funny.

The bond seems to feel something but he's not sure what it is and he doesn't like it, it's annoying and disconcerting.
"I'm not trying to make you feel like shit by the way, you broke our trust again" Steve tells him when Billy doesn't respond because it seems like he'd been watching Steve instead, like he'd been trying to crawl inside of his mind or something to try and find out what he was thinking but his tone is serious and Billy sores up a bit from that, standing up straight with a dejected look on his face.

They're still inches from one another, Billy's hands moving up under his shirt in what seems like an absent gesture, like he can't help himself and the familiarity of it is what's probably going to make Steve break and slam him into a wall, push him onto the damn floor, make Billy beg for it as he rides him-

His hands are also somehow warm and it makes Steve melt into his touch, makes him crave more.

"I said that because I already know everything you're going to say to me" Billy informs him as he huffs out a sigh like he's suddenly bored of this conversation and wants to get back to the potential fucking.

Not that Steve can really blame him at this point.

"Such as?" he asks, trying to get them both back on track but it's difficult as Billy's sinful fucking fingers are traveling feather light over his body.

Just like the damn dream.

This motherfucker.

"Such as 'you manipulated my words and just because you didn't throw a punch doesn't mean you didn't break the promise' or some shit like that" he says doing a rather spot on impression of him with his inflections and everything.

Steve can't help but deflate a bit at that but the anger he feels is still pretty prominent.

Sorta.

"That's- okay yeah I can see myself saying that" he grumbles out honestly as his own hands move to rub the pads of his thumbs into Billy's waist in soothing circles.

It makes Billy step impossibly closer so they're chest to chest.

"Mm, exactly" Billy says, tone far more seductive than it needs to be like he's proud of himself and his eyes are lidded with lust and a soul deep want, a hunger.

They breathe in each other's air, lips brushing lightly and Steve feels like he's on fire.

Will he ever not feel like he's been set aflame from the man he's come to know and love?
"I don't want to be angry with you" Steve croaks out, voice rough like sandpaper against his skin and he feels parched but in a way that makes him want to kiss Billy senseless.

"Then don't be, not right now at least. We should be working together and talk about us later, right?" Billy suggests as he finally presses a gentle kiss to his jaw and then lower, and lower still as he pulls his shirt down, latches onto the skin below his collar bone and sucks hard.

Fuck-

"It's not- this is different" Steve manages to say as he cards a hand through Billy's hair, pulling him closer, not wanting him to stop because all he wants is for those fucking marks to really be there, to be able to look in the mirror again and see them.

He can feel the grin against his skin as that mouth- god that mouth sucks marks into him, into places no one can see which is good, that's- that's good.

At least one of them has the mental capacity to be moderately intelligent about it.

"Drove me wild seeing you without marks on you this morning" Billy says instead ignoring his prior comment completely, clearly referring to the dream like he's reading Steve's mind or some shit.

"I- I felt them, I still feel them" Steve groans out as he cants his hips making them both sigh as Billy lets out a guttural growl.

Suddenly Steve finds himself pushed and pulled, slammed into the wall as Billy latches onto his lips and devours him and all of the anger, frustration, worry, hunger, want... every piece of it is there as Steve puts it all into their touches, into their kisses and it's rough, they're both harsh with one another as he holds onto him a bit too tight while pressing bruising fingers into his skin.

Billy responds in kind, clearly just a frustrated in his own ways.

"If- If you know what you did wrong then why the fuck- why do I even try?" Steve hisses out angrily between their heated kissing as he turns them so he has Billy against the wall instead, knocking him into it so hard the breathe gets pulled from his lungs as he grunts in pain.

There are hands in Steve's hair that pull hard in retaliation and make him hiss so he leans down and bites at Billy's shoulder hard enough to draw blood which just makes Billy's eyes roll into the back of his head as he grinds their hips together again.

"I- it was a lapse in judgement and I'm owning up to it okay?" Billy says, using his weight to push them back and Steve has no choice but to comply otherwise he'll fall flat on his ass.

The angry, rushed kissing continues and if Steve couldn't completely feel his marks before he certainly does now.

"So- so you're owning up to it so you can just do it again like you always do?" Steve asks mostly rhetorically as he barks out a dark laugh against Billy's face and he feels himself hit the back of the table.
That's rich, a lapse in judgement.

How convenient.

"No that's not-" Billy growls out before Steve interrupts him by moving his shirt aside and mouthing at his chest, taking the hardened nipple into his mouth.

It gets a desperate noise from Billy and he can't help but smirk, wants to get him all hot and bothered with it.

"Admitting you're wrong but still doing it doesn't make it better" Steve tells him between biting and licking, deciding to let him in on that little tidbit of information.

Billy clearly doesn't know that or perhaps he doesn't understand the concept of it.

Or maybe he just doesn't care.

"I don't intend to do it again" Billy says with conviction as he pulls Steve back up by his hair and gets his shirt over his head, looking at him like he's a fucking snack to eat.

"I honestly don't give a shit what you do or don't intend to do, it's just always excuses with you" Steve huffs out with a snarl as he bites a mark onto the side of Billy's neck where he knows everyone will be able to see it, wants everyone to see it because even though Steve's can't be seen he knows they can get away with Billy's.

Besides, everyone will think it was some random chick anyway.

Billy frowns as he grabs his ass with both hands, lifting him up so he's sitting on the table and stands between his legs, putting a hand to his chest while the other is still holding onto his shirt which will probably be wrinkled now from the way he has it bunched up into his hand.

The only thing they can hear is each other's heavy breathing and there's a prolonged silence as they stare at each other for a long while.

Eventually he grabs his shirt from Billy who's still holding it as Steve finally rolls his eyes and goes to put it back on, this clearly isn't going anywhere.

Within the next moment Billy snatches it right back and shoots him a glare as he throws it across the room out of reach and it's on the dirty fucking floor- this son of a bitch.

Steve can't help but flail his arms out in exasperation as he just sits there like he's on display.
Which at this point he pretty much is.

"What do you want me to say Steve?" Billy finally asks, voice quiet and soft which is uncharacteristic of him.

Especially considering things had been very heated a moment ago.

Also he's shirtless.

Also Billy's still standing between his legs and it's a very precarious situation.

Not that it matters, he's kind of used to it at this point when it comes to Billy.

"Nothing, there's nothing you can say because it's only a matter of time before you break the other promise" he says as Billy shakes his head, bringing his hands up to cup his face.

Steve wants none of that as he slaps his hands away, leaning backward as far as he can even though there's really nowhere for him to go.

Billy proceeds to hook his hands behind his knees, grabbing tight to pull him forward fast.

The rough quickness of it causes him to flail a bit as he's forced to put a hand on Billy's shoulder for leverage.

Now he's pressed up close, rock hard member pressing into Billy's stomach as he starts breathing heavily through his nose and this is seriously becoming way too much.

Billy starts rubbing his hands over his chest, his arms, pressing gentle touches to his neck, manhandling him into submission.

It's not easy to deny Billy because that usually means he's also denying himself which is just as frustrating.

Also Billy pressing up into him like this is really clouding his judgement right now.

Truly he doesn't know what he wants at this point from Billy, why he's even bothering with this conversation since he knew this was about how it would go anyway.

He's not sure what he expected honestly.

"I didn't think, I saw his car in the driveway when I picked Max up from the Wheeler's house and I
was so fucking angry-" Billy finally goes to say, running his hands up his back as Steve's eyes flutter and he falls forward.

He can't help himself as he buries his face into the crook of his neck, grabbing at his upper arms and feeling the muscles ripple underneath his touch while mouthing at his throat desperately before interrupting him.

"Jealous" he barely manages to say, sounding muffled against his skin.

"What?" Billy asks, pulling away a bit to grip at his waist, still keeping him close.

"Let's not mince words, you were jealous" Steve says as he clears his throat, tries to get some distance between them which isn't much.

"Don't get me wrong...I'm not one to talk, I've got a pretty nasty jealousy streak myself so I get it" he clarifies while thinking of Karen who may or may not have been there.

She always tries to find some damn excuse to put her hands on Billy.

It's no secret that Steve fucking hates her and Billy is always so damn polite about it.

It drives him insane even though he knows it's unwarranted.

"No- Karen wasn't there, I only want you" Billy says desperately like he knows exactly what Steve is thinking as he leans in, starts kissing his face reassuringly.

Steve can't help but snort as he puts his whole hand into Billy's face to stop him while pushing him back until he finally gets the message.

The pout he gets after he grabs his hand and moves it away is honestly fucking adorable and he's trying really hard to still be upset right now.

He's failing horribly.

"Billy come on, I know that. Anyway, you should have walked away from Jon" he says getting his hand back from Billy as he moves them back up his chest and rakes his fingernails up and down it to get him breathing hard again.

It's no secret that Billy loves it when he does this, usually he'll do it for a prolonged period of time and get him worked up before sucking him off but he likes to see how far he can take the teasing before he starts to get too impatient which he wishes he could do right now.

Probably not a good idea.

Getting them both back on track instead of onto each other like this is somehow the first time they've ever touched each other is quickly becoming an impossible endeavor.

"I know..." Billy says looking legitimately guilty for once.
"Do you?" Steve asks honestly.

"I do, I swear to god I do and I'll be better, I'm not going to go against the plan" Billy says, tone pleading as he grabs his hand one again and interlocks their fingers together, pulling it to his chest as he runs his other hand up and down his arm for a moment.

"I know you're trying, I get that but I can't keep having my words fall on deaf ears" Steve tells him as he brings his his free hand up and brushes a curl out of his face, tucking it behind his ear as Billy completely melts into the touch.

"They won't, they aren't" Billy breathes out, kissing him soundly and he falls into it for a moment can't help the moan that comes out of him from it.

It's easy to allow himself to indulge in this briefly before eventually pulling away again to nose at Billy's cheek.

"Clearly that's a lie, I told you to stay away from Jon" he says, calling him out because no matter how much he wants to just let it all go and brush it under the rug he knows that's not going to help either one of them.

Billy doesn't respond to that, he probably doesn't really know what to say to that and Steve decides to throw him a bone for once.

"You let him hit you though" he states, looking at him pointedly.

"I- yeah" Billy says, looking a bit embarrassed and self conscious as Steve kisses at the light bruising on his face gently that seems to be healing pretty well especially since its barely been a day.

"That counts for something Billy, I know you and how you are and that's not like you" Steve acknowledges because it's true.

It's no shock to anyone that the guy likes to get into fights and assert his dominance but he didn't.

Not in this instance.

Billy at least seems to know he'd crossed a line which isn't something the old Billy he knew would have ever done.

That's huge for someone like him, Steve's not even going to pretend it's not.

"I know you can't just change overnight and neither can I- you're trying and I just..." Steve says before interrupting himself to sigh as he presses a kiss to Billy's cheek.

"I've been an asshole lately" he admits.

He's been far more closed off and distant with everyone, Billy included and it's something he's aware of but can't seem to shake.

Steve wonders if maybe he's starting to finally crack.

"That's an understatement" Billy says with a snort as Steve swats at his shoulder and rolls his eyes.
"Fuck off. I'm just trying to say thank you" he says, tone amused and there's amusement in his eyes as well as he cracks a smile.

Billy's smile is blinding, he loves to see it because it just makes him fall in love all over again. It makes him think of lazy mornings at his house, waking up to Billy pulling him out of bed and forcing them into the kitchen.

His parents being gone so they can be *themselves* for once.

Of watching Billy in his element, of feeling those hands against his skin, of being kissed gently and being asked what he wants for breakfast.

He *aches* to have that *always*.

To be able to fall into some form of domestic bliss.

They *can't*.

"Thank you for trying...you still fucking suck at it though" he clarifies as Billy just shakes his head and laughs before getting a far more serious look on his face.

"I- I know and I'll keep trying I swear to you" Billy reiterates.

Steve really needs to get his shirt back, they're hitting that point where he knows things are probably going to get a little too heated soon if this is the way it's going to go.

"Stop, this isn't a get back together speech or anything, we both know there's no point in that" he says, looking at his poor discarded shirt in a crumpled mess on the floor far away from him.

He's also still a bit trapped with Billy caging him in.

Which was probably his plan all along.

"Pretty sure I don't need to try *only* when I'm trying to win you back, isn't that besides the point?" Billy asks with a raised brow as he actually moves and lets Steve get back down from the table.

"Oh wow- is someone giving you pointers?" Steve asks as he looks over his shoulder while walking away to get across the room to his shirt, surprise evident on his face.

"Gee, thanks for the vote of confidence there sweet cheeks" Billy huffs out, sarcasm lacing his voice.

"I'm impressed is all, you really came up with that all on your own?" Steve asks with a snort.

"Oh fuck off"
"Hey, you're usually less insightful- no offense" Steve says with a shrug as he goes to pick up his shirt from the floor.

"A lot of offense has been taken, copious amounts even" Billy says, suddenly behind him as he grabs his shirt yet again and Steve tries to get it back, almost eating shit while failing to get it.

"Billy- stop taking my damn shirt- is it Alex? Gotta be Alex...maybe I should start paying him to train you" Steve says with a grunt as he crosses his arms over his chest defiantly.

The look on Billy's face is decidedly not amused, making Steve chuckle.

"This has been fun" Billy says as he goes to turn around like he's leaving.

"Billy stop, come on- I'm just poking a bit of fun. You have my shirt!" Steve hisses out as he grabs his arm and spins him around.

When he's turned around Billy eye's him up and down, the heat back in them as he stalks forward and Steve backs up, hand outstretched as he tries to warn him off.

"Hey, control yourself. That bell is going to ring soon" he says, trying to convince himself it's a bad idea to let things get to where Billy clearly wants them to be right now.

"Mm, we got plenty of time before next period to screw around" Billy says, all seduction in his voice as Steve shakes his head weakly.

The teasing asshole reaches out and grabs at his outstretched hand, pulling him forward so he's closer as he stumbles while trying to gain purchase.

Billy takes his poor shirt into both hands, holding both ends of it as he proceeds to lift it up over his head and back down around his waist, using it to yank him even closer.

He can't help but make a startled noise in the back of his throat as he glares at Billy, resting his hands onto his shoulders.

"Don't stretch it you dick" he says as he gets backed up yet again and his legs hit the table yet again.

Steve is seriously getting the feeling that Billy wants to fuck him against this damn table.

Mostly because Billy takes the shirt and sets it down next to them while his hands then reach down to unbutton his jeans as Billy lays his palm flat to give him a moment to relieve the pressure.

"Calm down your highness, I'm just poking a bit of fun" Billy says as he leans in to whisper against his ear before taking the lobe into his mouth and sucking gently.

He can't help it anymore as he indulges in touching Billy anywhere he can reach as he starts kissing, licking, biting and hearing doing everything he can to hear his breathless moans.

Billy puts both hands into his hair and tilts his head a bit which is-

_Crap_, Steve is so screwed at this point.
literally.

It's a deep and all consuming kiss, the kind that Billy uses on him to erase any and all of his thinking as he grasps weakly at his shirt.

*Cheap trick.*

Steve thinks absently as his back arches and he's having a full blown war with himself.

He *needs* to pull away because he can think of a million reasons why this is a *bad idea.*

So he does before it's *way too fucking late* and hears a low whine come from the back of Billy's throat from the loss of contact.

"Wha- wait stop- Billy...*fuck* seriously we can't. Now is *really* not the time" Steve says, moving himself to the side and getting some distance as he tries to get his breathing under control while swiping his shirt off the table and finally getting it back on himself.

Billy groans and puts both hands onto the table while hanging his head down.

"You really know how to blue ball a guy" he huffs out in frustration.

"I'm suffering too, I miss you like crazy but-" Steve says, it's not that he doesn't want it...it's far from that.

It's just not the time and place, not right now when things are about to become crazy.

Granted they shouldn't regardless due to the fact that they're not actually together but Steve is past the point of caring about semantics.

He's pretty sure neither one of them knows the true definition of 'broken up' at this point.

Of course Steve will continue to try and fight the good fight while he still can because someone needs to keep Billy in line while this all goes down.

It sounds underhanded but if he needs to pull out the 'getting back together' card or 'broken up' card he wants to keep them in his back pocket while he still can.

"No, it's okay I understand...there's too much going on right now" Billy says as he runs a hand through his hair and rights himself.

They stay like that for a few moments getting themselves under control, getting themselves put back together again and Steve feels bad, wishes they could have a genuine moment for them, wants to have Billy's hands on him but there's no time.

It just *sucks.*
It all sucks.

The guilt is still eating away at him too which really isn't helping and he wants to tell Billy they're fine, there's no point in trying to stay apart because it's not doing them any good at this point.

Billy seems to notice his inner turmoil as he shoots him a smile.

"I'm on your side Steve" he says out of nowhere which catches Steve a bit off guard for a moment.

"I know Billy" he says, giving a small smile while averting his gaze.

"We can do this, we can" Billy says, clearly attempting a pep talk which is pretty nice of him.

"Yeah...yeah we can" Steve says, agreeing even though there's a part of him that's still pretty worried.

Billy walks forward and takes his hand into his own, pulling it up to kiss the back of it gently before moving down to press his lips against his wrist to feel at his pulse in a way that makes Steve's knees go weak every time and he has to put in actual effort to not lose it as he closes his eyes and takes in a shaky breath.

Jesus...why does Billy have to be so damn soft?

If somebody told him that the real Billy is actually the most romantic, softest, most kind hearted person Steve will ever meet in his life he'd punch them in the face and tell them to fuck off.

It's almost sad that nobody will probably ever know this side of him, not in the ways that Steve does at least.

Unless of course he tries to be with someone else.

Steve doesn't intend to let that happen though, he's pretty sure he's already decided there's no real point to them staying apart and putting up a front.

It's only making him miserable, making them both miserable.

"Forget about the other shit, our problems and what we need to work on and this whole relationship ordeal" Billy starts to say, pulling him out of his own thoughts.

"Right now we have a common goal and we need to do everything we can to reach that goal and I'm here, you're here, we are both on board" he says with conviction and Steve can feel a lump forming in his throat.

"Okay, alright I get it" he says, really needing for him to stop this, to stop being so-

He doesn't even know.
"Look at me love" Billy says, grip tightening on his hand as his other one comes up to cup his face as he leans into the touch with a small smile.

God he missed hearing Billy call him that.

"No matter what happens we will get through this" he whispers softly.

For the first time since this all started Steve finds himself actually believing that.

Chapter End Notes

So with this chapter I wanted it to be a one off and self contained because I realized for what is already planned out I needed to establish where Billy and Steve are with each other going into all of this and with the earlier drafts I kept struggling with how I wanted this scene to go and if I wanted it to explode into them just having a knock down drag out fight or something that was a bit gentler.

I ended up with both as you can see which when I was finally done with this monster I said to myself "Yeah, this is so them and I dunno why I thought any differently"

But yes ultimately this turned into me needing to establish their current relationship toward one another from Steve's perspective since we haven't really gotten his true thoughts until now.
Later That Night

The plan goes off without a hitch.

So far, that is.

Walking back into his house with his cold hearted father in front of him and his mother behind him is strange, it feels weird and he finds himself not missing it very much.

The ride home had been utterly silent not that he'd been expecting anything different.

Even his mother had said absolutely nothing though which is unlike her and Steve wonders if she was told to keep her mouth shut or something.

Hopper had shown up after fifth period to take him into police custody as per the plan.

Any other time, under any other set of circumstances he'd be pretty excited about being taken out of the school in handcuffs where everyone can see him.

The whispers of his classmates had been amusing to see while leaving the building but his concerns of what was to come heavily outweighed any pleasure from gaining a sudden spike in popularity and change in reputation.

A reputation he isn't looking forward to having in a place like Hawkin's Indiana.

Small price to pay.

Hopper had loaded him into the back of the cruiser and taken him to the precinct to be reunited with his parents which is the part he'd been dreading the absolute most.

Walking into the precinct had been...awkward and unsettling and the first thing he saw was his mother barreling towards him and bringing him into a crushing hug, tears streaming down her face.

"Please- Stevie don't ever leave like that again all you've gotta do is talk to us" she had pleaded, sobs wracking her body and he actually felt kind of bad for a split second.

That is until he had locked eyes with his father over her shoulder who had been looking at him like he was trying to put the pieces of a puzzle together and it had been...weird.
He could see no concern in the man's eyes, no happiness upon seeing his own son after he'd been missing for days but maybe that's because they never really see each other anyway.

So what the fuck does it matter?

When his mother finally pulled away his father had walked forward with an unreadable expression on his face.

"Steven"

"Dad"

That's it, that's all they had said to one another and he's really not sure what that exchange even meant because it felt like a lot was being said without them saying anything at all, especially on his dad's side of it.

His father proceeded to turn to Hopper and shake his hand and even that exchange seemed forced and stiff.

If Steve didn't know any better he'd say every single person in the room knew that it was all for show, that this was just an act coming from all sides.

Like a mutual self awareness.

"I appreciate you going out of your way to help me find my son Jim, I know it's not proper protocol" his father had said at one point and Steve knows he's referring to the fact that he'd been taken 'by force' to be returned to his parents even though he's eighteen and responsible for himself.

"It's no problem I'm just glad he's alright" Hopper had said politely or as polite as someone like Jim can be.

They all had done just enough to be socially acceptable.

It's almost like Hopper and his father knew they were playing each other and Steve finds himself still waiting for the other shoe to drop and he wonders if maybe there's something he's missing between the two of them.

Paperwork gets filed, questions get asked and eventually Steve gets released and the sun isn't even out anymore by that point.
It's all messy and completely against the law but Hopper had gone out of his way to 'take a bribe' from his father and try to get on his good side just to get as much information as they possibly could from any angle they could extort.

Perhaps it had worked or perhaps his father had deliberately allowed it to work.

It's hard to tell and Steve isn't nearly smart enough to figure out all of these mind games but he certainly wouldn't be shocked either way.

He had also already tried getting a piece of the cut but Hopper had told him he's already got his father as a trust fund.

"Not if he tries to kill me or something" Steve argues.

"I'm going to go out on a limb and say that's probably the last thing he's going to attempt to do, kid" Jim says.

"You've clearly never met my father" Steve replies with a frown.

"I went to school with him, he was a lot like you" he says with a snort.

"I'm nothing like my father" Steve hisses out and he can't believe Jim would say something like that to him.

"We're all our fathers kid, it sucks but it's the truth"

Alex had needed to intercept and bring them back to the task at hand to keep the peace.

He still feels pretty fucking offended by the comment in all honesty.

Regardless he'd gotten no part in whatever money Hopper had gotten from his dad...not that he needs it, that was one of the things Hopper had actually been correct about.

As for the drive home he almost found himself breaking the silence a few times but had decided against it and proceeded to stare out the window looking dejected instead.

Clearly his parents want to wait until they're in the sanctuary of their own house and that idea alone makes walking through the front door all the more nauseating.

It's the clicking sound and locking of the door that has his skin tingling in the same way it does when he feels under threat and he truly has no idea what he should be bracing himself for as he stands awkwardly off to the side as his father just starts walking up the stairs.

His mother merely turns away and starts walking into the living room without even a glance and Steve wonders if he's just walked into the fucking twilight zone or something as he turns his head back and forth to stare at them.

"My office" his father's voice finally says when he's halfway up and Steve jumps a bit from hearing it.
"I'm going to assume Mr. Hargrove spoke with you"

That's the first full sentence that finally comes out of his father's mouth upon their reunion and Steve can't help but fidget in his seat uncomfortably.

He hates this fucking office and if he could burn it to the ground he would.

