"Make out with someone in this room that you’ve never kissed before,” Clyde dares.

No one expects Craig to turn to his boyfriend of eight years – least of all Tweek.

---

All it takes is one drunken game of Truth or Dare to throw Tweek and Craig’s carefully cultivated ‘relationship’ right off track. When things between them go from fake to real very quickly, Tweek struggles to understand exactly what it all means.

Basically, shit hits the fan.
uploading it because...

honestly, i have no idea.

i've got the entire story plotted out from start to finish, and the first three chapters already written, so there is that.
“Come on, dude,” Craig says again from where he’s spread out across the length of Tweek’s bed, chullo hat on the floor and dark hair in such a mess that Tweek wants to run his fingers through it. “You promised you’d go.”

Tweek, only just having climbed back up the stairs after getting them both another huge mug of coffee to share (really, Craig ought to feel blessed – Tweek doesn’t share with just anyone), rolls his eyes. “Ugh, you know I hate parties. And crowds—”

“And loud noises, and lots of bodies, and drugs and alcohol and good music and having fun, and just about everything else… yeah, I know. But you promised, honey.” Is he actually pouting?

Making a sound of disgust, the blonde takes a huge gulp of the scalding drink, sets the mug down on the table with a sloshing clunk, and shoves at Craig’s legs until the taller boy shunts over a ways. Tweek flops down beside him, the lengths of their arms and sides pressed together.

It takes all of a second for Craig’s bare toes to hone in on the baggy length of Tweek’s pajama bottoms, so he can warm them up on his calves.

Much flailing, grunting and tickling ensues, abating only when Tweek’s fists are full of Craig’s hair and the taller boy is half sprawled on top of him, chilled hands pressed high against Tweek’s ribs, beneath his green t-shirt. Their legs are tangled, cold toes forgotten; their kicking was so violent that the blanket that normally lives at the foot of the bed is now in a heap on the floor.

For a long beat of silence, both boys gather themselves, Tweek feeling flushed and breathless and more relaxed than he does with anyone else. Craig’s small, crooked smile and pink face is so close that each puff of air from the other boy’s mouth fans out across his cheek, and makes the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. Tweek isn’t sure when it became commonplace for him to see Craig this way, but it’s been pretty much half their lives now. At eighteen, they’ve been ‘boyfriends’ for eight years. At some point, they were bound to grow comfortable with one another, he supposes. (The fact that it happened after ‘dating’ for just a handful of months was a huge shock to Tweek. In fact, it’s still a surprise now.)

“I didn’t, actually. Promise I’d go, I mean,” Tweek says, huffing, (mostly because he already knows there’s no way he’ll get out of it now). As much as Craig’s bugging him about going to Token’s, the other boy hates big parties too, and they’ve ditched so many over the years (usually claiming to be out on dates) that their friends have started getting pissed at them. Nowadays, everyone just bribes or threatens Craig until he caves, and then the two of them go through this routine of grumbling and roughhousing and lazing around until the last minute. Inevitably, they turn up rumpled, red cheeked and late. Everyone just assumes they’d been making out or fucking or something, Tweek supposes. His fingers clench a little harder in Craig’s hair at the embarrassing thought, and Craig hisses a breath.

“Shit dude, that’s still attached to my head, you know,” he says, sliding one hand out from under Tweek’s top (Tweek’s stomach does some weird twitchy thing as Craig’s fingertips skate over it), and gently tugs the shorter boy’s fingers free. Then his hand is on the pillow beside his head, Craig’s grip encircling his wrist, and they’re staring at each other again. From this close, he can see every nuance, every fleck of silver in his eyes, every long eyelash and freckle and imperfection. Tweek is hyperaware of their breathing, and his heartbeat, and the warmth and weight of Craig’s body on his —
And then, like a hundred other times over the last eight years, Craig blinks and the moment is over. Unlike when they’d been younger and they’d scrambled away from one another, embarrassed and awkward and unsure of their own weird pseudo-relationship, now Craig just lays his cheek down on Tweek’s shoulder. The press of a long nose against his throat and lips a hairs width from his skin sets Tweek’s nerves on fire.