There's a part of him that planned to come in here and start spouting apologies or something just to make it look like he legitimately feels bad for taking off even though he honestly doesn't feel all that bad about it but there's something unsettling going on, something is already rubbing him the wrong way about all of this.

"Yes" he says instead, keeping it simple.

"Clearly you came back for a reason and I'll entertain this rouse of yours to our mutual benefit for the time being" he says and Steve's brain short circuits at that.

Wait, what?

"Huh?" He asks, lip curling up in surprised confusion while scratching his head.

"Don't overexert yourself Steven, go sleep in your bed for the night and in the morning we'll proceed" his dad says, hands folded in front of him on the desk in a way that's really fucking creepy and not for the first time Steve reminds himself that his father is not who he seems.

"Sorry you lost me. Proceed with what?" Steve asks, honestly not knowing what he's getting at with any of this.

His father sighs and gets up from his chair wordlessly as he pulls open his drawer and Steve feels himself start to panic as he barely catches sight of some strange looking grey...thing.

It's a light grey and shaped like a- Gun?

It's not a gun but it's certainly shaped like one and through sheer fear of being potentially shot Steve can't help himself as he stands up abruptly almost toppling over the chair.

"What are you doing?" he asks uselessly and when he gets no response it's pure adrenaline that causes his brain to say 'run' and he obliges as he heads straight for the door.

Which was probably stupid.

Also worthless because as he goes to turn around he barely catches sight of his father reaching under his desk when he suddenly hears a click.

The door locks.
Oh my god...his father has a fucking hidden *button* under there?

When the fuck had that happened?

"What the fuck kind of creepy villainy shit is this?!" Steve yells out as he turns to face his own father with as much defiance as he can muster even though he's more afraid than anything else.

His own fucking dad.

One of Brenner's agent's.

Steve wonders when his life had turned into a poorly done spy movie and when he'd obviously taken the role of the super rich daughter with no god damn survival skills.

He definitely doesn't think he's the femme fatale in all of this if his complete helplessness is anything to go by and he's certainly not going to toot his own horn for no good reason when he's allowed himself to be stupidly cornered like he's some sort of amateur.

It's because this is his *dad*, he'd let his guard down and he hadn't expected *any of this*, hadn't expected him to have more apparent knowledge than they had first assumed.

His dad merely raises his brow, not amused in the least bit and Steve realizes he literally has nowhere to go as his eyes dart frantically around the room.

When his father stalks toward him with purpose he feels like a child again as he backs up into the door and flinches away like he's going to be hit.

Except his father has never cared enough to strike him so he's not sure why that is his automatic reaction.

It takes mere seconds as the strange not-gun is pointed to his neck as his father pulls the trigger and he wonders if this is how he dies.

Killed by his own father, what a way to go.

He feels a sharp sting and hisses in pain while slapping his hand up to his neck in a knee jerk reaction and just as quickly as it came suddenly there's nothing.

No pain, nothing, there's not even blood as he pulls his hand away to look down at it.

"It's a tracking chip" his father tells him and Steve can't help but gape at him.
"You're fucking kidding me" he says in disbelief.

His own father had just injected him with a fucking tracking chip?

"Leave if you'd like but I will find you now" he threatens and Steve still can't believe this is happening right now.

"I'm still stuck on you putting a tracking chip into my fucking neck" Steve snaps back with a snarl as he shakes his head and groans in frustration while putting his face in his hands because this whole thing had just made things so much more annoying.

"It's because you disappearing is probably the only thing you've done to catch me off guard at this point" he says and Steve can't help but glare at him when he finally recovers from the initial shock of this whole cluster fuck of a situation he's suddenly found himself in.

"I'm genuinely curious, where did you actually go?" His father asks and Steve can hear the unspoken 'I searched everywhere' between them.

So they'd actually gotten one up on his dad, the guy who always seems to know everything.

It feels nice.

"A friends place" he says and it's not entirely untrue.

"Cheeky, doesn't matter. You'll slip up at some point and do you know why?" He asks, tone taunting and Steve can't help but clench his jaw and he hates it when his dad does this, treats him like he's an idiot.

"Why?" He asks back just to entertain him.

"You're an awful liar and you always have been" he replies and Steve just rolls his eyes at that.

"Dad, I don't know what you think you know, but you know nothing" he says and it had sounded way cooler in his head but now that he's said it out loud it just sounds really stupid.

His father seems to agree with his own self assessment while looking robotic as usual.

"Go to sleep son, we can talk more in the morning" he says as he turns around and when he reaches the desk he hits the button under it again, unlocking the door.

Steve still can't believe that's a thing.

Did he have it installed because he's a cheap James fucking Bond ripoff or is he screwing women behind his mother's back?

Both, probably both.
"Oh and Steven?" his dad says as Steve just stares at him and waits for him to continue.

"If you cooperate with no fuss I will personally see to Billy's protection in all of this" he says like this is some sort of peace negotiation and he's not sure what they're negotiating.

"All of what?" He asks except he's not really expecting a real answer.

His father purses his lips like he's trying to find the right words and there's an uneasy feeling settling into the pit of Steve's stomach.

This whole thing just went all kinds of different ways he hadn't been expecting which is something Alex said would probably happen but he didn't want to believe him.

"He's probably still an active agent so I'd prepare yourself for that mentally"

He's still trying to wrap his head around the fact that his father has lied to him his whole life regardless of the fact that he may or may not still be in the line of work involving the capturing of people who have the potential for latent abilities.

Or those who already have them.

"This...silly little war" his father says with trepidation as he waves his hand in the air absently and cold hard fear washes down Steve's back at his choice of words.

"Get some sleep" he says after that when Steve doesn't respond, can't respond because he's too deep in his own head upon those words.

He leaves the room as quick as he can after that and starts cursing under his breath.

War.

"Alright, what's the real reason for recruiting people with gifts?" Steve asks next, finally trying to get to the heart of whatever their little clubhouse is.

"See that's what I thought you'd ask first. It's to give people a place to hide and feel safe, like they can actually make a difference with what they have if that's what they truly want" Alex tells him plainly like he's done this spiel a million times.

"Make a difference in what?" Steve asks, raising a brow as he takes a large gulp of his coffee.

"The war" Alex says, tone suddenly dark.
That's a strange wording and Steve isn't sure if he's just being dramatic or not.

"What war?" he asks, wondering if he'll even get a straight answer.

"The war against the other side" Alex says simply and he'd been expecting more of an answer that leaned more toward what Kali does but they don't seem to care much about revenge against the people that harmed them.

"What's your stance on Brenner's men, the ones that tortured and experimented on all of you that are scattered around everywhere like roaches?" he asks, wondering if there are others in his group that seek vengeance.

"That differs depending on who you talk to but Maggie surrounds herself with a team that doesn't seek out a fight against other human's. We should all be working together against the real threat otherwise what's the point if we're all dead and eradicated?" Alex asks and it's a good question.

"What about those that disagree but Maggie takes in anyway?" Steve asks next because he knows those people exist.

Kali can't be the only one going on a killing spree.

"Those outside of the core team are taken care of and free to do as they please, we merely give them access to safety should they need it" Alex tells him and that just opens up a whole new can of worms.

Alex had used that word too but he's wondering if his father is using it in a different context.

How much does he know?

When he gets back downstairs he almost slams right into his mother and nearly jumps out of his skin upon seeing her.

He hadn't been paying attention at all and had been too deep in his own thoughts.

"Ma'- Jesus" he exclaims as she grabs at his arm, worry on her face.

"Stevie, can we talk?"
"I know you have questions" she says as she walks them into the living room as they sit down next to each other.

"Are you one of them too?" He asks, wanting to know if she's a byproduct of his father's lifestyle or they're both somehow involved in all of this.

"I need you to know that everything we've done is to keep you safe and protected" she says ignoring him completely and he can already tell this is going to be a fun conversation.

"You're giving me the cliche 'you're our son and we love you' speech right now?" He asks as he huffs out a chuckle that's more born of frustration than anything else while wishing she'd just cut the bullshit.

"Dad just put a fucking chip inside of me" he goes on to say as he rubs absently at his neck while his mother gives him a look of apology.

"We didn't expect you to disappear" she says simply like...like this is somehow normal, like it's okay to do something like this.

"So the correct thing to do is inject your own son with a device that follows his every movement?" Steve asks as sarcastically as he can.

"We have our theories of who is helping you and we know you aren't going to tell us but you're unharmed so that narrows it down at least" she observes while still deliberately ignoring his comment.

"The fuck is that supposed to mean?!" He asks in exasperated surprise, not liking what that implies one bit.

"Sweetie...your father and I spent most of our lives capturing and containing people with gifts and we know what happens to them" she tells him as she takes his hand into her own and he's too shocked to react, to pull his hand away.

"You are one of them- oh my god is this how you both met or something?!" He asks finally pulling his hand free as he runs it through his hair.

"I- we worked in different departments but yes" she tells him.

The story of how they'd met had been told to him when he was younger and he'd thought nothing of it because she'd left out the part where it was them working for Brenner.

She had told them they worked for the same company and it had been a 'whirlwind office romance'. It's hard to imagine his father as romantic and that's certainly one way of putting it.

"Oh my god" he says in disbelief once more.

"I can't tell you much but I just- can you please sit down?" She asks because at some point he'd started pacing frantically.

"You lied, you both lied and that's all you've ever done" he hisses out at her, ignoring her request.

"Just please- tomorrow I need you to not fight your father" she says and Steve stops dead as he stares at her like she's lost her damn mind.
"Excuse me?!" He yells out a bit too loud.

Not that he cares about that at this point.

"Fight him on what exactly?" He asks when she still doesn't answer.

"Just...whatever happens I need you to trust him"

"Fuck you" he says, completely deadpan.

"Steve!"

He chastens a bit, embarrassed that he just spoke to his own mother that way and had let himself get caught up in the moment-

"Ah- sorry mom...no wait- wait yeah no actually- fuck you" he says as he remembers that she's a damn liar anyway, his dad too.

What does it matter?

"Trust him, trust him in what way?! I agreed to attempting to remove the bond but now there's a fucking chip in the side of my neck because of it" he hisses out to her, rubbing at the spot absently.

Agreeing to attempting the bond removal had been part of the plan.

"You need to convince them that you want to remove the bond, make it believable or else it's just going to seem fishy" Alex says.

So he did, he'd told his parents at the precinct that he had come back because he wants the bond gone, wants to take his father up on the offer of removing it.

Billy does not feel the same, had refused and wants nothing to do with it or at least that's the cover story which just so happens to be the truth as well.

Steve of course wants the bond as well but with these new developments he's starting to think it doesn't matter if they want it or not.

Something else is going on here.

They had however seemed pleased upon hearing that he at least wishes to seek help unless that's just them lying as well.

"You are all that matters to us, you are the only thing your father truly cares about in this world" she says taking him back to the present and out of his own mind.
"You expect me to believe that?" He says as he barks out a hollow laugh. "He has never cared about my life, he's never here, my birthday gifts don't even come from him" he continues to say, not really caring much about what's proper in the face of his own mother at this point.

"Steve-"

"Yeah, I know about that by the way, they're all from you and I've known for years" he says with a shake of his head.

"You...you're a liability" she says quietly.

"What?"

"You are your father's weakness and if anyone were to ever use you against him much like where we find ourselves right now he will do anything to protect you" she tells him as she goes to stand, coming to take his hands into hers again and he's once more too shocked to react.

He just stares at her.

Or rather he stares through her, past her.

"I can't fucking believe this" he hears himself say.

"We know you were somehow involved with the closing of the gate at the lab" she says still ignoring the break down he's currently having, tone becoming serious which isn't like her at all and it's unusual to hear coming from her, a woman who is always so upbeat and happy.

He's never really known his parents, not truly it seems.

That sobers him up as he frowns and focuses on her face, looking down at her and just now realizing he has about a foot of height on her.

He starts noticing other things as well, things he hadn't paid attention to before like the way she holds herself, her worn hands that are rough like she's done a lot of physical labor in her life which is unusual for women.

It's like he'd been asleep but now he's awake and he doesn't like this feeling, doesn't enjoy seeing his own parents as a threat to his life and in a completely different light.

"Honestly we don't know how it got closed but we know you were involved at some point and Jim Hopper is working with Owen's for some reason" she says as she reaches a hand up to cup his face as he moves away.
It's in that moment he sees the heartbreak in her eyes for a split second before she recovers quickly.

"If you've known this whole time...why didn't you say anything?” He asks and it still begs the question...how much do they know and for how long have they known?

Also...if they start figuring things out about Hopper that puts Eleven at risk.

That won't be happening, not if Steve has anything to say about it.

"Too many parties are involved and it's hard to know who you're affiliated with and we'd have tipped our own hand" she says with a shrug like it's not a big deal.

"Your enemies you mean" he says as he lets out a frustrated huff of breath. "You're worried I'm affiliated with Brenner's enemies" he clarifies.

"Not necessarily-"  

"My own fucking mother treating me like I'm a god damn criminal" he says as he takes a step back and rubs his hands over his face, feeling exhausted all of a sudden.

"Look-Stevie, my sweet...not everyone agreed with Brenner's methods and there are different factions of us that go against what he stood for" she informs him not that it matters because at one point in time she had worked for him, had done the things she now probably stands against.

Or maybe she's just still lying.

"How many lives have you helped destroy or been directly responsible for destroying?” he asks and the question seems to take her off guard as she takes a physical step back and starts wringing her hands, averting her gaze.

He wants to ask how many people she's killed but he knows he's not one to talk.

*Hard to judge a killer if you're a killer as well.*

He thinks to himself with a tinge of regret.

Perhaps he isn't one to speak on destroying lives either in that case.

"Too many" she says quietly and Steve can't help but shake his head, he wants to cry because he feels responsible in some small way for some reason.

This happened before he'd even been born and anything after that was out of his control because he'd been young and stupid.

He's *still* young and stupid.
"Jesus Christ I think my head is spinning" he says, chuckling to keep himself from completely losing his shit.

"Your father and I did not work with the men that kidnapped poor Billy, I need you to know that" she says like she's trying to make herself seem better as she places a tentative hand on his arm after stepping forward again.

No...

The kidnapping...his coma and Billy getting shot, his own kidnapping cover story.

Billy had to kill two men, Eleven had to kill a man.

All of that shit and-

"You- you fucking knew about that?!" he exclaims, wrenching his arm away to step into her space and stare her down.

He has never in his life wanted to hit his mother like he does right now, he's never considered hitting a woman ever before but it's tempting for the first time in his life and he knows he can't, knows that he won't because at the end of the day this is his mother, the woman who birthed him and he-

This can't be happening.

"When we suggested therapy your father knew you'd go to Owen's behind our back" she tells him.

"Holy fucking shit" he says as he starts to laugh hysterically while grabbing at his hair with both hands and pulling hard.

They've known about all of this since his fucking coma, since the session's, they've known all this time.

"I'm sure you know it's not all black and white by now darling, it doesn't matter who's helping you or who you're working with...we will protect you" she reassures him like he somehow needs their protection.

"From what?" he asks, wanting to get as much out of her as he can.

"Yourself mostly. You're young and you have no idea what you've gotten yourself into but just trust your father, I need you to trust him" she reiterates once more and he's tired of hearing her say that.

"I can't" he tells her as he shakes his head because that's just not going to happen.

"It's alright, regardless of anything we will keep you safe, alive and protected" she says and there's a
fire in her eyes only a mother would have and Steve just scoffs at her because he doesn't buy it, not one part of it.

"I can't believe you...my whole life-"

"You have been under our protection Stevie, you were always safe and now...you will be again I promise"

That sets him off.

That's the breaking point as he feels the anger rise inside of him.

Promise?

She promises him?

He can't help it as he grabs at his face and screams loud and it sounds broken and wounded to his own ears and he knows it's childish but he can't help himself as he takes the closest thing to them and launches it in some random direction.

It's a picture that had been on the table of all three of them when they'd gone to Disneyland one year with him in that stupid Mickey hat and he hears it smash against a lamp at the far end of the room, glass shattering and different things clattering over to the ground.

His mother doesn't even so much as flinch as she just keeps staring at him with a look of pity on her face.

It just makes him even angrier.

"Fuck you, fuck all of you and your fake fucking promises. I'm so tired of you people promising me things and then turning around to break them" he growls out into her face as she still looks completely unaffected like she knows he's not ever going to actually put his hands on her.

She just waits him out like his emotionless father always does when he gets like this and throws his tantrums.

"Stevie-"

"Don't fucking talk to me!" he screams out as he turns away from her and stalks toward his bedroom.

On his way there he sees his father come out of his office to see the commotion.
There's a look of disappointment on his face that he can't bring himself to care about and he doesn't fucking want to even look at him, doesn't want to look at either one of them.

When he reaches his room he slams his door shut as hard as he can and locks it even though he knows there's no point in doing so.

If they really wanna get in here they'll get in here.

Fuck his mother.

Fuck his father.

Fuck Billy.

Fuck all of these piece's of shit that keep taking advantage of him and treating him like his own thoughts and opinions don't matter as they say all of these empty things like they want to protect him and keep him safe.

It's bullshit.

They all promise these things to him only to break them left and right like he'll just keep forgiving them, like it'll be fine because 'oh it's just Steve' or 'Steve forgives everything and everyone'.

Fuck it.

Steve wrenches his closet door open and starts throwing things out every which way as he searches for one specific item he knows is stashed away inside.

"Come here son, I have something for you"

There's a box of things he's kept in here for years and one item he's begrudgingly considered his most treasured possession.

It's the only item he has conscious memory of getting personally from his father when he was about six years old after his dad had come back from a trip after a little over a month of being gone.

It's a small box that looks professionally wrapped and Steve has never been more excited in his life because his dad is back and he got him a gift.
It's not even his birthday either.

"What is it?" he asks excitedly as he bounces up and down and it's one of the rare few times he sees his father smiling down at him.

"Open it and see" he says and Steve wastes no time.

It's-

It's a small glass container that's holding what looks like an incredibly old looking bullet.

"This is the bullet they removed from my father during the war, do you remember that story?" his dad asks him as he kneels down so they're face to face and there's a genuine look of fondness staring back at him.

The only time he gets to see this much passion from his father is when it involves his grandfather, he thinks the world of the man and holds him in the highest regard and even Steve's young mind had realized the importance of the item in that instant.

"Yeah, yeah the stories of the war from grandpa!" he exclaims excitedly as he holds it carefully.

"He's a bit young isn't he dear?" his mom says off to the side from the kitchen and the fond look on his dad's face goes away to be replaced with annoyance.

"Of course not, Steven knows how important a piece of history like this is don't you son?" he asks as Steve nods his head up and down frantically as he clutches it to his chest and holds onto it for dear life in fear that his mother might try to take it away from him.

This is his now, his dad gave this to him and it's his.

"Your grandfather wants to see you today, I'm sure he'll tell you more stories so why don't you go put it upstairs on your shelf?" he says and Steve gets a frown on his face as he looks down at his feet.

"Can I- I wanna let him see it when we go to the hospital is that okay?" he asks and his father's face softens and he feels his face cupped gently for a single moment before his hair gets ruffled and he can't help but giggle as he swats the hand away.

"We can arrange that son, I'll keep it here so you can go get ready alright?" he says and Steve can't help the bright beaming smile he gives his father as it's taken from him and put off to the side and he wraps his arms around his father's neck to pull him into a tight hug.

"Thanks dad" he says as he buries his face into the crook of his neck.

He feels his father's arms wrap around him protectively and squeeze tight and when he pulls away there's a look on his dad's face he doesn't know how to decipher.

"You're welcome son"
It's the only conscious memory he has of being hugged, it's the only conscious memory of affection he has of his dad.

A week after that event his grandfather had died and his father had been devastated even though they'd all known it was coming and he remembers walking into his dad's office to see his face in his hands as he'd been silently sobbing to himself.

It's the only time he'd ever seen his father cry.

He'd never gotten caught for it because he knew it was a private moment so he'd left quickly and quietly.

For years Steve had kept the bullet on his shelf because it was a reminder of so many different things but after years had gone by and his relationship with his dad had become more and more strained he'd stashed it away inside of a box in his closet instead.

Now he doesn't even want those memories anymore, wants nothing to do with any piece of it.

Eventually he finds it and for a split second he reconSIDers what he's about to do but it's gone within an instant as he goes to his door, unlocks it and stalks out with purpose and when he looks out over the railing of the stairway he sees his mother and father arguing near the front door.

They stop talking to turn up and look at him and he looks his father dead in the eyes.

"You can have this back" he says as he drops it callously and he hears it shatter to the floor below him.

The look on his father's face is worth all of it and he doesn't wait for a response from either one of them as he walks away and locks himself back inside of his room again.

His father bangs on his door a few moments later and he just curls into a ball next to the bed and holds his hands over his ears to block out the noise.

He wants to leave, wants to run out of the fucking house and just never come back and leave Hawkin's forever, forget any of this ever happened but he can't.

What does it matter?

With this fucking chip in his neck he's a prisoner anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Phew it's starting to go down and if you're wondering why his parents have no names I may never give them names???
Once upon a time I had no intention of making them big parts of the main story but then that changed and we don't know their names in canon and we will probably find out next season so I kind of just want to keep them from being said????

I dunno I might change my mind but we shall see.

I really wanted to create a divide here and lead into what transpires in the next chapter to really see what sets Steve off because he's been through a lot but he hasn't actually had much of a break down moment.

He's been strong for Billy and hasn't focused on his own trauma and taking care of himself so I figured now is a good time to get him to that breaking point and reverse the roles so Billy is the one that needs to pick up the pieces for once.

Also I wanted to touch on that whole scene from S2 where it's pretty clear that Steve was close with his grandfather to some degree.

In canon he's probably still alive but who dah fuck knos at this point?

It's my story and I'll do what I want XD

Hope you enjoyed!
Chapter Notes

Chapter 50!

Wow I can't believe we're all the way to chapter 50.

Thank you all so much for being here on this journey with me and don't worry I know I have an ending in sight but we've still got a long way to go my darlings. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Earlier that Day

After Steve's Arrest

Billy's POV

"Billy" he hears the familiar shrill ringing voice of Nancy say from behind him as she loops her arm into his and starts to walk with him while Jonathan falls into step on the other side.

As per usual he attempts to wrench his arm out of her icy grip and fails as she hugs at it tight like a fucking leech while he just huffs out a sigh and eventually gives up.

"Why are we being left in the dark?" she asks and her tone is sickly sweet in a way that implies she's completely faking it.

"Probably because it has nothing to do with you" he says honestly.

They aren't needed so there was no point in telling them.

"Hopper seems to know though and he's the one that escorted Steve out of here in handcuffs" she says curiously like somehow stating that is going to make him tell her anything.

Word had spread quickly that Steve had been taken into police custody which was the signal for Billy to start his side of the plan but with Nancy on his arm like a psycho clingy girlfriend he's being delayed.

"Can you control your woman please?" he asks Jonathan as he gives him a look that he hopes says 'why the fuck are you letting this happen?'

Jonathan just shrugs and looks forward with indifference and he seriously hates them both so god damn much.

People start to look at them strange and he knows it's because he doesn't usually go out of his way to
interact with these two while they're at school together, any interactions are always outside of it.

Eventually he catches sight of Tommy and Carol rounding the corner as they look right at them and he sees the mischievous smile that Tommy gets on his face as they make a bee line right for them and as they get closer Billy fights to keep in the groan he wants to make out loud which he's pretty sure just ends up making him look more constipated than anything else as he barely manages a semblance of self control.

"Hargrove, Byer's and Wheeler...you really get around don't you?" Tommy says as he stares right at Nancy.