They stay like that for so long, the light outside the window starts to fade, and Tweek finds himself wondering if maybe Craig’s fallen asleep. Perhaps they won’t have to go to the damn party—

“Please, babe?” Craig says, and his voice is little more than a mumble against his neck; he shivers. “Token’ll kill me. We didn’t go last Christmas, and you know he was a pain in my ass right up ‘til summer vacation.”

Gulping, Tweek runs the fingers of his free hand through Craig’s hair so that he can avoid replying for a little longer. It’s soft, slipping through his fingertips without a single tangle catching; when Tweek turns his head just slightly, he gets a waft of citrus shampoo and cigarette smoke. Craig waits silently, doesn’t bother pushing Tweek for a response – knows him well enough to give him the chance to think.

“What’s in it for me, huh?” Tweek finally asks, his voice equally quiet.

“I’ll let you hog the covers for the next month, and I won’t complain once,” Craig says instantly, the barest teasing inflection in his voice.

The blonde snorts. “Weak, Tucker. We don’t even share a bed when we crash at mine.” His parents still won’t let them. Not like they need to worry about anything ever happening.

Craig pulls himself up onto his elbows. “What’re we doing now then, huh?” The hand still under Tweek’s top moves, the pad of Craig’s thumb accidentally brushing over his nipple.

A shock jolts through him.

Tweek squawks, flails, elbows Craig in the side of the head and falls off the bed.

There’s a beat of silence before Craig peers over the edge, a shit-eating grin on his face.

Tweek gives his pseudo-boyfriend precisely three seconds to enjoy his brief victory.

The scuffle that follows wastes another nice chunk of time.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

so... thanks to the response to this story, you guys are getting an update way sooner than
i'd expected to post it! enjoy. :))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the time they get out of the house, the sun has long since set, and the already crisp air has
plummeted well below any kind of reasonable level (even for South Park). Just stepping down from
the porch has Tweek shivering.

It's the last weekend of the winter holidays before school is back in, so Token's annual Christmas
house party is likely to be in full swing already. Tweek's not sure where Token's parents go every
year, or how he keeps managing to convince them to let him throw parties when the place gets
repeatedly trashed, but it's always the same. Everyone arrives early, everyone gets drunk and/or high
before the street lights even get switched on, everyone gets so loud it's a wonder that the police don't
turn up, and everyone says or does stupid shit they regret the following morning.

Well, everyone apart from Tweek – he's not really one for drinking in large groups. Mostly he leaves
that to Clyde, Stan and Cartman. He and Craig hang around for a little, Craig maybe drinks a beer or
two, or plays some beer pong, and then inevitably gets sleepy, so they go back home early.

Alternatively they share a joint with Kenny and Kyle, and Craig gets sleepy, and then, excitingly
enough, they head home early.

Sometimes though, just to mix things up, they do neither of the above. Instead they just sit, chat and
avoid the makeshift dancefloor. Craig gets sleepy after a few hours and, feeling wild, they walk
home early.

Really, anything can happen at Token's.

Tweek snorts at his thoughts and noses his way deeper into the scratchy woolen scarf his mom
knitted him a few years back. Even so, white clouds of breath gather in the air in front of him as they
walk down the drive and set off up the street for Dark Meadows Mansion.

New Years had been a few days earlier. Tweek and Craig had spent it doing a Hitchcock movie
marathon, lazing around on the couch in the Tweak family living room and drinking their body
weight in black coffee. When the clocks had struck midnight, they'd fist-bumped, clacked mugs
together, and flipped each other the bird. They hadn't gotten to bed until around seven in the
morning; as Tweak's parents were at a New Years party somewhere else in town, they'd shuffled
wozily up the stairs, flopped down on Tweak's bed together, and had slept for a solid twelve hours.
It was amazing.

Despite the fact that Christmas had been over a week ago, every house down the length of the street
is still strung up with obnoxiously bright lights and decorations. Almost every house they walk by
has inflatable santas, or glowing reindeers stuck to the roof, or brightly clashing neon lights. One
house they pass has a particularly memorable light pasted across the entirety of the second floor, of
Santa looking up Mrs Claus' skirt. This doesn't make Tweek laugh. He hates the winter holidays for
this alone: flashing lights and dumb decorations make him twitchy and anxious. (He remembers with no small amount of bitterness, the year he and Craig 'got together', and all the creepy artwork that had circulated. He'd had to draw the line at his dad painting their likeness on the wall in Tweek Bros.)

Craig slings an arm around his shoulders as they walk, and Tweek is grateful for the distraction; he's never really figured out whether or not Craig does this sort of thing specifically to help calm Tweek down or simply because they've gotten used to the constant public displays of affection. Either way, it's appreciated.

They only have to walk five minutes before they hear the deep, booming bass and the tinny rattle of music blaring out from Token's house. Craig huffs something caught between a sigh and a laugh. Tweek just twitches.

By the time that they reach the Manor and shout their names to the man guarding the gate so he can check them off the list, Tweek's nervousness has escalated to full out spasms. Even with Craig's arm pinning him against his side, the shorter boy almost falls over face first on the icy driveway.

Jesus fucking Christ, do they have to play the music so loud? This is just obnoxious.

"I wanna get coffee," he yells over the music, even though he's barely a foot away from Craig's face.

"What?" Craig replies, and Tweek feels like punching him in the arm. There is no way that Craig didn't hear what he said.

He leans in closer, mouth to ear, and positively bellows, "Coffee!"

If the way that Craig rubs the side of his head is anything to go by, then he might have been a little too noisy. Oh well. He doesn't have time to think on that further, as he's already ducking out from under Craig's arm. Slipping around chatting groups of people he doesn't spare a second glance, his shoulders hunch up and his hands clutch into fists at his sides. Tweek doesn't do touching with anyone that aren't his parents or Craig, and every small brush of fabric adds to his discomfort.

By the time he's made it to the kitchen, he's already had to avoid Bill and Fosse, Nichole, Annie and Red, and Kevin Stoley (who is, incidentally, donned in full Star Wars regalia - blue lightsaber, Anakin rattail and all). He's also just about ready to curl up in a corner and cry.

Instead, he shoves his way to the front of the booze counter (strewn with at least a dozen different types of hard liquors, boxed wines and six-packs of beers) and scrabbles for the handle of the cupboard overhead. After safely grabbing onto a large, grey-blue mug, which kind of reminds him of Craig's eyes, he makes a beeline for the kettle.

Speaking of the devil, Craig is waiting for him there, having apparently already filled it up and flipped the switch to boil.

"Best. Boyfriend. Ever," Tweek gushes, setting the cup down on the side with a loud cl-clunk, and running his hands over his face.

Apparently Craig understood the sentiment, even if he didn't catch the words, because the haughty arch of his eyebrow says it all.

Smug dick, Tweek thinks, even as he helps himself to the instant coffee granules from the shelf, and the milk from the fridge on the other side of Craig.

They stand together in silence, Tweek hunkered over his drink and Craig leaning against the counter
and calmly studying the ceiling. Between greedy gulps, Tweek takes stock of everyone in the room properly for the first time. There's a bunch of Junior year boys hanging around in front of the snacks table, casually trying to check out the ex-Raisins girls that are gathered in the doorway to the dining room. Currently getting themselves drinks are some kids he doesn't recognize from their own year group. One of them is drinking straight from a bottle of vodka. Tweek gives him an hour before he's throwing up into a flowerpot, or curled up under the coats in the cloakroom. He debates sharing the wry thought with Craig, but that would require prying his mouth away from the cup. No, thank you.

It takes a good mug and a half, greedily gulped down, before he's willing to share it with the boy beside him, and only once Craig makes them a third does Tweek let his pseudo-boyfriend take his hand and draw him back out of the kitchen. It doesn't escape Tweek's notice that Craig somehow filches an unopened bottle of Jack Daniel's on the way.

He blinks at the sight of the bottle clutched in Craig's other hand, wonders if he's gone crazy. Still, he allows himself to be maneuvered through the huge house without asking the taller boy anything. Craig doesn't drink that much at big parties; he must have run into someone in the hallway, before he caught up to Tweek.

They double back on themselves briefly in order to dump their coats and scarves down in the temporary cloakroom (the study closest to the front door). The wide, dark wood desk is already buried beneath the mass of material, as are the desk chair, the chest, the side tables and the majority of the floor. Just how many people are here already?

By the time they make it up the stairs, Tweek is wishing he'd just brought the whole damn kettle with him. The staircase is crowded, the landing and every one of the guest rooms they pass are already heaving; Tweek somehow doubts they'll ever manage to find some peaceful corner to sit down in.