Billy immediately moves forward which is what finally gets Nancy to let go of his damn arm as he gets right into Tommy's face who looks like he's trying not to shit his pants from the sudden turn of events that has quickly gone from zero to one hundred within seconds.

Usually Billy likes to play with his food before he eats it but he's really not in the mood and he's got somewhere to be.

Not only that but this guy is always talkin' so big but when you really confront him he always cowers.

"Jesus Hargrove...you're like a fucking pit bull with a chain around your neck, you gonna unleash him on me or something princess?" he says while locking eyes with Nancy.

Yeah.

Fuck Tommy.

He doesn't like the way this piece of shit is looking or talking to her at all right now cause only he gets to take the piss out of Wheeler.

Not to mention there had been a time long ago when Tommy had gotten blackout drunk and said some nasty shit about the things he wants to do to her.

He may not be a big fan of the chick but all of these piece of shit assholes are still his responsibility at the end of the day with everything they've all been through together.

Almost collectively dying certainly brings people closer.

Billy brings his hands up and grabs at Tommy's jacket as he turns his body and slams him into the lockers as hard as he can so that Tommy gets winded.

"Is that what you want Tommy boy? I can grant your wish for you if you ask nicely" Billy hisses into his face.

"Really Hargrove? You- you're going to defend the creep and that- that stuck up bitch?" Tommy says breathlessly as he tries to wiggle free like the cockroach he is.

Billy tilts his head to the side and he sees Tommy visibly deflate.

"Wanna say that again?" he asks and the guy actually gets brave like an idiot as he steels himself.
Man, he's really lookin' for a fight.

"I said she's a stuck up bitch"

Billy gets a smile on his face as he nods his head and steps away from Tommy as he smooths out his jacket for him.

"You also called Byer's over there a creep...got anything else for me?" he asks him as he puts his hands in his pockets and Tommy looks at him like he's not sure what's going on.

"Other than your boy toy being hauled off by the Chie-?"

Tommy doesn't get to finish that sentence as Billy grabs him again and quickly starts to haul him up the stairs and the guy starts squealing like a fuckin' pig.

"Billy!" he hears Nancy and Jon yell out while Carol just screams like the dumb bitch she is as people scramble out of their way and a couple of kids almost fall down the entire flight of stairs trying to move.

"Come on you little fucker, let's go look at the view" Billy says excitedly to him as he tries to get out of his jacket to get free so Billy just grabs him by his shirt instead while getting a grip onto his arm.

"Stop it Billy, he gets it!" he hears Jonathan yell as they try to catch up and he's wondering how out of shape they all must be if he's actually faster than them while hauling all of this dead weight.

"I dunno, I feel like he really doesn't though!" Billy yells down to them as he straight up cackles because he can't help himself and when he gets to the top of the stairs he hauls Tommy up over the railing while keeping a good grip on him to keep him from dropping.

"Billy- Billy man come on I'm sorry, I'm fuckin' sorry I was just joking!" he screams out like the pussy he is.

Soon after that Nancy and Jonathan reach the top of the stairs and make a lunge for Tommy.

He lets go so he's holding Tommy with one arm and everyone collectively stops in their tracks as Carol starts sobbing and falls to her knees, begging him to stop and sputtering out all kinds of gibberish.

"You can't kill him Billy, there's too many witnesses around" Nancy says as she slowly tries to inch closer.

"Kill him? I'm just freakin' him out a little is all. That's fucked up...you think I'm gonna kill him?"
Billy asks as he barks out a laugh in disbelief.

"Billy please, please I'm sorry" he still hears Tommy say and the guy is actually crying at this point.

What a bitch.

"If you let him go he's going to fall to his death" Jon says and they're all looking at him like he's a wild animal or something, inching closer and closer at a slow pace.

Okay...so he kind of is like a wild animal so it's not completely shocking but still.

He's not stupid enough to kill someone where everyone can see.

"Jeez you all are such sticks in the mud, I'm just fuckin' around with the guy, gotta instill a little fear" he says with a shrug as he hauls him back and slaps his face a little.

When Tommy gets his feet under himself Billy pushes him back hard and it's incredibly satisfying to see him crash right into the wall.

Right before Billy goes to turn toward a very upset looking Jonathan and Nancy he catches sight of the fact that-

Oh man...wow.

He'd pissed himself, Tommy had actually pissed himself.

"See? I'm pretty sure he learned his fucking lesson" Billy says as he starts laughing boisterously loud as he crouches down so he's level with Tommy's face.

"You keep your measly little mouth shut and you stay the fuck away from them, capiche?" he says so they can finally have an understanding with each other because he's never actually imposed himself onto Tommy before, hadn't ever felt the need to.

"Okay- I get it Billy I'm sorry I'll do anything" he starts saying as he sobs like a little fuckin' baby.

When he gets up Carol darts to the guy's side and starts grabbing at his face and thanking god and whatever else and Billy can't help but roll his eyes at them.

So stupid, these people are so damn stupid.

"Oh and Tommy" he says as the guy looks up at him eyes wide in fear.
"If I hear that you've done or said anything to them I'm going to crush your fucking legs with the trash compactor out behind the cafeteria and well- I've never done that to a man before so...I may not succeed"

Tommy and Carol just look at him like he's lost all of his marbles and he kind of wants to inform them that he's always been this way so he's not sure why they seem so shocked all of a sudden.

"Basically what I'm saying is it's your choice and probably your funeral" Billy tells him with a shrug as a friendly warning while he watches Tommy curl up into himself and whimper like the cunt he is.

"Billy let's go" he hears Nancy say as he feels Jonathan grab him by his upper arm and haul him back down the stairs as he shoots Tommy and Carol one last toothy smile over his shoulder.

The school faculty here suck if he'd just gotten away with all of that with no consequence, lucky him.

"You're fucking insane, what the actual hell is wrong with you?!" Jonathan says as they walk outside as Nancy just glares at him while he starts walking toward Alex who's leaning up against his car waiting for him about twenty feet away.

"Come on, he's been askin' for it and I can only let that shit slide for so long before I need to put him in his place" he says with a shrug as he pulls his arm out of Jonathan's hold.

"You went overboard" Jon says and Billy can't help but snort.

"He wants to rape Nancy, you know that right?" he says as he turns around abruptly and gets in his face.

"What?!" he hears her yell out as Jon just gets a concerned look on his face.

"Got him real drunk one night while Carol was grabbin' us some food and he started going on and on about the things he wants to do to your girlfriend" Billy informs him as Jonathan takes a step back with a look of surprise on his face.

"Tommy says stupid stuff all the time, he was drunk Billy and he's never done anything to me" Nancy says and he can tell she thinks he's just full of shit but isn't directly saying it to his face.

"I was doing Tommy a favor, pretty sure if he ever wanted to make that fantasy into a reality I'm not the one that's going to end his life, bet you'd both just tag team it yourselves" he says with a huff of amusement.

Honestly he fully expects that Nancy wouldn't really need anyone's help especially since Tommy's a weak little fucker anyway.
"Neither one of us needs your help and this strange protectiveness you have for the sake of staying on Steve's good side is backfiring, just so you know" Jonathan says to him angrily.

"Why the fuck would I be doing it because of Steve if he isn't even here?" He asks and he's not really sure why they'd think that's his reason for what just transpired.

"Because if you get our approval he'll take you back" Jon says.

Oh that's rich.

"I don't need your damn approval on anything and I'm pretty sure we all know Steve's going to do whatever the fuck he wants regardless of your shitty commentary" Billy says as he barks out a laugh and shakes his head.

"Oh and does your girlfriend over there know you were up on her ex-boyfriend by the way?" he asks before Jonathan can open his mouth again as he points a thumb at Nancy.

"Billy-" Jon says as his eyes go wide.

"Wait, what?" Nancy says as she looks between them.

"Our Jonny here tried to get sweet on Steve the other day while you two were having a bit of a tiff" he says, the sarcasm rolling off his tongue as he smirks at Jon.

"It wasn't like that, I didn't do anything to him" Jon says as he turns to look at Nancy pleadingly who looks more confused than anything.

"Explain what you mean" she says as she turns her head to lock eyes with Billy.

"Pinned him to the damn couch, grabbed his face-

"I was trying to make him listen, I didn't do anything and I wouldn't have done anything!" Jon yells out as he grabs Nancy's arm and starts rubbing it gently up and down in what he can only assume is reassurance.

"Billy, you've got some serious problems if you think you can attempt to throw a wrench between Jonathan and I" she says as she gets out of Jonathan's grasp and steps into his space instead.

"I'm just letting you know what happened because you asked" he says with a shrug as he looks down at her.

"Did Jonathan fuck him?" she asks and Billy can't help it as his eyes widen because he had no idea that word was even in her vocabulary.

Looks like the 'Queen Prude' is finally starting to get her hands a little dirty.

Billy almost feels a little bit...proud for some reason.
"Uhh- no" he says and he's fully aware that Nancy's not exactly the easiest read as her eyes become a bit *too* intense.

"Did they kiss?" she asks next as Billy shakes his head no and scratches his head.

"Then there's no problem here and if you think that's going to distract us *you're wrong*" she says as Billy groans and rubs a hand over his face as he looks back at Alex who taps the top of his wrist in a 'we're losing time' gesture.

Billy motions to the assholes behind him aggressively in a 'it's their fault!' sort of manner in return.

Alex just shakes his head and rolls his eyes as he gets into his car and Billy takes that as a 'hurry up'.

"I'm just saying you might want to keep an eye on your *boyfriend*" he says with a frown.

"Worry about *yourself*. What's going on with Steve?" she asks, changing the subject completely and not falling for the bait at all which is kind of annoying.

"Look- I don't have time for this okay?" he says as he turns and starts walking away from them.

"Are you kidding me right now?!" she yells out angrily.

"Ask Hop!" he yells back behind his shoulder as he gets into the car as quickly as possible with an Alex who's raising a brow at him with a 'what did you do now?' look in his eyes.

"Maybe you should cool your jets a little bit" Alex suggests after Billy gives him the run down of what happened and he'd gotten far more detailed than he usually is upon further prompting from Alex because he's like a nosy little school girl wanting the latest gossip.

"It's what people expect of me anyway, I'm supposed to be the *crazy* one" he says with a snort as he waves his hand in the air absently.

"I don't think anyone doubts that about you. What's really going on though?" he asks like there's some sort of underlying meaning to all of it as Billy raises a brow at him questioningly.

"In my experience people don't generally lash out for no reason" Alex observes after seeing the confused look on his face which is kind of annoying.

"I- he's just an asshole" Billy says, not really wanting to go into detail after being yelled at already by Nancy and Jonathan which hadn't been very enjoyable to say the least.

"Yeah and you seemed to have it pretty well under control and you even spooked him up a bit- until he mentioned Steve of course and you lost your shit" Alex says with a snort like Billy isn't fooling anyone...which he probably isn't as he just keeps staring forward without responding to him because Alex is *not* his father and he has no reason to explain himself to *anyone*.

Anyone other than Steve that is.
"Ah yep- there it is, you get this little twitch in your jaw when he's mentioned" he says with a knowing smirk as he points absently at him.

"I just miss him" Billy says, keeping it simple like it's no big deal as he sniffs and wipes at his nose.

"Oh nice cover up, try again" Alex says and Billy is really hating how this guy can see right through him most of the time.

Or all the time, it's hard to tell.

"Christ- I feel like I'm going to jump outta my skin if something happens to him okay?" He admits even though it's still even a little bit worse than that but he's trying to get Alex to just drop this.

He could probably throw up on the spot right now from how nervous he is for Steve and all he can see when he closes his eyes is his lifeless face when Billy had held him in his arms after they'd climbed out of lake Michigan.

There had been nothing.

Billy had been nothing while Steve had been dead.

The fact that Steve even survived is a miracle in and of itself and Billy wakes up every morning to the thought that maybe it's all a dream, maybe he'd succeeded in killing him and one day he'll wake up and Steve won't actually be there.

Thinking about it for too long just makes him angry, vulnerable, and heartbroken.

It's too much.

It's just fucking rough.

Billy reaches for the unopened water bottle that's in the middle drink holder only to have Alex bat his hand away.

"Tsk- you won't want that just yet" he says as Billy just rolls his eyes and shakes his head as he looks out the window instead.

"Might wanna work on not taking out your frustrations about the lack of control you have over a situation on others" Alex says with a look of pity on his face.

"Whatever" he tells him, really wanting this conversation to be over as he continues to stare out the window as he sees them pass by the small shitty little Hawkin's houses.
He really needs to leave this place at some point.

"You realize you're just doing what your father did to you all your life right?" Alex says and apparently this is just never going to end.

Billy gapes at him all the same and thinks about his pact with Max in that moment.

"Why don't we make a pact, if either one of us starts being like Neil we call each other out?" He says, mostly as a peace offering.

Max actually smiles at that as she turns her head and nods.

"You've got a deal, we gotta shake on it though" she says as she spits into her hand and holds it out.

"Yeah alright' Billy says with a shrug as he spits into his, holding it out to take her hand as they shake on it, solidifying the deal.

"You'll turn into him and eventually that's going to be turned on poor Steve" Alex says pulling him out of his own thoughts as his hand clenches into a fist in his lap.

"Or...maybe Steve will die and you'll become the shell of a man your father was when he was alive and become an even bigger piece of shit as a result" he says and Billy can't help but whip his head to turn and look at him like he's lost his damn mind.

Did this guy really just fucking say that to him?

"You act like tough shit but you're weak Billy, it's an easily exploitable weakness too" he says and the shock is starting to wear off as he glares at Alex.

It's almost as if the older man knows what's coming next, knows that Billy's about to beat the shit out of him because within the next moment he's parking the car off to the side of the road and getting out of it as Billy wastes no time getting out of the car, slamming his door shut as he starts walking around over to the driver's side to get into Alex's face to stare him down.

"You don't know me" Billy hisses out at him as the older man looks completely unaffected.

"Come on big guy, you wanna hit me?" he asks, small smirk on his face. "Before you decide though- why don't you ask yourself why you're about to hit me?"

"The fuck are you even on about right now?" Billy asks him as Alex just crosses his arms over his chest and chuckles lightly to himself.

"I wordlessly parked this car and you got out of the car just like I knew you would, you are doing every single thing I knew you'd do" he tells him and suddenly Billy feels a bit out of his depth as he clenches his jaw and steps away.
"You wanna know what control is?" Alex asks as Billy just stares at him warily. "It's moments like these" he says menacingly.

Billy feels himself suddenly burning up like he's in desert heat as he starts to sweat and it feels like he’s going to suffocate as he falls to his knees and starts getting disoriented from it.

Every breath feels like fire in his lungs.

Billy visited Nevada once when he was a kid and it had been over a hundred and ten degrees outside and the California heat can get a bit more humid at times.

Nevada heat is dry.

Sometimes when it’s hot and you breath in it's like you've got a blow dryer in your fucking face and it sucks.

That's exactly what this feels like.

For some reason it's in this moment that he notices how green the grass on the ground is as time seems to slow down and the heat gets more and more intense and he feels himself start to panic.

He's going to die.

Alex is going to kill him and he's about to fucking die.

The older man leans down and tilts his head to the side and Billy can see the look of pity out of his peripheral but it's too hard for him to focus because his body is fighting to simply survive the sweltering heat.

"Control is when you refuse to allow someone else to dictate how you think, feel and react to any given situation" he goes on to say like they're talking about the weather or something and this is all just no big deal.

"Please-" Billy pleads because he can't die here...not now when Steve is in potential danger.

"People will extort your weakness because you can't learn to use your anger as an asset" he goes on to say, ignoring him completely.

It feels like it lasts for an eternity and it's like he's going to burn alive from the inside and it's unlike anything he's ever felt before as he tries to hold on for as long as he can.

Suddenly within the next moment it's gone.
He takes fresh air into his lungs and it *doesn't* feel like he's breathing in liquid hot *fire* anymore as he rests his forehead into the cool grass as he digs his fingers into it to feel the soil under his fingertips, on his skin so he can somehow feel grounded again and just gathers his bearings.

It takes him a long time to finally get himself together and when he rests his weight into his arms to push himself up a bit he can see Alex's worn black sneakers first before anything else.

When he takes a few more breaths and sits back on his knees and wonders when Alex had started standing again he turns his head upward to look him in the face.

There's a water bottle being held out to him.

The one from the car, the one Alex told him not to drink from.

He *planned* this.

Billy wastes no time to take it because he feels like he hasn't had water in *weeks* as he downs the whole thing in one go.

"I'll let you in on a little secret Billy, humanity is the real monster" he says and Billy just looks at him, doesn't know what to say to that or if he's even supposed to speak. "At the end of the day you're just some piece of shit kid who thinks the world is against him because your daddy slapped you around a bit"

Billy startles at that as he crushes the now empty water bottle in his hand and he can only hear his own heavy breathing as they stare at each other while he still just sits there unsure of what to say.

"There are real monsters in this world and they're people who don't care about anyone other than themselves" Alex finally says like he'd been waiting for Billy to *really* pay attention.

"Those people *actually* exist and I mean that in a sense I hope you never have to understand as long as you live"

Billy's got no fucking clue what he's going on about but he knows at this point he's dealing with a *very* fucking dangerous man.

"I've seen some shit worse than anything that other dimension can throw at you and I've been to both sides multiple times just like you, it's unfathomable how much worse our side is compared to that one" he says as he gets a far off look in his eyes and it's in this moment that Billy thinks he's seeing the *real* Alex.

Or maybe he's not, he has no fucking clue anymore at this point.

"People, real flesh and blood people that torture *other* real human beings to the point of insanity and Billy...believe me when I tell you that not every person with a gift is an ally" he says with a clench of his jaw.
"You don't fuckin' say" Billy says as he shakes his head and glares at him as the older man just snorts in response before his expression turns back to something gravely serious.

"For example there's this man that heals people...do you know what he does with that gift?" he asks.

"Heals people?" Billy says sarcastically.

"Not for the reasons you think...torture is a very mild way of describing it but if you ever want to know about it in detail one day and we get the chance to talk just ask me about Unit 731" he says and Billy has no way of describing the look on his face now other than *haunted*.

"Regardless you are not hot shit like you think you are, you're a young kid that hasn't really seen the world or the people that live in it, not truly" Alex goes on to say as Billy finds it within himself to stand again on shaky legs.

"There are billions of us and not a single one of us is special, we are all just humans trying to find our own way and *nobody* is better than anyone else- we just *are*"

"It can all go away too-" Alex snaps his fingers for emphasis, "Just like that, a single instant is all it takes and you're just *dead*"

"You fucking suck at pep talks" Billy tells him and he still feels like he's run a damn marathon as he uses the car as leverage to keep himself upright.

"I'm trying to get you to understand that life is *way too fucking short* to wallow in your own fears and insecurities and allow them to dictate how you live your life" he says and-

He's starting to sound like Steve.

Or maybe Alex has always reminded him of Steve in certain ways and that's why he finds himself inherently trusting the man even though he probably *shouldn't*.

The guy had just tried to *kill* him but he's pretty sure that had been the point and it was more of a lesson than anything else because if Alex truly wants him dead he can clearly do it without any effort whatsoever.

He'd fallen for the trap and gotten himself worked up like Alex knew he would.

God *damnit*.

"If you can't find a way to be of sound mind and roll with the punches it will get used against you just like I used it against you right now" he says and after they stare at each other for a few more moments Alex lets out a deep sigh.

"You ready to go and grab this motherfucker Terry?" he asks as Billy just shakes his head and runs a hand through his hair.

"If I said no would it matter?" he asks as he finally rights himself.
"Not really" Alex says with a chuckle.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was intense to write and it was totally different originally but I decided to add more detail because you all know how I am with my details lol.

So yeah, everything that was meant to be THIS chapter will be in 51 instead and the good news is I'm halfway through 51 as we speak as a result of this decision except it's the middle of the chapter?? And not? the beginning?? of it???

I tend to go back and forth between scenes a lot lately instead of the way I used to do it which was to write the chapter in order.

Now that there's so much plot it's hard not to write certain scenes first cause I get so excited. ;3

Any history buffs that are wondering why I had Alex mention Unit 731 was on purpose, I didn't just string some random numbers together.

Unit 731 was something REAL that happened back in WWII which was a VERY LONG TIME AGO even within the canon of this story so that implies exactly what you think it implies about the person Alex mentions.

If any of you want to know about the horror that happened back in WWII should look it up but I do warn you it's fucking awful because it was something that REALLY happened.

It isn't pretty and it's a testament to the awful atrocities that humanity is capable of.
Sorry it took me so long to post this I've been busy with life for once.

So my new car is now registered and I'M SO HAPPY!

GUYS YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW AWESOME IT IS TO HAVE A CAR THAT ISN'T SHIT AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO CRANK THE WINDOWS, THERE'S LIKE BUTTONS THAT ROLL THEM UP FOR YOU, HOW CRAZY IS THAT?!

ALSO I CAN JUST LIKE...OPEN MY DRIVER'S SIDE DOOR AND GET OUT?????? WHAT?????

My old car...I had to roll down my window and open it from the outside to get out of my car.
It fucking sucked.

Regardless I love my new car and all I wanna do is drive everywhere with it and I am so happy and her name is Polly.

Anyway, this chapter is actually really fucking long????

It's a bit ambiguous at many parts which is on purpose and it's pretty trippy so yeah...enjoy? XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"This is where he's staying?" Billy asks as he looks at the paper containing all of Terry's information while they drive to what is apparently some dingy little motel.

Well...dingy by Hawkin's standards.

Why wouldn't the Harrington's put this guy up somewhere better or in their own home if he's a family friend and someone Mr. Harrington 'used' to work with?

Strange.

"That's what Kali and Hopper's Intel says" Alex replies with a shrug as he gestures to the paper he's holding.

"I feel like a sweaty pig, you couldn't have almost killed me after all of this?" Billy says as he grimaces.

He needs a fucking shower.

"You're such a baby and I did not almost kill you" Alex says with a snort.

"You yankin' my chain right now? That is what burning hot fucking death feels like" Billy says as Alex just gives him a look.
"That was not me trying to kill you buddy, trust me when I say you'll know if I'm trying to" he says and Billy actually believes him.

Sorta.

"Great, I feel much better now, thanks"

"That unease you're feeling is hypocritical, I imagine this is how other people feel when they're around you" Alex says and Billy wonders if he's going to turn all of their conversations into some form of a life lesson from now on or something.

"Touche" he replies.

"Pretty sure if I had let it go on any longer you'd have compelled me anyway" Alex states.

The thought had crossed his mind briefly but his own panic and reliance on the bond to steer him away from danger had made him just sit there like a fucking doorknob.

The bond hadn't even stirred, there was no reaction from it which was unusual.

Even now he feels it under his skin, content as can be like there's not a single problem in the world.

Perhaps it knew Alex wasn't really going to kill him.

The implications of that are a bit terrifying to dissect.

It would mean the bond has its own personality and chooses to make judgement calls based upon its own thoughts and feelings or something.

It did with Lee and his men, it did with Steve.

They've already established it 'feels' by how upset it had been with Steve after he tried to hide the fact that he was being followed.

Since then the bond hasn't made a damn peep.

Not on Billy's side of course, he can't speak for Steve.

"Nice to know you trust me though, I thought maybe you'd go straight into a compulsion" Alex says with a dorky ass fucking grin on his face that belies the true nature of what he's really capable of.

*The stone sits in Alex's palm and Billy imagines his arm is starting to hurt from holding it up for so long with how hard he's been grilling the guy.*

"Do you intend to kill Steve and I?" He asks next.