When they reach Token's room, squinting in the much brighter lighting, it's a relief to see their usual gang lazing around the place. Token raises a hand in greeting from a bean bag in front of his huge HD television; Clyde, Kenny and Jimmy are sprawled out on Token's bed, intently studying some shitty, prehistoric copy of Playboy; Butters is texting from the foot of the bed and sipping on a packet of frozen Piña Colada; Cartman and Kyle appear to be playing an aggressive game of Bullshit and Stan is taking long, greedy gulps of his bottle of Captain Morgan between laying down his rounds of cards.

The tops of the dresser and the windowsill are laden with bowls of chips and dips, variety packets of candy, plates of cookies and several bottles of everything from cider to champagne. Tweek would be horrified by the showy display of wealth if it were anyone but Token, who tends to be so blissfully ignorant of his privileged upbringing that it's generally just considered another odd character quirk.

Tweek lets go of Craig's hand long enough to slam the door shut behind them, and the sound beyond it cuts off.

Oh, thank all fuck for soundproofing. He is now slightly less likely to end the night with a nervous breakdown.

"Jesus Christ, Token," he says, voice high and grating. "How many fucking people did you have to invite?"

"Don't be a downer, dude," Clyde pipes up.

Tweek shoots him the dirtiest glare in his arsenal, but it's no use; the brunet hasn't looked up even once since they came in. Apparently whatever bush is in the '85 Summer Edition (he imagines it's something monstrous and permed, just like whatever is on the model's head) is just too captivating to
look up from. Fucking gross.

"It's our last Christmas party before we graduate, I had to make it a good one." Token shrugs, smiles and waves a hand towards the cushions strewn across the rug near to the door, surrounding the one remaining bean bag.

Craig takes a few easy strides into the room and sinks into the seat, and Tweek follows suit, clutching his mug with two hands (his caffeine jitters have kicked in now – or, wait, maybe that's just the anxiety?) and plopping himself down on the floor beside his pseudo-boyfriend, his back against the wall.

"What's on the agenda tonight, then?" Craig says in a drawl, plucking Tweek's cup out of his hands when it's halfway to his mouth and easily ignoring the squawk of protest.

Feeling like he's just been betrayed, Tweek watches Craig settle the cup between his thighs, uncapping the Jack Daniel's and sloshing a generous portion inside.

"You _dick_," he whines, even as the cup's handed back to him. After an experimental sniff, he grimaces down at the offending liquid, and is almost ready to fly out of the room in search of more _actual_ coffee, when Craig settles a hand against the back of his neck. Despite himself, he stills. Doesn't take even a sip, though.

"I was thinking maybe an old-school game to get us going," Token says. Tweek glances up to find him watching their interaction, the corner of his mouth kicked up in amusement.

So he scowls at Token instead.

"Ooh, neato! You mean like spin the bottle, huh?"

"No Butters, you gaywad," Cartman cuts in. "Everyone knows spin the bottle is for thirteen year old girls and fags." And then as an afterthought aimed in their general direction, "Sorry dudes."

"Whatever." Tweek can practically _feel_ Craig roll his eyes.

"Three eights."

"Bullshit, Fatass."

"Fuck you, Jew." Cartman gathers up the generous pile of cards.

"What I meant," Token says, "was—"

"Strip poker," Kenny suggests. "Seven minutes of heaven. Never have I ever."

"Kenny, dude, why the fuck would any of us want to play those games with you?" says Stan, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand and setting the bottle aside in order to lay down two cards.

"Two fives."

"Bullshit."

"Goddamn it, man, how'd you know every time?"

"I told you, it's ancient Jew magic. He uses it to see into our minds and cheat on the game, cause Jews have no common freakin' decency."

"I swear to God, you fat turd—"
"Truth or dare!" Token shouts, before things have the chance to rapidly devolve into a fistfight, the way that they usually do when Cartman and Kyle are in the same room. "I thought we could play truth or dare."

There's a moment of silence. Tweek notices that even Clyde manages to peel his eyes away from the Playboy mag just long enough to curl his lip at the prospect.

"Dude. Lame."

"Y-yeah. No offense Token, but that idea's pretty retarded."

Tweek can't help but agree. He doesn't think that he's ever played Truth or Dare, and he isn't sure he wants to start now. It's the kind of thing middle school girls play at sleep overs.

Yet another surprise comes, though, when Craig snorts a laugh. "You guys are such fucking pussies."

"Hey, yeah," says Butters, clearly still put out at having his idea shot down a moment earlier. "You're just a whole load of... of sour apples! We could get into all kinds of fun."

_And a whole shitload of trouble too_, thinks Tweek, who would be more than happy to call it a night already. He doesn't need any help making a twat of himself.

"Fucking hell, keep your boner in your pants, dude," Cartman says to Butters.

"Well, I'm up for it. Anything to stop this shitty game. S'not like either of us are gonna win anyway."

Kyle pulls a face at his best friend.

"Sorry dude, it's just not fun losing to you ten times in a row. Besides, think of all the shit you could make Cartman do on your turns."

"Let's do it," Kyle says immediately.

"Aye!"

"I'm down for it. Sounds damn sweet to me," says Kenny.

One by one, all of the boys concede. Well, apart from Tweek, who sits there feeling jittery and unhappy. This sentiment is only made worse when he takes a large mouthful of his drink, forgetting that it's been liberally spiked, and struggles to swallow.

Craig's thumb strokes against the base of his neck, and a shiver rolls all the way down his spine.

Tweek meets hooded blue eyes and, unsure why he does it, takes another slow, deliberate sip of the abomination.

The other boy's eyebrow quirks just slightly, expression otherwise unchanging, but Tweek figures he did the right thing.

Craig begins to card his fingers through the hair at the nape of his neck; the blonde gulps, trying to ignore the goosebumps that have broken out across his arms.

Something in the way that Craig is looking at him makes his mouth go dry.
fancy sharing your thoughts? (it’s proven to make me upload faster, if that’s any incentive :) haha.)
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

thanks again to everyone who's been commenting and leaving kudos. you guys are the best! as for the story...

things're heatin' up ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After another half hour of everyone fucking around (Tweek has the shortlived hope that maybe this dumb game'll be forgotten), Kenny comes up with some rules to get them going.

Every time someone completes a dare, everyone takes a shot; every time anyone answers a truth, the whole group takes two, (seeing as nobody's going to willingly request truths without a little extra motivation. Getting the rest of the group shitfaced might encourage them, apparently. Tweek has no idea why). If the person given the truth or dare fails or refuses, then they have to drink three shots. They're all still scarily sober, considering it's already approaching ten (aside from Stan, who looks like he's been at least a little drunk since the middle of last week), and this should be a quick enough way to change that.

After Cartman gets up and waddles over to the food for a light snack of everything he can fit into his arms, the game begins.

"Clyde." Token starts in on the least enthusiastic member of the group (next to Tweek, that is. The only difference being that Tweek keeps his mouth shut about it and isn't bitching every two minutes). "Truth or dare?"

"Aw man, why's it me? Choose someone else, you asshole." The two have some kind of staring contest or silent conversation, or something. Clyde caves. "Fine. Dare."

The other boy barely takes a second to think it over. "Borrow Kenny's lighter to set that shit on fire." He waves a hand at Playboy '85.

"Hey, weak man. Pass."

Token shrugs. "Do three shots then."

After much complaining (at first from Clyde, and then from everyone else when he doesn't hurry the fuck up), he eventually throws back a round of spluttering gulps from the flask Kenny pulls out of his parker. "Dude, what the fuck's even in there? Sick!"

Kenny just laughs. It's the sort of laugh that makes Tweek uneasy.

While Clyde's still recovering, Kyle – who's next in the makeshift circle – turns to Cartman. "Truth or dare, Fatass?"

Cartman's eyes narrow to slits. Tweek watches in fascination as, growing several shades redder than is healthy, the brunet eventually says, "Truth," like it physically hurts him.
"Is it true Heidi broke up with you again because she caught you fucking one of your mom's pies?"

"Aye, you shut your goddamn Jew mouth! That's a vicious rumor and a lie; I broke up with her because she just wasn't woman enough for me. I like my bitches to have tits, know what I'm saying?"

"So it wasn't because she found all the weird ass sex toys you borrow from your mom?"

"I swear to God, Kyle, I will punch you so fucking hard your face'll cave in." If Cartman was red before, then now he's turned purple. He looks like he may actually explode. Tweek wonders if he ought to shuffle further away, just in case. He doesn't want to get brain goop in his hair.