"No" Alex says simply.
"Do you intend to harm us?" He asks next.

"Ehhh, if I have to sure...you're a bit if a loose cannon and I've already had to impose myself on you a little bit. Steve is pretty relaxed though albeit manipulative at times it seems" The older man says with an exaggerated shrug as he scratches at his face absently.

The stone stays blue.

"What do you mean?" Billy asks not really knowing what that has to do with anything or how it matters.

"Mm, I'll admit I'm a bit biased towards you because at one point in time I was exactly like you were except far worse" he says as Billy just raises an inquiring brow at him.

"I get how hard it is when you finally try to break years of bad habits and nobody believes you can do it" he says and for some reason Billy finds himself feeling a bit uncomfortable at hearing such an admission.

"It's obvious that Steve's on your side and your biggest cheerleader but it just seems like he can be a bit harsh at times when it's not really all that warranted" Alex says almost like he's talking to himself out loud.

Billy has noticed he can be quite the chatter box.

"Don't get me wrong I understand it but if you don't surround someone in an environment where they can succeed they're just going to fail" Alex says and the sigh he lets out sounds rather frustrated and Billy wonders if he's thinking more about himself than Billy in this situation.

"He's just making sure I stay in line, he keeps me in check" Billy says defensively.

"There's a difference between keeping a person in check and manipulating them to do what you want them to do" Alex tells him with a raised brow.

"Steve doesn't manipulate me, if anything I tend to do it more often than not" he says as he laughs at the ridiculousness of this.

"I could see that but I also know how hard it is to deal with people like Steve, they're chameleons" Billy asks, feeling a bit taken aback.

"The fuck is that supposed to mean?" Alex says which is pretty much dead on.

"They make you think they're submitting, they choose their battles wisely and blend in to a situation effortlessly and he knows you intimately so he knows exactly what to say and do to get you to do certain things" Alex says which is pretty much dead on.

He's mentioned to Steve before that he is the one that truly has the control in their relationship.

Or rather when they had one.
"I- yeah okay" Billy mutters while rubbing at the stubble on his face.

"Here's the thing- you've been taught to take unnecessary punishments all your life so it's what you're used to and as a result it's hard for you to see when you're being treated unfairly because you think you deserve it" Alex says while looking at him pointedly.

"I don't think Steve treats me unfairly" he says as he really tries to think about it.

"Maybe, maybe not but there's a potential regardless"

Billy can't help but just stare at him, not really certain of what to say to any of that and he knows Alex means well and he's going for the whole recruiting angle.

Perhaps he should feel more bothered by it.

"All I'm saying is don't sell yourself short, you're a good kid and some people are able to see past your gruff exterior" he says and for some reason Billy can't help but think of Joyce Byer's.

She's one of the kindest women he's ever met and she's one of the only people in his life that when he looks at her in the eyes he can tell that she sees him.

Even Steve had never been like that, they'd hated each other at first and it had taken time to learn from one another.

He knew she saw right through him the moment she'd grabbed his arm and told him he's welcome in her home any time.

Billy realizes he should visit her soon, it'll give him an excuse to see Will too.

Hopefully when Jonathan isn't around.

"When did this turn into us painting our nails and talking about girls?" Billy asks him as he sees him shake out his arm a little because it probably fell asleep.

"Sorry, I like to talk a lot" he says apologetically.

"That's for sure" Billy says with a snort.

"Anyway, I'm on your side and I intend to help you kill the Mind Flayer so you can get yourselves back on your feet again" Alex tells him.

The stone stays blue.

"Try it again and I'll compel you to bash your face into the car door until I feel satisfied" Billy tells him, purposefully ignoring the 'trust' comment.

It's not that he necessarily trusts Alex it's more that he can see there's an obvious multi-layered gain for him in all of this.

The most important one being recruitment if he plays his cards right which Billy is still on the fence about.
Recruited for what exactly?

He doubts it involves just throwing a bunch of freaks together and letting them live happy lives to frolic wherever they please.

There's a catch somewhere in all of this.

"Duly noted" Alex says as he nods and gets a small smile on his face.

There's a bit of a stifled silence before Alex starts tapping his finger on the steering wheel thoughtfully.

"I want you to practice on Terry by the way" he says next.

"Say what?"

"You'll need to start figuring out how to use it at will" Alex clarifies.

"I don't disagree just...what are you planning to do to this guy?" he asks even though he's pretty sure he just got a taste of what may likely happen to him.

Not that he's complaining because looking at this file Kali was able to get on the guy...which she'd probably gotten illegally.

It seems he's a real piece of shit.

He places the file back into the glove box and finds himself wanting to see the man in a great deal of pain.

Turns out he's known for his forceful methods of capture.

"He knows where my brother is, he's going to tell us where" Alex says.

That's the other important aspect of this, Terry apparently transported the person Alex is looking for somewhere.

He knows where this 'brother' of theirs is being held.

It's a large part of why they gave Steve up because they know he'll become the main priority and it will make getting to Terry much easier.

Not to mention Alex wants to use him as a hostage to gauge his importance in all of this.

"You think they'll care that we have him?" Billy asks curiously.

"Probably not but that's why we've got to find out what their protocol is when their agents have been compromised" Alex says.

"It's just an information grab" Billy says more than asks.

"Something like that" he says and Billy gets the feeling that there's something he's missing.
"Alright, how do you wanna do this?" Billy asks, following his lead because it's his plan and partially Hopper's at the end of the day.

"We do this the simple way, knock on his door and if he answers we go inside" he says.

"And if he doesn't?"

"We go in anyway and wait but Axel and Dottie were the ones tailing this guy, they said he's going to be here" he says with a hopeful shrug.

"Sounds good to me, just give me the word el' capitan" Billy says as he salutes to him and Alex just rolls his eyes.

"How does it work anyway?" He asks suddenly.

"The compulsion?" Billy questions.

"Yeah, is it just you concentrating on giving the words purpose?"

"Nah it's more like uh-" Billy keeps trying to find the right words for this. "Okay so imagine Steve's a car" he settles on saying.

"Are you seriously comparing the love of your life to a car right now?" Alex asks with a snort as Billy levels him with a glare.

"It's an analogy!"

"Sure, go on"

"Fuck off"

Alex raises a brow in response as Billy picks up on the unspoken 'I said go on'.

"So he's the car and I'm the driver. I direct all of this energy where to go that he seems to have built up inside of him" he tells him, hoping that makes sense.

"Sound kinky"

"I wish"

"So when you use your compulsion you're using his energy to do it?" Alex asks next.

"Exactly"

"What about if he uses that energy for himself?" He asks this time which is...a good question.

Billy thinks about that, thinks back to when Steve had almost...done something,

They had been captured and inside of different rooms by Lee's men and they had both been terrified, couldn't handle being separated and the bond wasn't having it either.
Every light in the entire house had shattered and it felt...Billy had directed it upon instinct because it felt like something that was **too much**.

The words were loud and clear in his head from Steve at one point before they had become one and things started getting really crazy.

**Make them go away.**

**Go away where?**

There had been a familiar feeling to it that terrified some deep part of Billy so by instinct he'd redirected it and instead of giving it the intent Steve had wanted he merely allowed release.

As a result the lights had shattered.

In the back of his mind he knew if he didn't direct it somewhere else *something* was going to happen, *something* really fucking bad.

He's not sure what that *something* is yet.

"I don't know" he says honestly.

Getting into the room is easy and simple.

*This guy is supposed to be an agent?*

Billy can't help but chuckle lightly as he steps over Terry's unconscious body.

"I told you to try and use your compulsion" Alex says in frustration as he rubs at the bridge of his nose and pushes Terry's legs off to the side so he can get the door closed as Billy barrels his way through to look around.

"I compelled him to be unconscious with my fist" Billy tells him with a toothy grin and the look he gets from Alex makes him straight up cackle.

"I actually got you upset for once, I'll consider it an accomplishment" he says feeling far more proud than he probably should.

"If you were so spooked by the gun you could have told him to lower it instead" Alex says with a sigh as he kneels down next to the guy and takes said gun from his hand, removing the clip.

"Being shot fucking sucks and I did what felt natural" Billy says with a shrug as he goes towards the bathroom and remembers the time he'd gotten shot fairly vividly.

There's a part of him that's happy that when he'd shot Steve he'd been out of it for most of the healing process because it's the aftermath that sucks the most.

Another part of him immediately begins to think of the most awful memories it can conjure of the worst things he's ever done to Steve and he feels the bile rise up in his throat as he tries to shake the thoughts away.
"Oi, no shower there big guy we need to be in and out of this place and time is of the essence" Alex says as he points accusingly at him as he gets his hand on the doorknob.

"It'll give you time to search the room and I don't need to be stinking up every damn place I walk into" Billy says with an eye roll as he ignores Alex's pleas completely and shuts the door behind him quickly after going inside.

He hears Alex groan and finds that today is quite honestly becoming incredibly successful on a lot of different fronts.

"Make it quick!" he hears the older man yell out.

It's not a great shower by any means because the motel is older than dirt and the water pressure is more of a trickle but it's still something and he makes it quick as he tries to calm down his own roaring emotions for a brief moment.

They're about an hour from Steve and even this is a struggle for him.

It feels a lot like failure.

All in all he thinks he's doing pretty well since he hasn't interfered at all and that's really all that had been asked of him but he needs to see him, needs to know he's alright to calm his mind.

A flash of awful thoughts passes through him once again.

Smashing a plate over Steve's head, towering over him threateningly, strangling him to death, holding his body in his arms.

It's never going to go away.

It becomes too much as he finds himself sitting down and curling up into himself in the corner of the tub as the light spray of water washes over him.

He holds his hands to his ears and whimpers lightly hoping Alex doesn't hear him.

He's on the verge of a full blown panic attack but nobody needs that right now, Steve needs his head in the game and if Billy distracts him it could be bad.

Instead he tries to calm himself down for once as he breathes in and out and starts to think of better things.

The taste and smell of Steve's skin when they wake up in the morning, the way he laughs when something is genuinely funny as he holds his sides and his eyes crinkle in delight.

The way he says Billy's name breathlessly as he makes him come undone.

That dorky smile he gets when Billy does something he finds endearing.

The way they fight, that adorable fucking way Steve's lower lip pouts when he knows he's wrong about something but doesn't want to admit it.

Most of all it's the way that Steve smiles into ninety percent of their kisses that makes Billy completely helpless and he doesn't even care.
It takes a bit longer but eventually he finds himself calming down.

When he steps out of the shower and dries himself and gets his clothes back on he looks at himself in the mirror and it's natural for him as he closes his eyes and pulls himself toward Steve-

"We don't got all day big guy!" Alex yells out as he bangs violently on the door as Billy runs a hand over his face and groans.

When he wrenches the door open he glares Alex down and they stare at each other for a moment before he pushes past him, brushing shoulders and almost knocking him over.

"God damn, you're in a really shitty mood" the older man says as he rights himself after almost toppling over and goes to grab a bag that's probably Terry's.

"I'm going to bring the car over here so we can load him into it" Alex says as he goes for the front door and Billy can't help but frown as he goes and grabs the towel from the bathroom to dry his hair a bit more.

"Wait- what about when he wakes up?" he says realizing they'll be in a tiny car with a supposed agent that will definitely wake up at some point.

"Compel him" Alex says as he walks out the door and Billy wants nothing more than to wring his damn neck.

Unfortunately the man on the floor chooses that moment to stir and Billy can't help but groan again.

"Wha- what" he hears Terry say as the man gathers his bearings for an incredibly long time and pushes himself up off the floor.

When he turns around and sees Billy his eyes widen as he reaches for his gun that isn't there anymore.

"Yeah, not this time" Billy says with a snort as he puts his hands in his pockets after throwing the towel off to the side.

"Mr. Hargrove, you pack quite the punch" Terry says as he rubs at his face and hisses in pain.

Now is as good a time as any to figure out this whole compulsion thing and he remembers what it felt like, the desperation behind it when they'd been under threat but it's hard to muster that up again because he's in no real danger.

Terry moves fast all of a sudden as he bolts for the door and luckily when it opens Alex is right there blocking his way.

*That was fast.*

Billy thinks to himself absently.

Alex seems surprised at first as Terry tries to get past him but it seems more like an automatic reaction than anything as he grabs him and gets him back inside of the room and throws him to the ground effortlessly.

"You just gonna stand there or actually do something?" Alex asks Billy as Terry struggles underneath him.
"I-" he says as he tries to focus on what it was like to compel Steve, wondering if maybe it's the same kind of thing except as he reaches deep within himself there's nothing.

It feels like he's reaching out for something but can't quite reach it.

"I think it's a vicinity thing" he tells Alex because that probably implies he can only use it if Steve is nearby.

Which he isn't.

"Ahhh- that makes sense" he says and the look on his face is far more relaxed than it should be considering Terry looks about ready to murder him.

Within the next moment Alex takes something out of his pocket-

A syringe.

He quickly injects it into Terry's neck and he struggles for what feels like an eternity before finally going lax and falling unconscious once again.

"You had that this whole damn time?!" Billy yells out in frustration.

"Yeah, had to have a backup plan in case you couldn't use your compulsion which you can't" he says as he gets off of the man underneath him and runs a hand through his hair.

"Whatever, can we just get this over with?"

They drive back to Alex's house and bring Terry there because it's nearby and there's less risk involved.

Apparently Hopper hashed out those details with him.

Billy doesn't really care either way.

It's dark out by the time they get back and Billy still hasn't been able to check in with Steve and he's practically ready to jump out of his fucking skin with the need to see him.

Hopper is there waiting for them with Kali and her crew.

Nancy and Jon are somehow here as well glaring at him from the corner of the room which means the ice queen probably talked the Chief's ear off until he caved and told them the plan.

The large home that's usually rather empty is filled with bodies for once and Billy has half a mind to take Alex's car and drive to the Harrington's house after they find out his release went well and he's back home with his family.

That doesn't mean shit to Billy even though Hopper assures him he's safe there in his own home.

If anything he's more liable to be in danger and Billy can't help but rub his arms up and down as he
feels a chill run through him.

"Nancy and Jonathan told me you had a bit of an issue today" Hopper says at one point as they get everything situated.

"They were also nosy as fuck, what's it to you?" he snaps out at him as he sees Alex roll his eyes in his peripheral at him.

He's certain Nance and Jon probably don't look happy either.

"He's in a bad mood, might wanna leave him be" Alex supplies unhelpfully.

"Nobody needs your input" Billy says as they glare at each other and he realizes he's shaking in that moment as it hits him like a freight train.

It's cold.

It's really fucking cold.

"Also, why the fuck is it freezing in here?" Billy asks Alex.

In the next moment as he breathes out he can literally see his own breath which is kind of strange.

"We using some weird torture tactic on poor Teddy over there?" he asks purposefully just to be an ass because he's starting to stir and wake up.

They've got the guy tied down to a chair in the middle of the room and it feels good to be on the other side of it for once.

Alex doesn't respond and just looks at him weird and starts mouthing a word at him as Hopper also starts looking at him with a strange look on his face.

"Huh?" he asks, cupping a hand to his ear as Alex just keeps mouthing the same damn thing over and over instead of using his words.

"Say it you dip shit, I don't know what the fuck you're mouthing to me right now" he says as Alex just rolls his eyes.

"Terry, his name is Terry you ass" he says as he rubs at his temple and Hopper snorts.

"Also- Bill, my man it's like...seventy-four degrees in here" Alex says next as he raises a brow at him in confusion and Billy isn't sure if he's just being fucked with right now as he goes over to the thermostat and sees that it's actually seventy-five degrees.

"Wha- it's broken or something cause I can see my own breath, my balls are going to fall off" he says as he turns to look at everyone staring back at him likes he's officially lost his mind.

Nancy seems concerned while Jonathan looks annoyed.

"I swear to you it's not broken and I don't see your breath at all" Alex says.

"Billy you're shaking" Nancy states as Alex walks up and touches his arm and Billy can't help but jerk away from the contact.

"You feel normal Billy" he says and suddenly it's like Alex has turned into a damn mother hen when
just a few moments ago they'd been ready to punch each other.

Probably cause they'd been in the car together for too long.

"I'm just cold-" he starts to say except he interrupts himself as his head whips over to look down the hallway.

There's a strange sound coming from it.

He can hear crying.

Actually it's more like a painful and muffled sobbing as he hears what sounds like loud banging on a door as well.

"Steve?" he says out loud, feeling confused because it feels-

"Is this a bond thing or something?" he hears Alex ask Hopper who tells him he has no idea what's going on as he slowly walks down the hallway.

Within moments there's a hard pounding in his head and it feels like his skull is going to rip apart as he grips it tightly and falls to his knees.

He can hear loud voices behind him but it's too hard to focus as his vision blurs and when he looks down the hallway and focuses for a split second he can see Mr. Harrington pounding his fists into the door at the end.

His vision goes dark and the last thing he feels is himself falling.

This isn't the first time he's gotten pulled into Steve's mind.

A month before spring break the poor guy had a bout of bad nightmares and it became too much for him.

As a result Billy had gone to sleep one night and found himself pulled into his mind which hadn't been Steve's intention not that Billy blames him, it's only fair since Billy had done it to him.

Billy's mind is a tumultuous disorganized crash of violent emotions that manifests itself as an ocean.

Steve's mind is something else entirely.

It's like being stuck inside of a labyrinth of his own creation.

Billy's working theory is that because he represses his problems they get tucked away into a far corner of his mind that Billy has to eventually find his way through when everything explodes and he has a mental breakdown.

It's certainly far more complex than Billy's mind and Steve refuses to believe him ever after he'd told him in detail what it had been like.
"That's insane Billy, we both know I'm not all that smart and you're making me seem like some sort of genius" Steve says with a scoff while they drive to Billy's house because Neil won't be home for at least two days.

"Oh don't worry I don't think you're a genius I'm just saying it was insane and it was like being on a fucking acid trip" he says with a snort.

Actually it had been like a waking nightmare but he doesn't want to make Steve feel bad so he omits that part of it.

The guy has a lot of repressed trauma he refuses to open up about so he throws it behind other memories and they sit there and fester like a ticking time bomb.

"I'm sorry" he says apologetically and when Billy turns to look at him for a split second he can see his eyes watering and he knows the waterworks are coming soon if he doesn't say the right thing.

"Don't sweat it love, it really wasn't a big deal" he says as he tries his damnedest to be reassuring which is not something he's very good at.

He just hates to see Steve cry, especially when he's already feeling vulnerable enough as it is and Billy feels like he's walking on eggshells already.

A large part of it is that he's just bad at this, he's not like Steve who always knows the right thing to say.

More often than not Billy finds himself saying the wrong thing and it just starts a fight.

Steve's current inner turmoil is stemming from their time in the upside down and how he feels worthless for not being able to control his panic attacks.

Billy knows the damage is done no matter how many times he holds Steve in his arms and tells him it's okay, it's alright.

He knows Steve doesn't believe him.

Back when Steve had his first panic attack and they had been bonded he'd admittedly acted like a dick so now Steve just thinks he's being nice.

It's honestly his own damn fault.

Unfortunately it's making Steve self conscious on top of everything else he'd been trying to ignore and it had inevitably become the trigger for his impending breakdown.

When Billy comes to it's like an out of body experience as he turns around and sees his own body lying unconscious on the floor.

Alex is kneeling down next to him trying to get him to wake up and everyone actually looks concerned which he's a bit surprised by.

Even Jonathan has a mild look of confused worry on his face although it's probably more of a concern for Steve than him.
"Shit" he finds himself saying out loud but nobody can hear him.

It's happening, he can feel it.

He turns toward the door he'd heard the sobbing coming from and wonders why he'd seen Mr. Harrington before he'd passed out.

Was it a memory?

When he gets his hand on the doorknob and turns it to walk into the room he suddenly finds himself walking through it and just like that he's through the Harrington's front door.

It's cold and he's still freezing and the house is utterly silent.

This is the part he hates about being stuck in Steve's mind.

It becomes some sort of fucking puzzle that he's supposed to decipher and last time this had happened he'd been trapped inside of a fucked up warped version of their high school.

Fortunately he's been through this song and dance so he knows every door he opens generally leads to a memory that's haunting Steve that he refuses to acknowledge.

He'd asked Steve one time what it had been like to be shattered, to be stuck between memories and it had apparently been fairly black and white.

You watch a memory and it ends and then it's over and eventually a new one pulls you in.

Billy finds himself wishing it were the same in his case when he's pulled into Steve's mind.

He's not so lucky.

Billy gets to watch memories, that part is the same but also this little pocket of hell Steve's mind cooks up is a living nightmare that's tearing itself apart.

Which means Steve's currently having a breakdown.

Fantastic.

He turns back toward the front door and runs a hand through his hair, wondering if maybe he should just walk back through it and see what happens.
The choice is made for him as he almost full body dives to the ground upon hearing glass shatter behind him.

When he turns back to face the inside of the house he sees glass everywhere like somebody had dropped something from the top of the stairwell and curses under his breath.

Looks like the nightmare part is already starting.

"Steve?" he asks frantically, a bit loudly as he starts walking quickly through the house but there's no one in the living room.

He comes upon more shattered glass along with a broken lamp and a few other items knocked over in the far corner of the room and wonders what that could even mean.

"Steve I need you to help me out here“ he says, hoping that maybe his mind will recognize that he's here.

There's nothing.

When he walks back toward the front door the glass is suddenly gone as he hears the front door unlock and mentally prepares himself for whatever fucked up shit might walk through it.

In walks Mr. Harrington, Steve, and Mrs. Harrington and Billy finds himself breathing a sigh of relief upon seeing them even though he knows they aren't real.

This is clearly a memory.

There's no speaking as Steve stands off to the side looking uncomfortable as fuck while his mom walks away from them and down the hallway and right through Billy which feels really strange because he knows he's not really there.

It's like being a ghost.

He sees Steve's father begin to walk up the stairs and he's starting to wonder if this happened recently after being brought home from the precinct.

Steve is still wearing the same shirt from school, the one Billy had taken off of him when they'd been in the AV room.

"My Office" he hears Mr. Harrington say at some point as he sees Steve spring into action up the stairs.
He sees everything.

His heart about stops when he sees the correspondence between Steve and Mr. Harrington and he feels helpless when the man puts the chip into his neck.

*Son of a bitch.*

He thinks to himself and wonders how they're going to deactivate the damn thing.

Alex will probably know someone that can get it out or turn it off so he's not too stressed but it's the action of it that bugs him more than anything.

The memory of Steve's mother spouting shit left and right is an overload of information and makes his head hurt.

He sees the outburst coming way before it happens but still can't help but cringe when he hears the glass shatter from across the room

His heart breaks for Steve when he gets to the end of the memory, when it all becomes too much for him and he lashes out.

"Fuck you, fuck all of you and your fake fucking promises. I'm so tired of you people promising me things and then turning around to break them"

Billy knows he's also being roped into that statement and he's fully aware he deserves it, deserves his ire and when the memories are over he figures this whole thing is probably over as a whole as he walks up the stairs and tries to get into Steve's room.

It's locked.

Nothing is happening.

He knocks on the door but there's no answer.

*Something* ain't right.

"Fine, I'll try the front door" he grumbles to himself as he trudges down the stairs.
When he's about to go and open the front door he can hear loud pounding music coming from somewhere behind him but it's like it's muffled and coming from far away.

He turns his attention to it and tries to find where it's coming from and after a short walk he finds himself standing at the door of what he knows is their utility closet except he can hear voices from behind it.

Upon opening the door he comes across a memory of Steve and Wheeler standing in a bathroom together and-

Wait.

Billy remembers this.

This is the night of that Halloween party where he remembers antagonizing Steve after becoming the new keg king.

*I swear to god if I see them fuck-

"Nance, I'm sor-" he hears Steve say when he gets the door closed. "It's not coming off" he says as she keeps trying to wipe at her shirt in an attempt to get the red punch out of it.

"It's coming" she says and she looks to be in more of a daze than anything and Billy can't help but feel a bit uncomfortable upon seeing this.

He really doesn't need to see whatever the fuck this is.

"Come on let me just take you home, okay? Come here, let me take you home, come on" Steve says as he tries to grab her but she starts to fuss in the usual typical Wheeler way that Billy has witnessed for himself even when she's sober.

"You wanted- you wanted this" she says in a slurred manner as she sways a bit and grips the counter while leaning forward. "No I didn't want this, I told you to stop drinking okay-?" Steve retorts quickly.

"It's bullshit-"

"No, it's not bullshit, okay?"

"Bullshit" 

"No it's not bullshit Nancy-"
"No you"

"You're bullshit" she says with conviction as she finally turns to look him in the eyes and he sees the immediate moment when Steve's eyes go impossibly sad as his expression follows suit.

The breakup, this must be the breakup.

Billy realizes in that moment and he can feel his heart rate pick up as he hears the quite and heartbroken "what?" come out of Steve's mouth.

Fuck, just seeing his face like this is killing him, the look is just impossible to describe.

It's not a look he ever wants to see Steve give him, it's not a look he wants to put onto his face.

"You're- you're pretending like- like everything's okay. You know like- like- like we didn't ki- like we didn't kill Barb?" Nancy says desperately.

Barb?

Barbara, the chick that they found out had been experimented on?

Billy has never actually heard the full story on that and he finds himself impossibly confused because back when Steve had mentioned it when they'd been in the upside down he'd been brief and had merely mentioned that she was a girl who died because she'd gotten stuck in that place.

He'd never asked for the details.

"Like- like it's great- like we're in love and uh- we're partying...yeah let's party huh- let's party- we're partying- that's- it's bullshit" Nancy says and Billy kind of wants to punch her with how sloppy fucking drunk she apparently gets if you get her shitfaced enough.

Ever since he's known her she never seems to let it get too far and this must be why.

"Like we're in love?" Steve says as he cups her face gently and it's-

Wow.

That's probably one of the most heart wrenching things Billy has ever seen as he feels a lump form in his throat upon hearing the way he says it and the look on his face is absolute devastation.

This is clearly a large part of where Steve's insecurities come from and he didn't know it had ended so callously, hadn't expected it to have gone this way because of the fact that him and Wheeler seem
to be on pretty good terms all things considered.

"It's bullshit" she says again and Billy grits his teeth and can't bear to hear or see anymore of this as he slams the door shut as quickly as he can.

It's too much, that whole thing is too much and it's just-

Billy finds himself yearning to find Steve, to touch him and show him what it's really like to have someone who loves him unlike Nancy fucking Wheeler.

He wants to kiss Steve senseless until he knows that Billy is never going to fucking leave him.

There's also a part of him that wants to punch that cunt as hard as he can even though he knows it happened a while ago at this point and it's more like beating a dead horse.

It's not really his business either, it's something from Steve's past that he clearly wants to forget but can't so now it's festering.

Also it sure has fucking paved the way for Billy to swoop in and show Steve what it's like to actually have someone who's madly in love with him.

He's glad they're past that part, glad they both know that above all else, above all the shit it's the one truth in all of this.

They're both hopelessly in love with each other.

He can't help but rest his forehead against the door as he takes in deep breaths before pulling himself back together.

This time he actually manages to open the front door when he walks to it and all it does is lead him outside.

It's cold again, really fucking cold.

He can hear distant voices again but they're coming from behind the house so he goes to see what memory is going to be thrown at him next.

It's Nancy, Steve, Tommy, Carol and- Barbara.

He recognizes her from the pictures and he feels a pit in his fucking stomach form.

Billy can't help himself as he runs his hands through his hair and rubs at his arms from how cold it is and when he turns around towards the woods he sees-

"Byer's?" he says out loud in absolute shock and disbelief.

There the little fuck is like a fucking creeper in the woods with-

His camera.

"No fuckin' way" he says as he laughs out a loud cackle. "Motherfuckin' shit" he says next under his breath and when he turns back to look at the party animals they've all jumped into the pool and Barbara is gone into the bathroom in the house because she cut her hand or some shit.
He turns back to Jonathan and sees him start to take pictures and he seriously can barely believe what he's seeing as he continues to shake his head.

If anything it seems more like he's taking pictures of Nancy which doesn't shock him, the guy's been obsessed with her.

"How romantic" he says sarcastically.

Eventually the scooby doo gang gets out of the pool and he finds himself following them inside.

At one point he hears Tommy mention that Steve's mom has a fireplace in her room and he feels a little bit cheated.

Harrington never told him that, they could have been fucking in his mom's room this whole time next to a fireplace?

When he follows Nancy he sees the small exchange between her and Barb and finds himself liking the broad when she tells Nancy "this isn't you".

He can see Wheeler's body language loud and fucking clear and feels the jealousy rise inside of him even though this is just a memory, there's no changing what happened.

Again he finds himself not wanting to see any of this but he doesn't exactly have much of a choice in the matter.

Eventually Nancy tells Barbara to go home and he sees the look of disappointment on her face.

"Bestfriend of the year" he says to Nancy's retreating form with a snort as he turns to look at Barb.

He kind of wishes Nancy had been the one dead but knows that's just his jealousy talking.

Billy knows this must be where Steve made his move on Wheeler and finds himself following Barbara outside instead.

He really doesn't need to see him fucking someone else.

Past, present, or future.

Eventually Barbara ends up going to sit on the dive board at the pool and Billy finds himself sitting down and putting his feet into the water and just waiting for the memory to end.

He rubs at his nose absently as he puts his face into his hands and the chill from earlier comes back again in full force as he rubs at his arms.

"I need a fucking smoke" he says under his breath as he watches Barbara stare off like she's got a lot going on in her mind and most of it ain't happy.

"What a fuckin' waste, Harrington and Wheeler get to fuck and you get to die...life just ain't fair Velma" he says to her even though he knows she can't hear him.

He sees the drop of blood fall into the pool from the cut on her hand and frowns as he watches it sink into the pool with a bit of absent fascination.

Within the next few moments as Barbara brings her hands closer to her face the lights in the pool flicker off and Billy's eyes widen.
"Oh fuck" he says as he scrambles away from the pool.

Blood.

It smells her blood.

This is how she dies.

It's no wonder Steve never wants to get into this pool and he'd tried many times but it had started a fight one day as Steve had kicked him out of the house and as a result he just never brought it up again to avoid getting kicked out again.

This whole thing is like a fucking horror movie right before his very eyes as he turns to look at Jonathan who he knows had been taking pictures of everyone.

Nobody could save this chick?

No one was around?

Jonathan looks to be fiddling around with his camera or something but it's hard to tell and when he turns his face back toward Barbara he sees the Demogorgon appear behind an oblivious Barb and he can't help the grimace he gets on his face as he watches it take her and walk right back through a portal to the other side.

Ten seconds, maybe five and that's all it had taken for that thing to just grab her and go without anyone knowing.

"Fucking shit" he says under his breath and when he rubs his hands into his eyes and opens them again he groans out loud upon seeing himself in the upside down.

"No come on, please not this again" he says loudly so that maybe Steve can hear him.

This is what had sucked last time too.

Somehow he always ends up seeing the upside down as Steve's worst nightmares come to life.

There's absolute silence around him and he half expects to just watch how Barbara dies but there's absolutely nothing.
The pool is empty which is interesting and he finds himself walking closer to it to look inside.

It's a mistake because within the next moment the Demogorgon looks up and him and screeches loudly as he puts his hands to his ears and it starts to charge at him within the next moment.

"Shit!" he says as he runs the other way back toward the front door of the house.

He can hear the thing chasing him and even though he knows it's not real it doesn't fucking matter, he has no intention of finding out what happens if he lets one of these things get a hold of him while he's inside of Steve's mind.

It's probably a manifestation of whatever awful thing Steve can think of, whatever fears he has of being ripped open by them.

Billy is more than good to avoid that possible experience.

He reaches the front door and slams it shut and everything goes silent again.

All in all things seem normal as he turns around to look at the house that is back to what it had been before.

No upside down, nothing.

Just silence.

The cold seeps into his bones as he feels his teeth start to chatter as the wind picks up outside.

He turns to look out the window and it's snowing but it's going to quickly turn into a blizzard soon.

There's a thoughtful frown on his face when he goes to stop at the bottom of the stairs and lays his eyes on the door that he knows leads into Steve's bedroom.

He feels himself break out into a cold sweat.

There's something wrong with that door.

*Don't go near it.*

His mind screams out to him.

It's like those moments in a flick when you watch the dumb bitch walk slowly down a dimly lit hallway toward her death.

You scream at her to run, you know if she goes toward it she's going to die and you're helpless as you watch the inevitable.
Like it's a fucking train wreck you can't look away from.

He can't help himself as he walks up the stairs slowly step by step, fighting against the fear and he wonders what the fuck is even going on right now.

Weren't Nancy and Steve fucking in his room?

Is this another memory?

Is it the same memory?

It feels different, strange, it's not like the usual memories he finds himself running into.

The house groans and creaks all around him and he thinks he can hear voices coming from the room that sound low and hurried.

He feels compelled to go to it but it's more like a feeling of dread than anything else and it's making him curious.

_Curiosity killed the cat, Hargrove._

He thinks absently as he ignores his own better judgement.

"Please?" He says out loud for some reason as he absently starts wondering if maybe Steve doesn't want him to see it, maybe he's got a wall up around it or something.

If he gets some form of retaliation he'll stop but as he stands there and waits nothing happens.

That's as good an indication as any.

When he makes it to just outside the room he feels nearly paralyzed by the feeling of terror welling up inside him as he goes to open the door and when he goes to reach his hand up his arms feel like heavy lead as he reaches shaky fingers out to grasp the knob and as he goes to turn it-

It's locked.

The fucking thing is locked and he feels a bit frustrated.

"Seriously?" he says mostly to Steve who probably isn't even listening right now, probably isn't even
aware that any of this is happening.

Instead he puts his ear to it in hopes of maybe hearing something on the other side because he knows there had been voices and-

He hears the blood curdling scream of a small child like they're being killed or something and he feels his heart rate skyrocket as he pushes away from the door like he's been burned and almost topples right over the fucking railing as a result.

The wind from outside begins to howl and he knows it's the awful blizzard outside as he feels impossibly cold again.

Frost begins to form on the walls, the floors, the railing, the stairs, everything starts to become encased in it and he's pretty sure he fucked up or something just now.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry I won't do it again- I'll leave it alone” he pleads as he hugs his arms to his chest and falls to his knees as he begins to feel like it's going to consume him too, like the cold is going to reach inside of him, freeze him and shatter him into pieces.

For some reason his pleading seems to have worked as everything begins to thaw out and he-

It hits him in that moment as he hits himself on the side if the head a few times a bit too hard "stupid, you're so stupid" he mutters out loudly as he tries to catch his breath.

He felt almost consumed.

Like he was going to be shattered.

"Fuck me I'm stupid" he says under his breath as he stands.

This is Steve's darkness.

This house, the stormy blizzard outside, the freezing cold frost.

Whatever is on the other side of that door is his true darkness.

Billy's worst traumatic memory is the death of his mother and the ocean and that's how the darkness inside of him manifests itself.

Steve's is-
He has no clue.

Billy always assumed it was coming face to face with a Demogorgon, the upside down, something like that but now he's-

If anything he's just confused as fuck.

Whatever it is it involves this house, a blizzard and has something to do with Steve's room.

The pieces are all jumbled up like for some reason Steve's own mind can't put the puzzle together itself.

Does he not remember?

Was it too traumatic?

Was he too young?

The scream he heard on the other side of the door is going to haunt his fucking nightmares because it had sounded like a younger Steve.

He's never heard him mention anything that involves any of this but then again he's never really asked either.

Billy feels lost and he wishes he knew what to do but he's completely unsure.

He needs to find Steve.

"Love, I need you to help me out here...how do I get to you?" He asks out loud as he turns every which way hoping for some sort of sign, anything.

Nothing happens as he groans in frustration and pulls at his hair.

"Only one way to find out I guess" he says to himself as he stalks toward the door.

When he wrenches it open he's expecting to see a brick wall in all honesty, another memory, anything that isn't going to be helpful.
All it takes is a single blink of his eye and he's surrounded in darkness.

"Alright, progress...good job Hargrove, we're doin' good" he says to himself more because he's freaked the fuck out and doesn't want to admit it to himself and hearing his own voice instead of silence is oddly calming.

"Steve, help me find you...I want to see you" he says as he twists and turns every which way and hopes that maybe if he says it nicely Steve will be more inclined to see him.

He can't control the memories part of the bond, that's all Steve and he's pretty much stuck here until-

He can hear soft sobbing behind him as he whips around and suddenly he's inside of Steve's room.

The sobbing gets a little bit louder and he can see the top of Steve's head peeking out on the other side of his bed.

"We leave in the morning, don't make me break down this door Steven" he hears Mr. Harrington say as he hears his footsteps retreat.

Billy falls to his damn knees and thanks god because he knows he's not stuck inside of Steve's mind anymore.

He's projecting himself and time is moving all around him again.

When he recovers he goes to Steve who has his eyes squeezed shit, tears streaming down his face as he's holding his hands to his ears.

Billy tentatively reaches out and grabs at his elbows to try and lower his arms down as Steve gasps.

"Billy- what?" He says as he looks like he's embarrassed, eyes wild.

"Hey there pretty boy, you lost it there for a bit on me" he sayssoftly, gently...like he's coaxing him into a sense of calm as he touches his face softly.

"I- what?" He says like he's confused.

"You- I got a little trapped inside of your mind not that it's a big deal since I deserved it, now we're kinda even" he says with a light chuckle.

They aren't exactly even, Steve seems to have far more self control and seems to subconsciously not want to cause Billy harm.

The moment Billy had pleaded with him it's like Steve subconsciously knew he was going too far or something.

He wishes he could say the same for himself and his own raging emotions but he can't.
It's not like his intention had been to shatter Steve back then, he just had no control.

"Oh- I felt you in the bond like you were asking to come in or something...I dunno how to explain it" Steve says as he sniffs and wipes the tears from his face.

"That's...okay. Anything else?" Billy asks just to be sure.

"Ah, uhm...no?" He says like he's totally unaware of the bad acid trip Billy had just been on.

"Alright well I saw- I saw the memories of what just happened" he says.

Part of him had almost brought up Steve's darkness, Barb, the fight with Nancy.

There's no point.

"He put a chip into me Billy" Steve says as he sniffs a bit.

"I know love, it's alright we can get it out or something I wouldn't worry too much" he says and for once in his life he feels like he's the one trying to keep someone from falling into chaos.

He's not used to it.

"They lied to me- my whole life it was all a lie...did they ever even fucking love me?!" he hisses out as more tears roll down his face.

Ah.

This explains the Nancy memory.

He sits next to Steve and pulls him into his arms even though it's that strange projection feeling, it's better than nothing and he finds himself appreciating it for once.

"We don't have answers yet so don't worry yourself over it, gotta keep our heads in the game yeah?" he says softly as he grabs his hand and interlocks their fingers and presses his lips to the top of his head.

"Fuck shit- you're right I'm sorry and I- god damn it" Steve says in frustration as he uses his free hand to rub at his face.

"Did you want me to stay until you fall asleep?" Billy asks him and he feels the immediate nod and can't help but chuckle lightly.

"Alright, come on then" he says as he moves himself out of their embrace to stand and holds his hand out to Steve to lift him up.

"I'm sorry Billy, I was giving you so much shit and here I am an absolute mess" he says before taking his hand as he looks up at him with apologetic, watery doe eyes.
"Don't worry about it"

In the back of Billy's mind the only thing he can bring himself to do is worry.

Chapter End Notes

I don't wanna say too much because I feel like I might give something away but there's this thing I've had prepared for a while that is finally starting to happen and I REALLY SUBTLY MENTIONED IT FOR LIKE A SPLIT SECOND in a prior chapter like...forever ago and this is part of the setup for it and yeah...

I'm excited that I finally get to touch on it again and it's funny because none of you have any fucking idea what I'm talking about. XD
Chapter Notes

Ugh I've had a rough week.

My beautiful new car? I took her in for the once over to make sure she's running well and it had been going great, needed to replace a couple of hoses.

A $230 job is now turning into a $2,000 job because the private seller we bought the car from failed to tell us the head gasket was blown.

(By replacing the coolant tank before I'd taken it home he'd been trying to hide the problem)

Long story short I'm going to just eat the cost and my monetary situation is pretty rough but manageable which is a really good silver lining considering it could be much worse.

I still don't have her back yet but I will soon, next week I should have my baby and I'll be happier which is another silver lining.

If you're wondering why we aren't just returning it it's because what we are now paying is about what blue book would have called for anyway and going to small claims court is a hassle anyway.

Also I want to keep her so yeah...that's my life right now.

It's the reason it's taken me a long time to put out this chapter but don't worry I am always writing any chance I get. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The unfortunate sterilized smell and scenery of Hawkin's lab fills every single one of his senses and he wants to fucking gouge his eyes out from the frustration he feels.

Steve should have known this would be where his father would take him after finally getting his grubby hands on him.

He finds himself rubbing absently at the chip in his neck as he stares out the window of the room, avoiding even looking at his dad.

Strangely enough it's a perfectly bright and sunny day, a huge contrast to the chaos that is currently his life.

"Alex said he can get it out?" Steve asks as he starts getting himself dressed while Billy watches him rather methodically.

They've got very little time now that his dad has told him they're going to the lab so a lot of information needs relaying.
He'd unlocked his door at some point so his parents could get in again and his dad had sat on the edge of his bed to tell him where they would be going.

Not once did his father look him in his eyes.

Or apologize.

Go figure.

"He says it's easy to deactivate them and not to worry" Billy says sounding far more detached than usual.

"Easy for you to say" Steve says with a snort as he gets a shirt up over his head.

"Steve it's going to be fine, don't sweat it" he hears Billy say when the fabric gets bunched up over his ears as he pulls it down.

"You're not the one that's being taken to the fucking lion's den" Steve hisses out as he walks into his bathroom to run a brush through his hair.

"Say the word and I'll take you out of this, I'll get my car and take you away from here"

"No- that's not"

"Then stop fucking whining"

Steve can't help but make a noise in the back of his throat as he turns to look at him.

Billy's on the defensive and maybe it's because he's feeling restless but there's a cold detachment in his eyes, his posture, every part of him is just seemingly bracing itself for something.

It's the opposite of how Billy had been last night as he stayed until he'd fallen asleep, made sure he was alright.

There's clearly something Billy isn't telling him because he has that same haunted look in his eyes that Steve is unfortunately familiar with.

Billy must have gotten stuck in his mind again.

Steve's got too much to worry about to start asking for specifics and every amount of energy Billy seems to be putting off right now is screaming at him to not ask.

So he won't.

Not right now at least.

"I'm serious, you agreed to this and insisted upon all of it" Billy reminds him which is true.
"I- I know that"

"Good, keep your tantrums to yourself and try to stay on your dad's good side because you're the closest we can get to this kid"

Turns out Terry spoke pretty candidly after Kali had worked her magic on him and used his fears against him.

He talked real quick after that.

Apparently this 'brother' Alex has been looking for is named Cameron and all this time he's been at Hawkin's lab which explains why Alex had been following a thin spread crumb trail all the way to Indiana of all places.

"I thought Owen's had done away with using people as experiment's?" Steve asks.

"It's just temporary containment until they can transfer him to some specially made chamber in Oregon. I guess Owen's is just as tied down by some of Brenner's past as everyone else"

"Temporary containment?"

"They have him under because apparently he's too dangerous awake" Billy says as snorts.

"Uh- what can he do?" Steve asks, wondering if he even wants to know.

"Alex says his ability involves...cosmic energy?" Billy says like he's not entirely sure if that's correct.

"Like- like space shit?" Steve can't help but ask as he just blinks at Billy.

"I guess? He can create black holes and the sky is the limit with him or something" Billy says with a shrug.

"Black holes...Alex wants this kid back?" He finds himself asking.

"He seems pretty attached, he's about as old as Kali" Billy says with a frown.

"Alright, well it's a good thing I'm headed to that damn lab anyway" he says with a sigh.

So here he is...the only thing standing between this Cameron kid and everyone else.

He's the only Intel into a way to get to him except he has no clue how he's going to do it.

Honestly he has no clue what happens next, his father has been tight lipped and he'd taken Billy's advice about staying on his good side.

Which involves shutting the fuck up.

He's not sure he can manage anything else.

Billy is of course in the room projecting himself and prowling around like an angry tiger ready to pounce at any moment.
There's still an edge to him like from this morning but it's a bit more desperate than before.

Perhaps it's because he's actually at the lab now and all bets are off and also, when Billy has no control he gets squirrelly.

Steve taps his foot absently as he looks around the room.

He'd had his sessions with Billy inside of this room before they'd learned that they'd been put on display like a couple of lab rats in a maze by Owen's.

Every session recorded for viewing pleasure and it's turning around and biting them in the ass.

All because he wanted to try helping Billy, them, their relationship.

He'd trusted too much.

Not anymore.

"Stop" his father says all of a sudden, breaking through the silence to put a firm hand on his thigh to keep him from tapping his foot as Steve shoots him a glare.

His dad hates repetitious sounds, hates this habit he has of tapping his foot and always has since he was little.

If he's being honest he'd been doing it because it's his nervous tick but he's glad he had been doing it just to see the irritation on his father's face.

He finds himself wishing he had been doing it on purpose.

"Why are we even here?" Steve asks angrily as his dad removes his hand to fold it back into his lap.

There's something that bugs Steve about all of this.

The fact that the older Harrington man hasn't made a move to get Billy yet is a bit disconcerting, that's who he had gone to first except now it's like Billy is yesterday's news.

What had been the point?

Maybe...Terry was tasked with getting to him?

Tough luck on that since they've kidnapped him.

Perhaps that means part of his father's plans are foiled? Whatever the fuck those plans may be.

His 'loving' father turns his head as they stare each other down, both completely deadpan like it's suddenly a staring contest.

This guy is one extreme or the other and he either won't shut the fuck up or he doesn't talk at all, there's no in between with him.

The other interesting thing to note is that his mother had disappeared in all of this.
Part of him is glad, another part is worried.

When he'd gone downstairs this morning she was nowhere to be seen and when he'd asked what hole she'd gone and crawled into there had been no answer from his father.

"It's fucking creepy how alike the two of you are" Billy says as he stares between them causing Steve to break the gaze first to turn back to face forward in his chair.

That's offensive.

He's nothing like his father.

They certainly look similar but that's as far as it goes.

That's the second time someone has said that dumb shit to him.

"We both know you've been here before Steven, I'm not sure why you're still playing dumb" his dad says and Steve can't help but clench his jaw.

"Yeah, I've been here but that doesn't explain why we're here now" he says with a scoff.

"Multiple reasons" his father says which is about as ambiguous as it can get as Steve rolls his eyes as he hears Billy snort behind him.

"The new host is missing ever since your last encounter with it" he says and Steve feels his blood run cold.

Wait-

Billy curses under his breath.

"I thought- I thought this was you trying to get rid of the bond?" He asks and he can feel Billy directly behind him now.

"Attempting to expel it would probably kill you both and there aren't exactly experts that exist in regards to your unique situation" the older Harrington man says and Steve can't help but gape at him.