Kyle continues. "So it's not because she saw your internet history and figured that you've got a thing for taking it up the ass?"

Tweek chokes on his drink, feeling himself growing hot when Craig's hand, having been idly playing with the hair on the base of his neck, goes still. They're both used to gay jokes being thrown around, but…

Something's off between them tonight. Something's off, and Tweek can't for the life of him figure out what it is.

After Stan, Butters and Kenny have managed to pull Cartman and Kyle off of each other (the former with a bloody nose and the latter a nasty smirk), the game eventually resumes.

Stan dares Kenny to go retrieve a bra from Mercedes or Porsche. When Kenny returns with not one bra but both, and the girls too, he's greeted with a loud cheer and several rounds of celebratory shots. Tweek drinks just the one gulp, and still can't help his grimacing. At least his eyes aren't watering anymore.

On Cartman's go, he asks Kyle if he's ever jacked it to the thought of one of the guys in the room. His shit-eating grin clearly states that he thinks Kyle will get angry and defensive, or that he'll refuse to answer. Instead, Kyle just shrugs and answers, "Duh."

A round of jeering, cheering and laughter follows, lewd comments and shocked questions being thrown across the room. Kyle looks mostly unruffled, though his cheeks are pink.

Tweek's are, too. Does this mean Kyle's gay? Or is it normal for straight guys to think about sex with each other? It's not something he makes a habit of thinking about too much, and he's definitely gay.

After they all take their shots (Tweek's starting to get used to the abomination he's drinking, which is a shame as it's running pretty low), it's Craig's turn.

The blond finds himself weirdly nervous, half expecting Craig to turn his attention on him. He's given only a brief moment to panic over whether or not he should choose Truth or Dare, when Craig calls out Butters instead.

Tweek breathes a sigh of relief.

"Read out the last five texts you got, and your replies," he dares.

It turns out that three of the five texts are from Butters' parents, telling him to be home by his curfew (else he'll be grounded) and about how he'd better not forget to pick up Grandma's prescription of steroid cream after class on Tuesday (or there'll be heck to pay). The last two are both from some guy called Brad or Bucky or something, but Tweek's too busy leaning into Craig's bean bag and turning
to go under his stroking fingers, to pay attention. If anyone else tried to touch his hair, he thinks, he'd freak out.

He doesn't realize it's his turn until Craig pauses his quiet ministrations and pokes him in the shoulder instead.

"Ach," Tweek protests, face scrunching up as he turns to study the room. Craig's hand returns to what it was doing; Tweek is instantly distracted again. "Ugh, jeez, I dunno. Porsche, I guess?"

"Sweet," the girl says, twizzling a lock of hair around her finger and smiling so vaguely that Tweek's got to wonder if there's actually anything but air in her head. She's tucked under Kenny's arm where he leans back against the headboard, one of the bras (a very pink, very lacy one) tied around his head like Mickey Mouse ears. "Um… Dare please, cutie."

"Aw, Jesus Christ, okay…" He looks around the room trying desperately to think of something good (tries his best to ignore how almost every boy is buzzing with excitement at the prospect of getting dared to do something with her). His eyes land on a pack of candies sitting in Cartman's lap. "See how many marshmallows you can fit in your mouth?"

There is much disappointed groaning, until she gets up to retrieve the packet and starts sucking them into her mouth with blatantly lascivious pops and schlurps, her cheeks puffing out so much that she kind of resembles Stripe, Craig's last guinea pig.

Turns out that she can fit a lot in there.

She's well past ten when she gives up, face bulging. Tweek thinks he'd rather have had all of his teeth pulled without anaesthetic. Practically regurgitating them back up into the pack, Porsche wipes the trail of dribble off her chin – vague smile still in place. There's pretty much a standing ovation from the guys in the room.

He makes a face up at Craig, whose eyes crinkle in amusement.

And so the game goes on, everyone growing steadily drunker with each round. Tweek isn't called on to do anything more exciting than fifty star jumps. He ends up gasping and wobbly, and doesn't question it when Craig, bright eyed and even a little smiley despite the fact they're in company, pulls him down onto his lap. He's long and lanky and all bones, but Tweek finds comfort in the warmth, and leans into Craig's side. Now his mug's empty, he moves on to sharing Craig's bottle, and helps himself to sips between rounds.