"Why the fuck did you say all that shit to Billy then?!" Steve finds himself asking as he also gets out of his chair.

Billy puts a comforting hand on his shoulder and Steve finds himself wondering when the roles had reversed.

For once he's the one that needs grounding.

His father gets a frown on his face as he turns to look at him, it's one of the few times he's seen genuine anger.

Under any other circumstance he'd be elated.

"You disappeared, the only possible person who is going to know where you are is Mr. Hargrove so I baited you both"

"Baited?" He hears Billy ask.
"Baited?" Steve repeats for him.

"Regardless of how I played my hand you were going to come forward one way or another if I made contact with him"

"How were you so certain?"

"Your compassion, you'll sooner put yourself into danger than let someone else do so and if you hadn't come forward my focus would have been on Mr. Hargrove which isn't what you would have wanted"

Steve can't tell him he's wrong, they all know he's right otherwise he wouldn't be here right now.

This is his father, it's his own responsibility so Billy shouldn't have to bear the brunt of whatever this is.

"So...if you've known about the hive mother all this time why not just say something?" He finds himself asking.

There's a minute pause, his father's mouth hangs open for a split second and it's like he's come to some sort of realization.

Within the next few moments it's gone and he has his expression schooled once more.

It's like multiple things had started dawning on him at once and Steve finds himself feeling incredibly uncomfortable all of a sudden.

"I have my reasons"

"You have your reasons? I have almost died more times than I can count, I have been stuck in that hell twice and my own father knows all of this and you did nothing"

"If only the world were as simple as you see it with that narrow mind of yours, it would certainly be a much happier place" his father says in that monotone manner he's so used to at this point.

"Ah the insults, I missed the insults" Steve says with a fake smile as he crosses his as over his chest.

"There's only so much I can do, you have unrealistic expectations" he says.

"Unrealistic-
Owen's chooses that moment to finally enter his office and the air in the room changes significantly.

"Am I interrupting something?" He asks as he sits down.

He looks...wary.

Neither one of them answer him.

They know Owen's isn't team Brenner, he's been trying to undo all of Brenner's mistakes while
making his own along the way.

The lab is the middle ground filled with spies, Owen's men and probably other men and women with different affiliations.

It's a fucking cesspool of different kinds of shit.

Not just that but some of them are working for the Mind Flayer too.

Alex is rather excited about the prospect of how everything seems to be falling into place.

"He said we might be able to kill two birds with one stone"

Billy had told him before he'd left for the lab.

"It's going to be a massacre Billy"

"Probably"

They haven't seen Owen's since their last session which feels like an eternity ago and Steve wonders if he should be upset or angry, if he should be wanting to hurt Owen's for everything that has happened to them because he chose to keep the Mind Flayer inside of Dylan.

His decisions are what has put them where they are right now.

Also, all of their sessions had been recorded without their knowledge and clearly used against them if his father is any indication.

He feels nothing upon seeing the man though and is a bit surprised by his own lack of reaction.

Billy moves closer, seeming visibly upset as he watches from the side of the room, arms crossed over his chest as he glares at Owen's like he's thinking up different ways to kill him.

"We agreed to them both being present" Owen's says in frustration.

"Clearly that's not how it worked out" his father says in his more professional tone.

"You've been working with my father too, that's great...this is just awesome" Steve says as he finds himself running his hands through his hair nervously.

Granted he already knew that since his mother already told him they knew he'd go to Owen's.

Before Owen's can even respond his dad speaks first.

"Put the lab on lock down, no one comes in or out" his father says rather definitively, leaving no room for argument as Owen's raises a brow at him.

"Absolutely not-"
Multiple things happen at once.

His father sighs and rolls his eyes as he stands up and reaches into his jacket.

"Gun, it's a gun" Billy says a bit frantically.

Two men burst into the room and Steve remembers the way the men from the cabin had been dressed and it's the same kind of protective gear as they point their guns right at Owen's.

Steve doesn't think, there's just something that doesn't feel right about any of it as he spurs himself into action and within seconds he's got the barrel of the gun pointed toward his chest as he moves between his father and Owen's who's gone to stand abruptly looking just as surprised.

"Steven, move" his dad says and there's a tick in his jaw like he's just an annoying fly to be swatted away.

"What the fuck, I didn't tell you so you could jump in front of it!" Billy yells out as his hands go to pulling at his hair.

Steve's eyes dart to Billy as he glares at him because what else was he supposed to have done?

He may not be on anyone's team here but Owen's knows about Eleven and he seems to be keeping his promise of staying the fuck away from her.

That has to count for something.

His father seems to pick up on the glare Steve shot over his shoulder as he raises a brow and turns his head to see absolutely nothing.

Except Steve can see he's looking straight at Billy who goes stalk still.

Within the next moment his father turns to look back at him clearly not having seen anything but it's still just as disconcerting like he put together that maybe he's seeing Billy.

His dad is way too intuitive and it's getting really fucking annoying.

Steve's at least sixty-five percent sure his dad won't shoot him which should probably be a worrying number but it's still a pretty high one all things considered.

Regardless his dad lowers the gun so it's not pointed straight at him looking slightly miffed.

"Don't be difficult" the older Harrington man says as Steve just rolls his eyes.

"When am I not?" he retorts.

"It makes no difference" his dad says as he turns to point the gun at the wall off to the side instead as he fires a single bullet into it with purpose.

Steve can't help but flinch as he looks at the freshly made hole in the wall and catches sight of an angry yet fearful Owen's in his peripheral.
"It's an alert" Billy says as he looks at his dad like he's trying to dissect every single one of his tells and ticks at this point, like he's suddenly seeing the man in a new light.

Within the next few seconds more men burst into the room with guns trained on them as Steve raises his hands in surrender.

His father merely stands there cool as a cucumber like everything is going according to plan.

It boils his blood to think that all he's done is fall into every single one of his father's finely laid traps at this point.

Son of a bitch.

"Take 44, I want him in a holding cell but do not harm him or I will find your families and force you to watch as I kill them" his dad says.

Steve shouldn't be surprised when two of the men move to grab a hold of him as he jerks away on instinct.

44?

So now he's just a number?

"Don't resist them Steve" he hears Billy say which just adds to the anger he's already feeling as he locks eyes with his father.

"I fucking hate you" he spits out at him as the older man merely looks at him completely expressionless while the men grab hold of him and begin to drag him out of the room.

"Wait"

Everyone stops as they all turn to look at his father, himself included and Steve sees him tapping his finger against the cold metal of the gun that's in his hand still at his side thoughtfully.

"Put him under for now" he says slowly like he's changing his mind.

"Sir?" One of the men say.

"Take him to one of the medical rooms instead, strap him down to the bed...I don't want him getting free"

"Of course"

"I want a full team ready outside of his door protecting it" he says next.

None of them look very phased by this like they're used to him spouting out a bunch of shit at once or changing his game plan.

"Anything else, sir?" he hears the man to his left say and his voice sounds unnaturally deep.

"Inject him before you take him to the room and then transport him to it" he says which is incredibly
specific and-

Oh.

"He put together that I can see you" Billy says darkly, voicing his own thoughts.

His father is awfully fast on the uptake and a few moments later he's taken out of the room and within seconds he feels the prick of a needle against his neck followed by complete darkness.

It's a safe assumption on Mr. Harrington's part to assume that Billy can't see Steve if he's unconscious.

Unfortunately for him he's wrong as Billy watches helplessly while Steve gets carried away.

The men moved quickly and within a few moments of exiting the room one of the men already had him injected with whatever the fuck they use to put someone under.

It's most likely the good stuff considering Mr. Harrington has probably done his homework and knows if they're under enough threat there's no amount of anesthesia that's going to keep them from being awake.

He's clearly already watched all of their sessions, seen their files, the whole nine yards.

Also Steve collapsed within seconds of injection, the needle hadn't even been removed yet and he'd dropped like a bag of fucking potatoes.

What sucks is all it took was a minute glare from Steve to give away the fact that they can see each other and Steve's father had known it within that instant.

Underestimating Steve Harrington's father was a big fucking mistake.

Billy doesn't intend to keep making it.

Fortunately he knows what room Steve gets carried to except it's not going to matter since the whole place is about to go on lock down anyway.

*Room 431.*

He repeats to himself like a mantra.

There's a lot missing and something seems strange about this whole situation.

Steve's father didn't need to come to him with the fake intention of removing the bond, that was a completely unnecessary step.

Billy's starting to get the feeling that this guy has his hands in more than one cookie jar.

Is he playing on multiple teams? Does he need to fool other sides?

If he is that makes things even more difficult because there's no way of telling what his true
intentions are.

He's certainly a man with a plan but is it one they'll like?

The comment about not harming Steve could have been a fake gesture of concern...it could have been completely real too.

It's safe to assume Mr. Harrington probably knows he can't trust certain people.

With the man's prior comments in the past it supports the idea that he has every intention of protecting Steve.

It could also be a ploy, he could be faking it.

"They're chameleons"

"The fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"They make you think they're submitting, they choose their battles wisely and blend in to a situation effortlessly"

Seems like it's not just a Steve thing, it's a straight up Harrington family trait.

Go fucking figure.

The men from the cabin...they're working for him and that is the most concerning prospect of all of this.

Steve's mother had mentioned that they knew about what happened with Kirkman but it seemed like they didn't agree with how it had all gone down.

"Poor Billy" she had said.

It's pretty fucked up to think that maybe they were involved with the fire fight at the cabin though, the whole thing is far too confusing and Billy doesn't have near enough information to be able to definitively peg what is actually going on.

Perhaps this is beyond them, perhaps this is so much bigger than they are and they're both just stuck in the middle of it?

Billy finds himself sitting on the bed as he brushes a strand of hair out of Steve's face.

The longer this goes on the more he feels the need to just take Steve and go, leave, run away from all of this.

He's also aware there's no point in just sitting here so he can watch Steve sleep, he needs to tell Alex what just happened- they all need to know what just happened.

The lock down doesn't both him very much because if they need to he knows Eleven can tear this entire fucking place down but for now they need to be smart about it, there's still too much to get
done and Steve still needs to find Cameron.

Upon waking in his own bed at his own house he can hear multiple voices coming from the living room and feels himself growing confused.

Yesterday night at Alex’s place had been a bit chaotic after he'd been pulled out if Steve's mind and made sure he had fallen asleep alright afterward.

When he had returned to his body *then*, they’d put him into the guest room after he had collapsed and gone back to work on Terry.

Waking up had been awful because immediately all he could smell all around him was *Steve* and before he'd even opened his eyes he knew it was the room that Steve had been staying in.

For a moment he'd reached up and gripped a shaky hand into the pillow under his head as tears began to stream down his face and within the next moment he'd hugged the pillow to his chest tightly and allowed himself a moment of weakness, a moment of *missing* Steve.

There had been an emptiness inside of him...there's *still* an emptiness that he feels even now.

It's like his own fucking heart isn't even beating anymore, it's missing and there's just this gaping hole in his chest.

That's because he knows it's twenty some miles away on lock down in an experimental facility surrounded by enemies from all sides.

After he'd allowed himself that small moment to himself it had felt...*freeing*, it felt good to have a cry and he realizes how much Steve has rubbed off on him.

He's a fucking sap now, it's almost disgusting.

When he finally gets up out of bed after almost drowning in his own depressing thoughts and opens his door he sees all of the kids sitting in the living room talking amongst themselves.

"What are you all doing here?" He asks as they turn to him like they're all guilty of something.

Max is apparently voted as the vocal piece to their little group as Henderson pushes her forward, she stumbles a bit before finding her footing.

The only kid missing out of their little pack is Eleven and probably for good reason.

"We're worried about Steve" she says and he can't help but roll his eyes as he goes over to the phone in the kitchen while mumbling a 'join the club'.

"Billy-" Will starts to say but he holds his hand up politely to silence him as he dials a number and it starts ringing.
The doorbell rings after the third ring of the phone and he'd answer it himself but he's currently on the phone and he sees Max trot off to go and open it instead.

There's no answer over the phone as it goes to dial tone and he rubs a hand over his face.

Why the fuck is Alex not answering now of all times?

He sees Max open the door as he hangs up and dials a new number, Hopper's number this time because he's the next best choice that they have at this point.

There's two men he doesn't recognize at the door and-

Within an instant a gun is pulled aiming right at Max's head and his eyes widen, time seems to slow as he drops the phone and extends his arm out.

Max takes a step back-

*Step sideways you idiot.*

"Stop" he hears himself say as every person in the room goes stalk still, the two men included.

There's barely breath out of him as he starts moving forward, weaving himself between the furniture and children because he *needs to get to Max, needs to keep her safe*-

He needs to keep them *all* safe.

It's easy to pull on the energy being freely given to him and it feels effortless as he focuses on the two men at his doorstep.

"*Take your gun, shoot the man next to you in the head*" he says to the man holding his gun.

There's a struggle for a millisecond, a shake to his wrist like he's fighting it but it goes away quickly as his arm lifts and the gun is now trained on his partner instead.

Billy sees a fear in his eyes that disappears upon having a bullet go through his skull as he crumples to the ground.

The kids behind him seem to not be under his compulsion anymore because he can hear them rustling around behind him.

He grabs Max by her arm, picking her up so she's sitting in the crook of it as she throws her arms around his neck while he stares at the other man who's still alive.
"Put the barrel of the gun into your mouth" he tells him and he can see tears streaming down his face.

He clearly knows what's about to happen.

"Shouldn't have tried to shoot my fucking sister."

"Pull the trigger"

He doesn't wait as he uses his leg to kick the door closed, locking it as he hears the second shot ring out.

He walks over to the couch and sits Max down on it as he cups her face gently with both hands.

"Are you alright?"

"Of course Billy- I'm fine" she says looking rather unphased all things considered as she moves her head away and starts slapping at his hands.

Sinclair moves to sit beside her and is gripping her arm tightly and under any other circumstance he'd punch the kid in the face but considering what had just happened he'll let it slide this one time.

He notices they're all looking at him like he's a fucking alien or something and he'd feel more concerned but he doesn't really care what they think or feel because at this point all that matters is keeping all of these damn kids safe.

These men were probably here for him.

Were they sent by Mr. Harrington?

It's hard to know...hard to tell.

His own sister had almost just died-

What if he hadn't been able to use his compulsion?
What if he hadn't acted quickly enough?

She'd have a bullet right through her fucking head.

If anything she's looking at him like she's confused more than anything.

"There will be more, there's always more" Mike says, voice completely steady and if anything he just sounds angry.

The kid clearly has balls of steel and he can see why someone with insane power like Eleven would like him so much.

"We need to fucking go" Sinclair says frantically, waving his free hand in the air and Billy doesn't disagree.

"Dustin's on the phone with Hopper" Will says who had moved to stand beside Mike and Billy turns to look at him and then to Henderson over in the kitchen speaking frantically.

He gets up and moves across the room again quickly as he takes the phone from him forcefully.

"Hey!" the kid says as he just shoots him a glare.

"I'm on my way with Funshine and Axel- are you alright?" he hears Jim say over the phone.

"Hey Chief- I've got bad news"

Chapter End Notes

I'm sure this chapter is making ya'll scratch your heads and be like
"Ok so wait- what is Steve's dad really doing?"
"Is Owen's actually a bad guy?"
"Why didn't Alex answer the phone?"

Among many other questions and that was pretty much the point of this chapter ;D

Also who the fuck tries to shoot a 12/13 year old in the head? Wtf that's messed up.
Whew this one was a doozy to write.

The energy Steve felt building up inside of him from this morning is starting to make a bit of sense now even if nothing else is.

He's drugged out of his fucking mind and it wasn't all that bad at first, it had been your typical 'oh no I'm unconscious' sort of floating that he's had to deal with before.

At some point it became worse and he'd starting to think that maybe they shot him up with something else too.

The darkness he finds himself standing within is a comfort away from the chaos of reality so he's not too panicked yet.

It's not something Steve would have ever thought he'd feel in his life because as a child he'd been the typical scaredy cat that needed a night light and would seldom become haunted by night terrors.

It was the usual for him so of course absolute darkness had been associated with monsters and ghouls and anything unknown that he couldn't make sense of.

Now it's a beacon. It means safety, comfort, a place of his own, a place for Billy to hide behind when things become too much, a place for himself.

A safe haven for them both.

Traversing the darkness is another story, walking inside of it is different when you have no clear goal.

It's uncomfortable and there's always a sense of unease like he doesn't know where to go, yet something is calling out to him...something is always calling out to him in this darkness but he ignores it, pretends it isn't there and goes on about his business.

He always wakes up before he reaches whatever it is that's pulling him toward something like an awful waking nightmare, like if he finds it he's not going to like what he sees.

If Steve had to guess why he's walking around like an idiot aimlessly with no sense of true purpose he'd assume it's due to whatever drugs they're pumping into him right now.

They're pretty fucking hardcore whatever they are.

There's no destination and there's an underlying feeling of restlessness, of being lost or rather...he's
becoming lost?
It's hard to tell.

Has he always been lost?

How long has he been here?

Was it all just a dream?

He can't wake up...he knows that much because he already tried to pull himself back to being conscious.

It had been futile and for a little bit it seemed like it would work because he feels like he can remember bright lights and men in white lab coats standing over him but that's when the drugs felt stronger.

They're doing *something* to him and he's helpless to it.

"Nothing I can do about it now" he tells himself with a shrug.

Stressing isn't going to do him any good and all he can do is keeping walking, keep pulling himself closer to whatever he's feeling uneasy about.

The *thing* he's been ignoring.

"Guess it's time to face it" he says out loud into the darkness and his own voice is a comfort in and of itself with the surrounding oppression of silence heavy around him.

Generally this only happens when he's in a deep enough sleep but it never lasts, it's like falling but you wake up before you hit the bottom.

It feels like an eternity but upon walking for a bit longer the darkness begins to shift and change around him, shapes and colors start to take form and he finds himself standing inside of a small house that's old and rickety but charming and quaint which isn't something Steve ever thought he'd say about a house.

It's like a home you'd go to when you want to see a grandmother, it has that faint smell of nostalgia to it.

There's also a smell of rotten eggs like there's a gas leak or something which probably isn't very safe.

Is this one of Billy's memories?
It doesn't feel like a memory.

When he walks past the small couch in the living room he runs his hand over the scratchy fabric of the dark brown blanket draped over it, it feels real under his touch and he can hear a voice in the kitchen to his left.

There's a silky fabric hanging from the archway that leads into it and Steve wonders why it's so hard to just install a door...why even have the fabric for a walkway leading into a kitchen?

It just seems stupid, who cares if you can see into a kitchen?

When he walks through it though and feels the silk of it beneath his fingers it's a distraction because it all feels so fucking real and this isn't like the usual stuff he usually experiences when strange bond shit happens.

As he pulls himself away from the out of body feeling he finally focuses on the person in front of him and his breath catches in his throat.

Sheldon.

It's Dylan's brother rummaging about looking like he's attempting to make food but failing terribly at it as he curses in that hick accent of his.

"No fucking way" Steve whispers to himself except Sheldon doesn't seem to know he's even here, it's like he's invisible which is probably a good thing.

The energy simmers deep inside of himself again and he feels the beckoning of something calling him toward a partially open door that looks like it would lead into a pantry.

There's no point in fighting it and it's not like he has anything better to do so he willingly answers the call as he opens the door and sees a rickety staircase leading down into what looks like a small dimly lit basement.

The stairs creak and groan under his feet and he wonders if Dylan- if the Mind Flayer can hear him, see him or feel him coming.

Doesn't take a genius to fathom out who's probably down here.

"You're not easy to get a hold of" it says before he can even fully get down the stairs.

"Sorry for keeping you waiting, I've been a bit busy" he says with as much sarcasm as he can muster as he goes stalk still for a moment on the staircase, still unable to see into the room because of the angle he has near the top of the stairs that's giving him a nice view of the hanging wall.
Does that imply that this strange feeling he's had is because the Mind Flayer has been trying to 'get a hold of him' so to speak?

It's hard to tell at this point, it's hard to know anything for certain.

"You're all wearing something that repels me, what is it if you don't mind me asking?" it asks as Steve starts walking down the stairs again and upon reaching the bottom he sees a small room made up like it's for someone who can't move about very much and there's the basic essentials but that's about it.

There are trophy's and other deer related items throughout the room and Steve feels his heart clench because that means Sheldon probably placed them around the room to add a bit of personality to it, to make him feel more comfortable.

Nancy had told him a bit about their backgrounds and how their family is full of hunters.

Does Dylan even exist anymore though?

Does it matter?

When his eyes dart over to the rather tiny bed in the corner he sees Dylan laying in it staring up at him except he looks downright awful.

"I do mind actually" Steve can't help but say as he buys himself more time to take in his surroundings so he can try to figure out where they are.

"I'm in a nice little home that Sheldon and Dylan's mother used to live in just outside of Indiana, I can tell you where exactly but it won't matter" it says but its tone is full of what sounds like regret.

"You're dying" Steve says and it's not something he's sure of by any means, it's more hopeful than anything as he takes in Dylan's weak form like he's on his death bed or something.

"Indeed, the gunshot from that woman became infected and my host is dying" it says in a factual manner like Dylan is of no consequence, like it's not inhabiting the body of a living, breathing, tangible human being that had an entire life before all of this.

"I imagine that means you'll be inhabiting Sheldon next" he says with a sigh.

That's actually not entirely a bad thing though when he really thinks about it.

Now that Steve knows for certain that he can see the Mind Flayer it's good that he'll be forced into a new host because it won't be powerful anymore like this one became.

It's going to be like a baby deer taking its first steps again and he'll be even more vulnerable.

"No" it says pulling him from his own thoughts of how he'll handle a newly infected Sheldon as he startles a bit upon hearing the word.
"No, what?" he asks as he raises a brow.

"I won't be moving to a new host" it says and Steve just blinks at it like it's stupid or something.

"If you don't find a new host you'll die"

"I will, but I also won't"

They stare at each other for a long moment and Steve wonder's if it's going to continue but it doesn't seem to have learned social cues just yet and Steve can't help but let out a small chuckle in disbelief.

"We gonna keep going with these riddles or are you going to start making sense for once?"

Dylan tilts his head in a way that doesn't seem entirely human like it doesn't understand what he means by that.

"We all become connected in death" it says like that's somehow supposed to explain everything.

"More riddles, alright then" Steve says as he rolls his eyes and puts his hands into his pockets.

"I called out to you for a reason"

"So you could be annoyingly cryptic?"

It smiles.

The creepy fuck actually smiles at him and it looks so weird because it's so unnatural.

"There's a hell coming for all of you" it says as it reaches over to grab a lighter off of the side table next to his bed.

Steve's eyes widen as he holds his hand out.

That smell from earlier-

The moment the lighter flicks on the entire place erupts into flames and Steve feels himself cry out as he shields his face.

When he removes his arms he's surrounded in a blazing fire and Dylan is burning alive and he can hear the shrieking screams of the Mind Flayer and Dylan himself as their pained cries meld together into one cacophony of some of the most horrific sounds Steve has ever heard.

"I want you to watch as he burns so you know that you can never win" it snarls out.

Steve puts his hands over his ears, tries to block out the sound but it's no use, he can still hear Dylan's sobbing.

"Please- please I just wanna die" he hears Dylan scream out as hot tears start to stream down Steve's face as he closes his eyes tight to keep from seeing anymore of this.

"You may have survived after I tried to make Billy kill you but it won't stay that way, we will RISE even stronger than before and you will NEVER be safe" the creature howls out as it cackles in delight and Steve doesn't understand, doesn't know what it's committing suicide, doesn't know what any of this means.
"We will ALL know your faces"

Steve falls to his knees and when it finally feels like it's over, when he can't hear the crackling of the house burning around him anymore and it instead changes to the howling of ominous wind he opens his eyes.

He immediately wishes he was back in the burning house, wishes he could hear their screams again because that would be so much better than this.

It's unlike anything he's ever seen.

He doesn't recognize where he is but it's fucking terrifying because it's like his world and the upside down melded together into one, like both dimension's had been fighting for dominance and the upside down won the battle.

The buildings are overtaken by age as well as the overwhelming darkness of the vines taking root inside the walls like it's carving itself into the land, the streets, the soil, anything it can find like a cancer spreading out everywhere.

Skyscrapers surround him and he knows he must be in some sort of large city and some of them are half fallen, some are even toppled over onto each other.

Nature itself actually exists still in these conditions to some degree and he can see the green that hasn't been overtaken by the disease shrouding the shattered windows, taking over what looks like an abandoned city that hasn't been lived in for years.

The sky-

The moon is shining a blood red and it's huge, far too large in the sky taking up most of the space where there should be stars as it bathes everything around him in a red hue.

It's like a war zone after a nuclear disaster.

No.

It's like hell.

Steve can't help himself from the overwhelming feeling that this isn't some sort of awful nightmare.

"This is your future"

Steve's head whips over to his left as he sees-

"What...what the fuck- what. the. fuck." he whispers, eyes wide as he stares at himself.
An older looking version of himself that's leaning against a broken lamp post as he lights a cigarette and takes a long drag from it.

The way he is holding himself looks unusual, it isn't him, isn't like him yet it's still familiar as he stares in awe.

"Or rather it's a possible future" his other self says as he lets out a puff of smoke while he stares up at the sky.

"How?"

He shrugs and makes a strange hand motion, rolls his shoulders and looks to be trying to find the right words.

"Certain people die that were better off alive, certain people stay alive that were better off being dead...it's never one single thing that sets events like these into motion" he says as he pushes himself off of the post to walk closer which just makes Steve feel even more uncertain as he stands and steps away.

"Are you me or am I hallucinating?" he asks, trying to make sense of what he's seeing.

"I am you but I'm also me, I'm Billy, I'm us" he says and Steve's head is really starting to hurt.

That explains the familiarity...it's like a cross between himself and Billy.

It looks like him but acts like Billy.

"You're- the- the bond...do you always look like this?"

"No, I don't always look like this" it states in a factual manner which just makes Steve want to ask what other forms it can take.

"But- okay huh but why are you here? Why am I here?" he decides to say to keep things simple.

"I'm outside of time, I can do whatever the fuck I want but you already knew that and you're here because I can do whatever the fuck I want" it says with a small smile that isn't quite as creepy as the one Billy will sometimes get on his face but it's a near thing.

"Is this the part where you warn me?" Steve asks as he folds his hands over his chest and looks around at the destruction once again feeling a bit overwhelmed by it.

"Just because I function outside of time, doesn't mean I don't know how it works and the dangers that come with seeing into the future and revealing too much" he- it says as it starts to circle around him in a rather predatory manner.

It's unsettling.

He never thought he'd meet the bond in what can be considered a 'physical' form and he certainly never thought it would act like some strange hybrid creation of both himself and Billy.

He's not sure why he expected anything different, of course it would act like them.

It's still kind of creepy though.

There's a loud booming shriek coming from the sky as Steve nearly jumps out of his skin as he looks all around them.
He can smell the electricity in the air and wonders when the blackened storm clouds had started moving in.

Lightning flashes across the sky and he sees the familiar forms of multiple Mind Flayer's closing in around them from all directions.

He feels paralyzed with fear like he can't move even if he wants to.

"Hey" his older self says as he whips his head back over to look at him.

He's holding out the lighter like it's some sort of offering and Steve can't help but feel confused as he tentatively reaches out for it.

"Don't you have one of these?"

When Steve gasps awake he's in a cold sweat and restrained to the bed but nobody else is in the room with him.

It feels like he's been gone for an entire lifetime, like he's been trapped in that strange limbo for far too long.

What the hell did the bond mean when it said-?

There's a heavy weight in his pocket.

This morning he had been listening to Billy talk and had put on the pants he'd worn yesterday which means-

*Billy proceeds to take out the lighter from his pocket like it's an offering and Steve deliberately reaches out to grab it from him as he scoffs.*

*Steve isn't one to back down from a challenge as he pockets the lighter and steps forward.*

He *still* has Billy's lighter from yesterday when they were in the AV room.

Steve could fucking *cry* right now from how happy he feels upon this revelation.

The drugs are still making him feel a bit lethargic but for the most part he's pretty sure he can get himself out if his restraints.
Should he try?

He'll most likely just burn himself.

Maybe he should wait and use it later.

If he's smart he might be able to get them off without causing himself too much harm and luckily his legs aren't restrained so getting it out of his pocket is the easy part.

There's a chance that someone will be here soon though if he's finally coming off of his drugs which means his dad probably finally has the place on lock down.

He holds the lighter in his hand like a lifeline as he contemplates the best course of action.

More than anything he needs to be free so he can find Cameron because that had been his task and it's kind of the only thing grounding him at this point with all of the other shit that's swirling inside of his brain.

If he stretches himself out far enough to one side of the bed he knows he can start the fire on the lower part of the strap that's coming from under the bed and it'll burn through and he can get free without setting fire to himself.

_Hopefully._

The issue is that the angle is awkward and upon putting his hand through the opening of the holding bar his wrist is a bit contorted.

His eyes dart around the room and luckily there's a sink that hopefully has running water in the corner for when he needs to put the fire out.

_If_ he can even do that.

He's going on half baked plans at this point and he's nothing like Billy who thrives off of stressful situations like these and can stay calm and collected like he's the super hot protagonist in an action movie.

After taking a deep breath and hoping he won't regret this he reaches down as far as he can, feels for the strap, turns his wrist awkwardly and pushes his thumb down to ignite the lighter.

It takes an insane amount of tries and he can't see, doesn't know if he's completely succeeded until he feels the flame lick at his skin for a moment.
"Shit-

The lighter clangs to the ground upon him dropping it as he pulls his hand away and back through the bar.

So far he's managed to burn himself so that's just fantastic, he's off to an amazing start it seems.

If the strap doesn't burn through all he's done is light himself on fire like a fucking idiot.

He'll burn to death like the damn Mind Flayer.

At least the Mind Flayer meant to do it.

Steve on the other hand can already see his obituary in the papers.

'Man dies because he thought it was a good idea to set himself on fire'

_Fucking great._

He starts to see the black and grey smoke rise as the strap starts to give a bit after he pulls, trying to make it work quicker and as a result he can see the flames begin to spread off to the side of the bed closer to his feet.

Which means they'll spread _under_ the bed too.

"Let's light the bed on fire Steve- sounds great Steve what could possibly go wrong?" He says quietly to himself in an overly exaggerated tone.

This is his future self- the bond's fault.

Why mention the lighter from the future if he wasn't supposed to use it like this?

Alternatively he realizes it may have been for something that will happen later and his stupid, dumb brain's first inclination had been to just- attempt arson.

Well- he's got the arson part down.
He starts to panic a bit more because he can feel the heat start to rise as he pulls harder on the restraint.

It gives way quite a bit more and he knows he's getting close to being free which is good because he's about to be cooked meat.

Using all of his strength and a whole lot of adrenaline finally gets him results as the strap snaps and his hand flies back toward himself.

He strategically back hands himself in the face really fucking hard.

"Fucking shit-!" He yells out, holding said hand to his face as his lower lip starts to go numb.

He really just slapped himself in the face.

Steve's dignity may be gone but his life isn't just yet as he ignore the self inflicted pain on his face as he makes quick work of the other strap.

Within seconds he launches himself off the bed and gets to see just how stupid that had been upon seeing the full picture of how bad the flames had become as he shakes his head and goes for the sink.

Luckily there's a large metal bin and he fills it quickly before grabbing the small trash can next to the counter.

He struggles with the empty plastic liner for a moment as he pulls it out and flails a bit before finally casting it aside and glaring at it offendingly.

If he doesn't kill this fire soon he's going to set off an alarm.

He's really fucking glad he hadn't been hooked up to an IV or heart monitor this time because that would have made all of this so much harder.

He takes out the metal tin and replaces it with the small trash can, putting it under the running sink so something else will be filling as he goes to launch the first container of water at the fire.

He repeats the process and eventually the whole damn room is soaked in water and when the fire is finally out he runs a wet hand through his hair and realizes something important.

Isn't there supposed to be an entire team outside his door?

That's what his father had said, there would be a whole team positioned outside his door to guard it yet nobody had come in yet.

If the smell of the smoke hadn't alerted anyone then the loud noises would have, yet he's still completely alone and nobody has come to check up on him.

It's unsettling and Steve is hit with the sudden feeling that something is terribly wrong.
door...it's his only way out and when he gets his hand onto the doorknob a large part of himself expects it to be locked from the outside.

It turns and opens easily with no resistance.

He cracks it open just barely so he can peek outside and immediately closes it when his eyes glance down.

There's a body lying outside the door crumpled to the ground and the hallway is dark as he puts his back to the door and breathes while trying to make a game plan in his own head.

Something went wrong.

It's not the Mind Flayer, Steve knows that much since he's fucking dead now and he's still trying to process that information...still trying to process the things he'd seen in that strange vision of a 'possible' future.

He can't help it as he slides down and puts his head between his legs, grabbing at his hair and pulling.

It's all too much and he doesn't know what to do, doesn't know where to go, how to handle any of this.

After taking deep breaths and getting himself back down from a ledge he'd almost tipped himself over he stands and starts looking around the room.

The lighter, he hadn't picked up the lighter when he dropped it earlier.

He's not sure if it's going to be helpful or not but he tucks it away back into his pocket just in case, mostly to make himself feel better.

There's nothing else of use in the room and it's a bit disheartening and he finds himself wishing Billy was here right now but knows that he's got his own shit to deal with and worry about and that he'll appear when he can appear.

Steve has no intention of accidentally throwing him off his game if things have somehow gone sideways for him too.

"Alright Steve, time to open that door and figure some shit out" he tells himself as he jumps up and down and wrings his hands out a little bit to expel the nerves that have started to settle under his skin.

He goes to open the door again but when his hand gets onto the doorknob this time it starts to turn by itself as his eyes widen.

Oh fuck.

He thinks as he pulls his hand away and starts taking tentative steps back.

When the door opens he sees-

"Eleven?" he says in disbelief, not believing what he's seeing and wondering if he's still under some sort of hallucination.

Maybe he'd never left his mind and he's just tripping out still.
Is the bond taking the form of Eleven now?

Except there she is standing in the doorway and he knows the doorknob turned, she has to be real.

"Let's go" she says and that's it, that's all she says as she turns around and starts walking away.

"Wha- wait!" he hisses out in a loud whisper as he runs a bit to catch up to her, stepping over bodies that are littered all over the floor.

As he looks back at some of them while trying to keep up he notices most of them are breathing and he feels relief wash over him.

He also sees blood on the walls from an apparent struggle and how someone had slid their bloodied hand over his room number.

\textit{Room 031.}

Eleven turns a corner and he loses sight of her for a moment, it makes him panic because when he turns a corner she's gone and he starts walking down the hallway wondering when he'd starting questioning reality from his mind.

He hears a door beside him open, feels a tug on his arm and a hand come up over his mouth as he gets pulled into the room.

His instincts scream at him after being on high alert for so long as he struggles in the person's hold as hard as he can.

Was he tricked?

Was it an illusion?

Also if Eleven had been there why the fuck had he set his damn bed on fire?

He's starting to think that maybe the bond had been fucking with him or something...or maybe his earlier thought from before of needing the lighter for something else is why the bond had made that particular comment.

An arm wraps around his waist as he kicks his legs out and tries to get purchase on the door so he can push himself and his assailant backward but for some reason it's like whoever has a hold of him knows what he's trying to do as he's pulled backward and his feet slide down and away from it uselessly.

One of his hands is free as he reaches a hand up only to feel it get grabbed painfully tight as he gets spun around and pushed against a wall.

He's ready to deck the person in the face but the fight immediately goes out of him upon seeing his
face, upon seeing him.

Steve searches his eyes as he goes completely lax in his grip and he finds himself wondering how long he'd really been under and inside of whatever he experienced.

"Hey, pretty boy" Billy says in that smug tone of his and Steve feels himself start to choke up, feels his throat tighten and he can't get out any words or else he's going to burst into tears because he knows this is Billy, he's right here in front of him.

He's not sure why Billy is here or how he got here and kind of wants to get pissed off because he shouldn't be here.

Fuck it.

He fists his hands into his shirt and pulls Billy into a bruising kiss, his mouth opens easily and Steve is eager for it, desperate even to feel this again, to feel so inherently alive just from the touch of his lips.

Steve could write poems, sonnets, entire books about that mouth and he's not much of a writer. If anything he fucking sucks at writing but he wouldn't be if it was about Billy. There's a clarity to the depth of the love that he feels for this wonderful fucking man in front of him. No one else loves him the way that Billy does, no one will ever love Billy the way that Steve does. There's no question.

Break up?
What's a fucking break up?

He refuses to lose him, refuses to let them both get so stuck in their own heads and he doesn't even know why he'd started this whole taking a step back thing in the first place.

Yeah, they needed to do it but this has gone on for far too fucking long.

If the world is going to end at some point Steve wants to make the most of it.

They both fall into the kiss like they were made for it but he can tell Billy's a bit surprised by his sudden outburst of affection considering how strained things have been between them lately because his hands are uselessly up in the air and not touching him.

Not in the way that he wants them to be touching him at least.

Eventually he feels Billy cup his face as the kiss gets less heated and he can tell that Billy is the one winding it down, coaxing him into a calmer state because he can probably feel how out of his mind Steve is right now.
They pull away just barely to close their eyes and rest their foreheads together while trying to catch their breath and Steve can't stop fucking smiling.

"Alright, well that was fun"

He hears Alex say from behind them as his eyes shoot open and he slaps a hand to his mouth and makes eyes at Billy that he hopes translates to 'why the fuck did you not warn me we have an audience?' after seeing Alex over Billy’s shoulder with a smug grin on his face.

Billy merely shrugs and there's a redness to his cheeks and the bridge of his nose.

His embarrassment increases ten fold upon seeing Kali and Eleven too.

Steve puts his hands into his face and groans and he wishes the wall would swallow him whole.

He's been spending all day doing stupid shit it seems.

"Don't worry, I've seen worse" Kali says in that deadpan accented tone of hers.

It doesn't help because he's just scarred poor Eleven for life though and she still looks just as innocent as before and if anything she seems to have a small happy smile on her face.

What the hell is wrong with him jumping Billy like that out of nowhere?

"Anyway, now that the gangs all here let's run it all through one more time for the damsel in distress" Alex says as Eleven sighs and Kali rolls her eyes.

"Wait- before we get into that we need to tell him" Billy says as he comes to stand beside him a bit too close as he feels a hot hand on the small of his back.

Steve really doesn't mind and even feels himself leaning into the touch.

"Oh yeah- me too" he says remembering everything he's just been through as he blinks stupidly at them.

How is he supposed to explain any of it?

Honestly with Billy beside him he finds himself not really caring about how fucking insane everything has become because Billy's here.

Somehow the plan had changed and Billy is now here with him and he couldn't be happier because he doesn't want to face any of this alone.

There's an important place to start though...something that needs to be said above anything else that's too important to ignore.
"The Mind Flayer's dead" they both say to each other in unison.

Chapter End Notes

I actually really enjoyed writing this chapter lol.

If you're wondering how the fuck that whole change in events suddenly happened don't worry, it'll be explained.

Yes, the room number thing was on purpose.
Chapter Notes

So I took a much needed break.

Exhaustion hit me hard and when I'd get off work I would go straight to sleep and it helped a lot to just catch up on some zzz's.

My car is finally back and I'm trying not to overwork myself so please be patient with me. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Billy can't help but blink at Steve in confusion as he wonders if he heard him correctly.

*He* knows why the Mind Flayer is dead but how the fuck does *Steve* know if he's been unconscious for a little over a day?

Even stranger is that Steve is looking at *him* like he shouldn't know that.

*What the fuck* happened within the time they'd been separated and Billy had been fighting tooth and nail to get to him?

"Huh, interesting" Billy hears Alex say off to the side as he turns to see the older man looking at Steve like he's a puzzle to be solved all of a sudden.

"How-?" Steve starts to say.

"Lee tracked the energy signature, Hopper tracked Sheldon and Lee's men found them in-" Alex says only to be interrupted.

"A house, a small house in the forest"

"Yeah...that's right- it went up in flames and Dylan's body was found at the scene which means it probably has a new host" Alex says with a frustrated sigh.

"No" Steve says as they all look at him in confusion. "It's dead, it committed full blown suicide"

There's a long pause before Alex bursts into hysterical laughter.

"I don't know where you're getting your intel but that's not-"

"Okay wait- we're getting ahead of ourselves" Steve says, interrupting him yet again as he waves his
hands in the air and slaps his hands over his face to rub at his cheeks like he's trying to wake himself up.

"How did you get to my room completely undetected?" he asks as he turns to look at Eleven imploringly.

The kid shrugs as she shakes her head at him, "like in the upside down, I found you" she says.

"Oh, that explains how you were suddenly gone when I turned the corner" he says as he scratches at his head absently.

Honestly, getting into the facility had actually been the easy part oddly enough even with it being on total lock down and when they'd gotten to the first room it had been totally empty. He was there, he'd seen the room number with his own two eyes.

The anger he'd felt was immense but he could still feel Steve, knew he was only a few floors down from them.

The trouble had been getting there because that meant they'd have to travel four floors down without being seen.

It doesn't help that they all look like a bunch of fucking band rejects with the exception of Alex who looks like he could be their manager, if anything.

Basically they stick out like a bunch of sore fucking thumbs so they'd needed Kali to keep making them invisible.

Which is how they'd gotten in here in the first place.

On the flip side in regards to the case of the missing Steve Harrington; Alex suspected that Steve's father had gotten a wild hair up his ass and moved him to a different room.

Or maybe they were just moving him somewhere else to do god knows what to him.

Billy had been a bit busy with everything else and couldn't constantly be by his side so there's a lot of missing time between trying to protect the kids, helping Hopper hide two dead bodies, meeting up with everyone without being detected or followed, getting a new plan together, and then enacting that plan to get into the facility.

Nancy and Jonathan are on babysitting duty with Joyce and Funshine as they all keep an eye on Terry while the rest of Kali's group is on standby at the 'extraction point' as Alex had excitedly put it because he's an idiot.

Hopper's the one in the most danger at the moment oddly enough.
They'd loaded into his cruiser, driven right up to the front door happy as could be and snuck their way inside without hassle with the use of Kali's illusions.

Hopper's on distraction duty.

It's not far fetched to think that Hopper's ties to Owen's and the sucking up he's been doing to Steve's father wouldn't come in handy but to Billy it all still smells like a fucking trap.

It was too easy.

Also Steve having been conveniently moved to another room seemed strange, like they're being corralled somewhere...like Mr. Harrington knew Billy would come for him.

"Look, we've all got a lot to talk about but right now we need to find Cameron and get our asses out of this place" Alex says as he interjects before things can divulge into a full blown conversation at the most inopportune time.

Billy doesn't disagree and nobody else seems to either as they all just stare at him in acknowledgement and wait for him to continue.

"Do you think you can keep making us invisible?" Alex asks Kali as she nods.

"How did you all even get here anyway?" Steve asks as Alex does his best to give him a look that Billy knows translates to 'didn't I just say we need to get moving?' and he sees Steve get a sheepish look on his face.

"Alright let's try this again" Alex says as he pulls a picture out of his pocket and hands it to El.

She takes it tentatively, reaches into her pocket for a blindfold and Kali comes up behind her to grab it and place it over her eyes.

It feels like an eternity as they all stand there and watch her and Billy can't help but stare at Steve instead, to really look at him.

There's a strain to him like he's barely holding it together and Billy knows the signs, knows what it looks like when he's on the verge of hysterics.

He also can't help but think back on when he'd pulled him into the room at first.

Steve is much stronger than he looks and Billy was seconds away from landing flat on his ass when he grabbed at him and then saw him lift his legs to push at the door.

The thing is...he's actually fallen for that trick before and all it took was one time before he'd learned his lesson.
Sneaking up on Steve is one of Billy's favorite past times and he likes keeping him on his toes. It's downright fun to rush him at random times just because he can and mostly because it gives him an excuse to touch Steve even when they can't be themselves around each other because Neil is way too intuitive.

It's after school and nobody else is in the locker room other than Billy and Steve is going to be here soon to walk with him so he decides to have a little bit of fun as he hides away, hides his stuff and makes it look like he's already left.

The irony is that Billy has realized Steve fucking sucks at sensing him, at always keeping himself aware of Billy's presence.

Billy on the other hand always knows where Steve is and maybe that's just a personality thing, maybe it's because it makes him feel better to know that Steve is okay and to feel that familiar thrumming under his skin helps him feel better.

They got into a fight about it once too and it had ended in a begrudging stalemate because Steve told him he understands why Billy does it, understands that it's a fear thing but that Steve himself doesn't have to do it too because it feels like a breach of privacy to him.

Fucking ridiculous.

Steve had clarified by saying he doesn't mind it, doesn't care if Billy always knows where he is and that he even finds it pretty endearing if a bit obsessive because at the end of the day he has nothing to hide.

The admission made him feel guilty for a bit, he attempted to pull back but ultimately he couldn't bring himself to do it because he kept thinking of all of the awful things that might happen if he isn't paying attention and something happens the one time he's not keeping an eye out.

Metaphorically speaking.

There just isn't an option in his opinion and Billy needs to know he's alright.

Steve has teased him about it before, calling it his security blanket and that's not entirely untrue because it does give him a sense of peace.

Part of it might be that Billy has felt what it's like when he can't feel Steve, when he gets ripped away from him.

That first moment upon bonding when he couldn't feel Steve anymore still haunts him to this day and probably always will.

Owen's of course was firmly on Steve's side for this one and had tried taking him aside and warned him of such compulsive behavior and how it might potentially strain their relationship in the long run.

Billy tuned him out as usual.

So here he is waiting so he can come at Steve.

Eventually he hears and feels him enter the locker room and it takes only a couple of minutes for him to hear Steve's low cursing and the echo of a 'where the fuck did he go?"
If his dearest would pay some fucking attention he'd know that Billy is in the same damn room and he can’t help but rolls his eyes at how dense Steve can be at times.

He hears Steve's footsteps start to retreat and he waits for the perfect moment which is when he's about to open the door and leave because he must think that Billy left ahead of him or something.

Billy quietly moves up behind him and he's smiling like a predator about to take a bite out of his prey, tongue out and everything as he wraps his arms around Steve's midsection.

What he doesn't expect is for Steve's automatic reaction to take him off guard, fingernails dig into his arms as he lifts his legs up, arching back.

The offset of balance makes Billy stumble back a step and within the next moment he sees Steve put his feet against the door and push.

 Needless to say Billy falls back gracelessly to the ground after losing his footing, the air gets knocked the fuck out of his lungs and he thinks he bashes his head a bit on the linoleum floor.

The added weight of Steve falling right on top of him with all of his weight is usually something he welcomes but this time it just makes him groan out in pain.

He's pretty sure his vision goes black for like a split second because within the next moment Steve's right in his face, running hands through his hair and he looks equal parts angry and concerned.