All the dares grow progressively worse, from Token getting 'Roll topless in the snow' and Jimmy being called out to, 'Go through the living room and give everyone a strip tease', to Clyde being dared, 'Streak all the way to City Wok and back'.

There are also an unfortunate amount of truths being called.

Mercedes admits to having lost her virginity in the back of the movie theatre, aged fourteen, in a late night rerun of one of the Deadpool movies. (Craig leans in, making a wry comment about the fact that, "At least getting fucked while watching Ryan Reynolds mess shit up means she's got some good taste." Tweek has to fight down a shocked snicker and a burning blush. There's something in the way Craig says the word 'fucked' that makes his stomach flop.)

Kenny openly confesses to having wanked under the table in Chem Lab, on the coach during a class trip to Denver in their freshman year, and in the Teacher's Lounge after hours. ("Right into Mister Elton's favorite mug," he exclaims proudly. There's a mixture of delighted whooping and disgusted
Stan gets asked what the worst thing he's done while drunk is, and after a long, awkward look at Kyle, says some shit about passing out in a bush. Everyone in the room calls bullshit on the story – which is a blatant lie, no matter how anyone looks at it. Stan's one of the hardest drinkers in South Park next to Kenny (and his dad, Randy), and he's almost always getting caught doing dumb shit. (Just before last term ended, Stan came to class three hours late, off his head drunk, and pissed into some sophomore girl's locker because he, "Couldn't find the restroom.") When he refuses to correct his lie he ends up taking a forfeit, and has to down half his drink.

By the time everyone's well and truly pissed, their game has somehow gained about twenty more people; Token's room, however large, is feeling a pretty damn cramped.

The cushions on the floor are all taken up, and there are eight people on the bed, in total. The volume of the music downstairs has been lowered a ways, which is probably a good thing, considering they wouldn't have been able to close the door even if they'd wanted to.

It's okay though, Tweek thinks. He's still curled up on Craig's lap, head against a rather bony shoulder and eyes at half-mast. The blonde's pretty sure he's smiling like a fool, even though his breathing is weird and there's a heat gathered low in his belly that makes no sense at all to his fuzzy brain.

Craig's hand has moved at some point during the game so that he's holding Tweek against him by his hip, and he's drawing lazy patterns on the skin just beneath his t-shirt. The blond can't help but squirm at the ticklish sensation.

It's comical, he thinks, how often Craig's hands have been up his top today. A breathy chuckle escapes him before he can slap his palm over his mouth, and Craig has to steady the almost empty bottle of Jack Tweek's holding onto in the process. Craig's fingers are overlapping his around the neck of the bottle, and Tweek can't draw his eyes away.

Craig's such a good friend, isn't he? The best of friends.

He stifles another nonsensical giggle, a task that is almost impossible, until Craig's ducking his head, lips against Tweek's ear and hot breath fanning out over him in a way that sets all of his nerves alight.

"What's so funny?" he says, just loud enough for Tweek to hear, and Tweek shifts again as the heat in his belly turns up a notch. If he weren't so drunk, he's fairly sure he'd be feeling all awkward right now.

As it is, he finds himself leaning more heavily into the taller boy, breath hitching and voice getting stuck somewhere on the back of his tongue when Craig ducks his head, nose tracing across the skin directly below his ear.

He swallows hard. Sucks in a deep breath. Opens his mouth to reply—

"Dude, Craig, truth or dare?" Clyde yells.

Both boys jump like they've been hit with a hundred volts, leftover whiskey sloshing noisily in the bottle and attention drawn back to the room at large. Almost everyone's looking at them.

Clyde's frowning from the bed. He seems kind of pissed. "You done climbing all over each other yet? We're not in a freakin' gay porno, you know."
Craig lets go of the Jack Daniels in order to flip Clyde off. "Shame, that," he says, voice back to his usual monotone.

Tweek bites the inside of his cheek, caught somewhere between humiliation, confusion and hysteria. He wonders if he's gonna spend the whole damn night flustered and giggly.

"Well then?" the brunet asks, voice so whiney it grates on Tweek's nerves. "Come on, dude. Don't make me ask a third time."

"Will it shut you the fuck up if I say dare?"

Clyde grins the kind of grin that makes him look like a piranha. "Make out with someone," he says slowly, and then has to wait until all the cheering and guffawing dies down again, one hand aloft in the air to catch everyone's attention. "There's a catch."