"Oh my god Billy- fucking shit- why the fuck would you do something like that?!” he hears him say breathlessly and there are hands stroking his face in apology which is a pretty nice gesture but it's Billy's own fault.

He can't help it as he starts laughing uncontrollably as the pain begins to finally subside.

"That was pretty damn good you freaky fucking ninja. I'm- I'm impressed” he laughs out as he takes one of Steve's shaking hands into his own, squeezing it in a comforting manner to let him know he's fine.

"God, are you okay? You hit your head-” Steve starts saying and Billy can tell from how high his voice has gone just how close he is to losing it.

He's such a fucking sap.

"Shhhhh, I'm good- I'm alright love just knocked the air out of my lungs is all" he says reassuringly as he waves a free hand in the air and can't help the sappy little smile he's got on his face now as he looks up at him fondly.

He'd actually gotten swept off his feet by Harrington.

There's something he never thought he'd see.

"Your head though-” Steve says as he runs his hand to the back of it and Billy can't help but hiss out from how tender it feels when Steve rubs against the sore spot.

There will be a bump but other than that he'll be fine.

He decides the next best thing to do is pull at Steve who's already half on top of him so he's straddling him instead while giving him his best set of bedroom eyes.
Steve blinks down at him at first before frowning.

"I'm not riding your dick on this nasty ass locker room floor right after I've almost knocked you out" he says like he can somehow read his mind.

"Don't worry, I like it when you get rough with me baby" he purrs as he gets his hands up and under his shirt as he feels Steve almost jerk away from how cold his hands are before settling into the touch.

"Billy-"

"Come ooooon. You owe me now, don't be such a prude" he says with a smug grin and he can already feel that Steve's getting half hard.

They're both so damn easy and he thinks it's cute when Steve tries to pretend he doesn't have just as filthy of a mind as he does.

Actually he's convinced Steve's mind is even filthier.

It's not like anyone's going to find them and even then the potential of being caught is pretty exciting.

He's honestly surprised they don't get caught more often.

"Are you sure you're alright?" Steve asks as he strokes his face gently, still in that mother hen mode of his which is endearing most of the time like he's ready to take Billy to the damn hospital or some dumb shit.

Right now it's hindering Billy's ability to get his rocks off.

"Yes I'm alright, now are you gonna ride me or do I need to pin you to a damn wall?" He says voice laced with fake annoyance.

"Oi, don't get bossy with me Hargrove. I can leave you here high and dry" Steve says in that tone that says 'don't fuck with me' as he swats at his arm.

Billy knows better than to push it by now.

"As you wish" he says deep and dark as he shifts up to grind against him, watching Steve's pupils dilate nearly on command because he knows exactly how to get him all hot and bothered.

He gets a grip onto his waist, watching as Steve bites his bottom lip and it makes him want to fucking devour him whole as he grabs at his arm and pulls him so he falls forward.

"Hey" Steve says, voice rough and their faces are so close to each other it would barely take any effort to move up to capture those sinful lips in a kiss.

"Hey"

"Next time, plant your feet" Steve says with a mischievous grin as he goes to pull away.
Billy can't help the laugh that starts in his chest and comes out unbidden as he pulls him back into a fond kiss that turns heated very quickly.

Needless to say all it takes is one time which is why it didn't work on him that time.

When he'd pinned Steve to the wall he'd been expecting anger, concern, yelling.

He didn't expect the kiss, didn't expect Steve's eyes to go soft and doe eyed, for them to water, for him to look like he'd been about to burst into tears and to be pulled into his orbit like they haven't seen each other in years or something.

That was certainly the absolute last thing he assumed would happen.

The look in Steve's eyes took his fucking breath away and for a moment he felt something akin to hope.

It had been wonderful, amazing even because Steve hadn't been able to see anyone else in the room but him for that one beautifully blissful moment.

It's certainly a good sign.

It's putting him a bit on edge too though but not necessarily in a bad way.

Does Steve finally want to get back together?

Billy wonders if he's finally hit that point of caving in completely and the idea of it makes him feel giddy with the whole butterflies in the stomach deal and everything.

There's also the other part of him that's trying to be delicate because he's known how at war Steve has been with himself so he doesn't want to push at the wrong time.

If they come back together too fast it could easily go back to Steve having second thoughts.

The cycle will repeat itself and Billy doesn't want to be that person, doesn't want them to be those people.

All of Steve's points are valid and Billy knows it, Steve knows it, everyone fucking knows it.

They needed the step back, needed to get their perspectives switched up a bit, to pull away from each other and gain a sense of self.

There's another part of Billy that thinks this isn't enough, they haven't actually done what's truly needed in regards to a true break up.

They've been all up in each other's business the whole damn time and it's like trying to pull two super
magnets apart.

It just doesn't work and if you do manage it, it doesn't feel satisfying.

That part of himself is also aware that if they want something lasting and long term there needs to be far more stability.

That's certainly not what they have right now.

Steve doesn't trust him.

That's really what it ultimately comes down to.

Why would Steve want to keep being with someone who violates the fragile trust they build only to crush it under his heel every time?

He needs to prove himself, build that trust back up between them and start again and take whatever Steve throws at him along the way because it's his own fault.

There's no delusion to be had, he's fully aware he put himself into this position and now it's his job to step up.

Even more frustrating is the fact that he feels that separation Steve has, the war he has within himself.

They love each other, they're in love with each other and Steve wants to give so much but he's so fucking terrified of giving in, of becoming swallowed whole and just giving into those emotions.

Of giving himself to Billy.

It pulls at something in his chest, makes him feel worthless, inadequate because he's done nothing to show Steve that he'd been safe in his care.

He's done nothing to show that Steve's heart, his trust, it has somewhere to rest.

The hardest part of being bonded to someone that nobody can probably understand is the melding of emotions.

That harsh reality of knowing for a fact how a person feels.

It's a kick in the balls and a harsh reality check sometimes because there's nothing left to the imagination, nothing left to assume.

It's all there.

Steve wants to give in and his love for Billy makes him blind to reality and as a result he struggles to see the truth.

Billy isn't good enough for him.
It's a sad truth and he intends to keep working on himself but he worries it won't be enough, that Steve needs faster results.

There's years of conditioning, years of bad habits and Billy is fully aware it's an uphill battle with himself more than anything and right now...as he is...it's not enough.

Steve doesn't deserve to have to deal with that sort of baggage, to have to handle his baggage. It's not fair to Steve.

In this moment Billy realizes it's down to him, it's on him to make sure that Steve doesn't give in, that they do this the right way.

So instead, for now, he just sticks close while trying to keep things distant.

For like two seconds until he puts a hand on Steve's back without even thinking because he's an idiot.

Except the thing is...here's the thing...within the next blissful moment he feels Steve lean into the touch and his heart fucking soars.

He tries to tell himself that it's probably just Steve feeling vulnerable with everything that's going on and people generally tend to cling to familiarity so after this is all over it could easily go back to Steve telling him to back off.

He needs to back off.

It's already hard enough keeping his hands off of Steve and they've both done a total shit job at keeping the touching minimal.

It'd be easy if one of them would just put their foot down but neither one of them seems to be willing to take that step.

Billy certainly isn't going to, there's no chance in hell he's going to risk letting Steve feel like they can be 'chummy' instead, unless he's told flat out to his face to keep his hands to himself.

He's perfectly capable of the whole friends with benefits thing, it's pretty much all he's ever done with the people he's been with in the past.

Obviously in regards to Steve it's more of a self preservation thing, a manipulation tactic if you will.

He's capable of tricking Steve into thinking that's all it is but in reality he's just keeping him close.

If Steve feels like he can go to someone else it opens too many doors that Billy doesn't even want to consider.

He knows it's not right, it's not what a healthy functioning human should do or think but...not for the first time he just can't bear the thought of someone else touching Steve.

It also won't last though and that's the hardest part.

Eventually Steve will see through the rouse, will see through what Billy's attempting to accomplish
with the way he's been making sure he's always there in Steve's face, keeping his gaze solely on him.

Those delightful noises, the sweet and filthy words that spill from his own mouth to egg him on, becoming one, that sinful way Steve's breathing goes ragged.

The way his face scrunches up when he's drowning in the pleasure, every last bit, every last piece.

That's all for **him**, that's **his** and his alone.

He thought before the Jonathan thing had happened he'd be able to manage being mature about giving Steve his space when someone steps onto Billy's 'turf', so to speak.

After the Jonathan thing he's convinced it's just an impossibility for him.

He didn't think about it when he'd confronted Jon, he just did it because...because he **had** been jealous.

It's stupid, it's irrational and he knows it is but he's always felt strongly about everything and jealousy is not an exception to that.

Especially not when it comes to Steve.

The nail in his metaphorical coffin is the idea that he **might** be able to feel **someone else** touching Steve.

That's fucking unacceptable.

It's **that** part that gets him most, strikes horrified terror into him and makes him realize he's just doing them both a favor in the long run.

If he were to **ever** feel something like that there's no doubt in his mind he'd fucking lose his shit.

Have mercy on their soul because he will fucking **kill** whoever it is.

It's extreme, a bit unfounded but Billy knows himself too well, knows the own depth of his emotions far too well at this point.

No one else gets to touch Steve.

It's pretty much his only stipulation now that he really breaks it down to himself in his own head.

By **god**, it's so obviously far from how Steve feels it's not even funny.

Steve very clearly stands by the idea that they are their own person and blah, blah, blah.

When they really sit down and talk, when everything is back to normal and they can discuss **them** and really go for the whole break up thing?

It won't be pretty.

It's going to be downright ugly because that's all Billy will ask of him, it's his only request and it's an unrealistic one but he really doesn't fucking give two shits about that.

No one else.
The most unfortunate part?

All of that is neither here nor there because they're currently stuck in the lab with a job to do and as he looks at Steve he finds himself wanting to enjoy their civility while he still can before it probably all goes to shit.

He's always known how good he is at ruining anything good in his life.

At least he's mentally preparing himself for it.

Alternatively maybe Steve will see his logic, maybe he'll understand that Billy can't handle even the slightest chance of feeling someone else touch him and they can come to a compromise.

It's unlikely.

"Underground" Eleven says, snapping him out of his deep thoughts and he catches Steve glance at him before looking away, probably realizing he'd been staring for a prolonged period of time.

"Are we talking buried, or like- we can take an elevator and just pop right in to say hello?" Alex asks and Billy almost snorts at the look Eleven gives him like she's talking to a total moron.

"So, not buried" he mumbles as he looks away like he's worried he'll incur her wrath or something.

Billy doesn't blame him, she's not someone you'd ever want to fuck with and he can't believe how much better he feels with having her around.

"I can lead us" she says, nodding to herself as she turns to start walking away with Kali following close behind like they're attached at the hip.

"How much more time do you think Hopper can buy us?" Billy asks as he whispers to Alex, catching Steve furrow his brow and he can see from his eyes as the wheels start to turn in that pretty little head of his.

"Probably not much, we need to move fast" Alex replies.

Good enough for him.

Billy doesn't like it, doesn't like the silence surrounding them or the fact that they haven't come across a single person.

He also doesn't like that they're relying solely on Kali's abilities to keep them invisible.

She's starting to look strained.

It's clear she's pushing herself and most of it is clearly in an attempt to impress Eleven or stay in her good graces.
There's always been something that clearly happened between them but he honestly has no clue what it was.

He knows they knew each other, that they'd met before all of this but that's the extent of his knowledge as he recalls the time they'd left his hospital room to talk after he'd been shot.

There's also the worry he has about Hopper betraying them.

The guy doesn't even know Eleven is here, Kali had hidden her from him the whole time they'd driven here after Alex had taken her aside to give her a pep talk.

Both Jim and El had even gotten into a fight before all of this because she wanted to come.

So basically Hopper's under the impression she's back at Alex's house with the other kids.

It feels dirty and underhanded but if there's anyone Billy wants around it's her.

She's like their ace in the hole in case everything goes to shit.

Also if Jim didn't want her here it begs the question.

Why?

He's a practical man, he's protective but he's logical about it and everyone knows it will all go faster if she's here.

Everyone knows she can protect herself.

Billy likes the chief but he doesn't trust him, not after everything that's happened.

It doesn't take long for things to go strange and they're halfway down a hallway with what looks like a maintenance elevator at the end of it before it starts going to shit.

Within seconds they're all drenched in water as the sprinkler system turns on overhead.

It's an automatic reaction as he grabs Steve's arm, pulling him forward so they're all surrounding him and he hears a disgruntled noise come out of him as they all go stock still.

*Looks like it's time for the other shoe to drop.*

"That's not good" he hears Alex say.

The crackling of what sounds like an intercom comes on and there's merely the sound of a loud ringing frequency in his ears for a rather long period of time.

Within the next few moments the lights all go off, the sprinklers included and Billy can hear the click of what's probably the back up power generator kicking itself into gear.

Secondary lighting comes on, the sprinklers come back on too and the dim lighting makes it feel like they've all entered into a horror movie as a voice finally speaks over the intercom.

"It's interesting that I can't see you but I know you're here...it makes me wonder who's turning you
That's-
Steve's dad.

"I've been trying to figure out who Maggie would have sent but I know there's nobody under her employ with such an ability which means you have a wildcard with you too"

It's definitely his voice and Billy can't help but whip around as he stares at Alex, leaning to look past Steve's shoulder except the older man has his back to him.

Steve is facing him though as they lock eyes, both of them realizing what that implies.

Mr. Harrington knows Maggie?

"Process of elimination and basic common sense indicates Alexander is probably here...still begs the question of just how many of you are currently here and what the rest of you can do"

That's a good sign at least, he doesn't seem to know about Kali or even Eleven for that matter, doesn't seem to know the extent of their powers which means Hopper has been keeping his mouth shut so far.

Billy absently wonder's if Owen's is still alive because he would know of her existence and if he hasn't been killed yet he might spill the beans.

The sprinkler system going off on them is explained at this point now too.

It probably hinders Alex's ability to produce fire quite a bit.

The part that gets Billy though is the fact that it implies that not only does he know Maggie but he knows Alex too in some way.

Could be through basic file gathering but from the set of the older man's shoulder's, the way his posture screams 'I'm hiding something' he's starting to think there's more to this than what they've been previously told.

Or in this case not been told.

"Are you fucking kidding me right now?" Steve hisses out in a low threatening whisper as he turns around to face Alex too and Billy is more stunned than anything else as he tries to put the pieces together in his head.

"Regardless, my son gave you away just like I told him he would and I'm pretty sure I know who
you're here for and why you've come to Hawkin's of all places"

Billy tries to think about what he means by that because Steve hadn't even been conscious so how could he have given something like that away?

He replays the events of the day before in his head, the conversation that he'd seen before Steve had been put under and before his father had taken over control of the facility and it hits him in that moment.

"Shit- hive mother" he whispers as Steve turns back around to look at him.

"What?" Steve asks.

"Hive mother, you said hive mother to him yesterday...that's what they call it- that's how he found out" Billy says through gritted teeth as he points over at the fire user.

"Wait- I was out for a whole day?!" Steve asks in disbelief before shaking his head, looking a lot like he's starting to feel a little bit overwhelmed and Billy doesn't really blame him at this point.

"Perhaps we can strike a deal again...just like old times"

The intercom clicks off.

Things quickly break out into chaos as Steve lunges for Alex and Billy is too slow for once, too damn slow because there's too much going on in his head.

Steve has Alex pinned against the wall within seconds and Kali starts holding onto her head in obvious pain as Eleven looks on with concern and Billy is reminded of the fact that she's just a child.

Kali's young too and he wonders how these poor kids got pulled into all of this shit as he starts feeling bad for once.

The water continues to pour down around them and they look like a bunch of drowned rats.

The expression on Alex's face looks a lot like guilt.

"Steve- wait" he says weakly and Billy has no idea what to do.

"Old times, the fuck does that mean?" Steve asks, pulling him forward only to slam him back into the wall as hard as he can.

Damn, he's pissed.

"I was a kid, it happened a long time ago"

"You know my father and said nothing?!"

"I didn't know until I pulled up his picture and that was after we'd gone digging for information on Terry...I swear to you-"

"Bullshit, you're working with him"
"No- I'm not"
"Bullshit"

Billy goes to grab at Steve who shrugs him off at first before he finally gets a good grip onto his drenched shirt as he wrenches him away.

Steves slips on the water as Billy gets a tighter grip onto him to keep him upright.

If he falls, Billy's going right down with him because this floor is all kinds of slippery.

Steve's hands come up to grapple at his arms as he turns so they're facing each other so that he clearly doesn't fall straight on his ass and under different circumstances Billy would be enjoying himself.

Right now he's as far from enjoying it as possible.

"I can't hold on much longer" Kali grits out and Billy knows they don't have much time.

"Cut the shit, we need to get to that elevator...we've still got a job to do" Billy says, trying to gain some semblance of stability because this is clearly what Mr. Harrington was trying to accomplish.

"I can get us to the elevator but I can't create the illusion of it staying closed...I can't manage two illusion's at once and they'll know we're in there...he's clearly watching on surveillance" Kali says as she rests a hand against the wall and he can see the blood dripping from her nose.

It's getting worse.

"We've got my compulsion, let's go" he says as he starts to physically drag Steve away with him who continues to struggle in his grip.

"You can't be- how can you trust him?!" Steve hisses out as he turns in his grip, lunges again and Billy has no choice but to lock his arms around his waist and lift him off the ground as he starts walking them toward the elevator.

It's certainly not easy with all the damn water on the floor and he almost takes them both to the ground when Steve tries to become dead weight in his arms.

Which is unlucky for him because Billy's used to manhandling him into submission and when Steve realizes that won't work he starts struggling again, pushing at him and Billy can't help but roll his eyes.

Why is Billy always the calm one in situation's like these?

"Steve- fucking stop- god damn it regardless of some past deal they may have made makes no difference with what's happening now" Billy huffs out to him, trying to keep him from getting free and probably murdering Alex.

"You don't- you don't fucking know that Billy- this whole thing is a fucking trap!" Steve yells out and Billy finally stops them in their tracks because Steve keeps trying to get him to trip and fall which isn't going to be good for either one of them.

He's right, he doesn't know that for sure but he does know about the question's he'd asked Alex while he'd been under the influence of the truth stone.

None of it indicates that he intends to betray them, at least not right now.
Alex needs them if he wants to get this kid they're searching for out of here, he'd be stupid to jeopardize that.

"Call it a hunch" he says, trying to get Steve to just shut the fuck up and move.

"No- you don't get to do that...he's working with my dad" Steve says as he stops struggling, faces Billy and gets into his face as he points off to the side to where Alex probably is. "We're idiots if we keep playing their game, if we keep playing my dad's game"

At least his attention isn't on Alex anymore, it's all focused in on Billy right now and he counts that as an accomplishment.

Steve doesn't know about the truth stone and it probably doesn't make sense but hopefully his own words will be enough to placate him.

Except it's Steve fucking Harrington, he's always fighting him on everything so of course he just continues to stand there defiantly and his eyes are piercing, that familiar color of molten copper in the dim lighting and somehow he actually looks like the definition of temptation as he stands there completely soaked through.

The water running down his face, the pure livid anger, the way he's holding himself like he's a force of nature you shouldn't fuck with makes something dark and hot ignite deep in Billy's gut that he has no choice but to ignore.

"I need you to trust me" he says instead, hoping that will get through to him knowing full well it can potentially backfire.

"Trust- trust you? This must all be some kind of joke" Steve says as he barks out a harsh and ugly laugh.

Yeah, that's about the reaction Billy had been expecting.

"Steve, please...we need to do this and you told me not to fuck this up remember?" Billy says, tone pleading because at this point he's willing to try anything.

He can hear Kali's ragged breathing from behind him.

"We don't owe them shit Billy, we can take Eleven right now and go- leave Alex and Kali and fucking Jim here so they can all make some sort of fucking deal for all I care" Steve hisses out.

"That's true and if that's what you want it's what we'll do right now and I will not fight you on it but I think we should see this through" Billy says.

He's not sure why he feels compelled to help save some kid he's never met but all he can think about is if it were someone they did know, if it was Eleven or Will or any of the other kids...except Sinclair, he might still leave Sinclair behind.

Maybe.

The kid's really starting to grow on him especially after he saw the way he treated Max after she'd almost died, after those pieces of shit had almost shot her in the fucking head.

He wants all of this to have meant something, to get one over on these sick fucks and at least try to ruin some of their plans.
If it takes saving some kid, he's down for it.

He also understands where Steve is coming from though, there's a part of him that agrees and wants to just leave them to their own devices and get as far away from this place as possible and tell everyone to go fuck themselves.

Except now that the Mind Flayer is dead there's less of a threat looming over their heads and it makes Billy feel powerful, like he has some semblance of control back.

Steve takes a physical step back at his words, blinks at him like he can't believe those words just came out of his mouth and at first Billy is confused as to why he'd look at him like that but then he replays his own words back to himself in his head.

He's being agreeable, attempting to reach a compromise and not trying to fight Steve on something for once.

Honestly he hadn't even noticed, it's just what he'd wanted to say in that moment because he also wants to ultimately do what Steve wants to do too.

"I- you're serious right now" Steve says.

"Speed this up" Kali says like she's just run a marathon and Steve falters as Billy sees him look over past his shoulder, eyes darting around in uncertainty.

"Yeah alright, let's go" Steve says and he sees the minute glare that he sends Alex who has stayed uncharacteristically silent.

Somehow they all make their way to the elevator and Billy knows there's no turning back at this point as he watches Kali fall to her knees from pure exhaustion when they huddle inside.

The moment those doors close they're going to get swarmed and Billy hopes he's made the right decision.

Chapter End Notes

I like to call this chapter "Billy continues to make bad decision's"

Also I don't ever really hit on his unhealthy possessive behavior very much or rather his thoughts on the matter so I really wanted to take this opportunity to get into his head because you know I like to take any excuse I can find for character analysis.

Ya'll know how much I love me my character analysis. XD

Not to mention this is yet another example of them being on totally different wavelengths and how Billy already has in his head how he thinks things are going to go while Steve is already on the "Ah yeah I wanna get back together" bandwagon.

Should be fun when they both finally address the elephant in the room.

I do not condone Billy's possessive tendencies but I didn't want to shy away from it
either because I felt it would be unrealistic to his character and honestly a bit disrespectful.

Billy to me is someone who wants to try to be better, is the type of person who wants to help those less fortunate when he's not influenced by a bad environment and has really started to come out of his shell now that his oppressive father is out of the picture.

But the catch to it is that even though he tries he still has a lot of heavy mental issues that can't go away with the snap of his fingers so I see him as the type of person to do the right thing one moment only to kind of fuck it up in the next because it's easy to fall back into bad habits.

"Oh if Steve flat out tells me to back off I totes will" he says only to seconds later admit to himself that he's willing to manipulate the power he holds over Steve WHILE admitting he has been knowingly manipulating him.

*facepalms* Silly bois.

That being said I think he improves in some ways but then regresses in other's and his possessive behavior is one of those things I could see him regressing on as he gets himself all worked up about the idea of something that hasn't even happened, nor has he even attempted to discuss his own thoughts on the matter with the party involved so he just gets into his own head and perpetuates his own awful cycle.

Oh Billy, our poor Billy.

Meanwhile Steve's clearly on the verge of just giving everyone the middle finger and all of that repressed, pent up aggression from flat out betrayal is starting to come out. :)

Honestly if a child wasn't involved I could see Steve just giving everyone a peace out and telling them to figure it out while he takes Eleven and the kids on a trip for ice cream while the world burns around them.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!