Tweek's heart hammers hard against his chest. Craig, kissing someone? The warmth in the pit of his stomach is turning to lead.

"It's gotta be someone you've never kissed before."

The words aren't processing in Tweek's head. Someone he's never...? Has Craig kissed anyone since...? They've been 'boyfriends' since they were in fourth grade – Tweek's certainly never had the chance to kiss anyone. No, he thinks. He knows Craig better than anyone. His pseudo-boyfriend isn't interested in doing that sort of thing any—

"Fine," Craig says.

Wait, he wants to kiss someone? But... they'd been having a good time, hadn't they? He stares down at his hands for a long moment, surprised to find them shaking. There's a pounding in his ears that he recognizes as his heartbeat; his chest is tight around the sensation.

Tweek has an unfortunate realization. Oh Jesus, he's going to start blubbing right here in front of everyone.

Instead of analyzing his feelings, he scrambles to get off of Craig's lap, cheeks burning and eyes starting to sting. "Jeez, I-I'll just get up then—"

Only problem is, Craig's still holding onto his hip, gripping him so tight he just knows he'll have bruises there tomorrow. "What? Where're you going?"

"You wanna make out with someone for a dare? Fine, whatever man. Be my guest." Tweek flails, still trying to get away, and Craig grunts as the bottle collides with his shoulder hard enough that all of what's left splashes down his front.

"Ow, fuck dude," Craig says, wrenching the bottle out of Tweek's hands and thrusting it blindly at some kid sat at their feet.

Apparently the kid takes it, because a moment later Craig's hand is hooked in the hair behind Tweek's head. He's pulling the blonde boy's face towards him, and Tweek can't do anything but reel.

When their mouths meet, it's nothing more than a firm press. He has the shortest moment to notice that Craig's lips are dry and slightly chapped, before—

before Craig's eyes slip shut, and his head tilts. The hand in Tweek's hair slides forwards, running over his neck until it cups his jaw in his palm. Tweek stares at long, black eyelashes and the faint
A jolt of something hot and primal zaps through his nerve endings, and the heat softens the lead in the pit of his belly. His heart doesn't stop it's erratic pounding.

This… this feels right.

The rest of the room (gleeful hooting, sounds of objection and all) fades into insignificance as he melts against the other boy, tentatively, clumsily responding to Craig's ministrations. He isn't sure how long the soft, shy kiss goes on for, but somewhere along the way, it starts to change.

The other boy shifts, nose pressing against Tweek's cheek, and Tweek has to catch the surprised sound that tries to slip from him when Craig opens his mouth just enough to suck on his lower lip until it tingles. The tongue that follows, running over the sensitive flesh as if to soothe it, sends another shock through the blond. He pulls away, eyes wide and breath unsteady. Tweek's hands clutch at the front of Craig's t-shirt, though he has no idea when they got there.

The dark haired boy looks right back at him, eyes hooded and pink lips parted. All Tweek can do is stare as Craig's brows draw together, blue eyes flickering over Tweek's face like he's searching for something.

Oh, God.

Tweek doesn't want to let him work out if it's there or not – doesn't want the moment to end – and so instead he surges forwards, capturing Craig's mouth in a kiss much harder than the last.

He mimics the way Craig ran his tongue along his lower lip, bravado in the face of his nerves. He isn't given the chance to regret his decision; the other boy makes a quick grunt of surprise in the back of his throat, but doesn't hesitate in meeting Tweek with equal enthusiasm.

When their tongues brush, Tweek's breath hitches and his toes curl in his shoes. But this time he doesn't freak out and try to pull away – he leans in, bracing his hands against Craig's chest despite the awkward angle.

Craig's tongue pushes it's way into Tweek's mouth, tracing along his teeth and over the roof of his mouth. He's wet and warm and tastes like whiskey, and Tweek feels like his brain is short-circuiting.

He makes a noise of encouragement when Craig pulls back and nips his lip, his fingers convulsing against the collar of his top. The hand on his hip tightens briefly in response, before slipping around to the small of his back, and urging him to shift his position. The blonde acquiesces, pulling back from Craig just long enough to sit up straight, swing one of his legs over to straddle Craig's lap.

Fuck, he wants more. Wants Craig, wants wants wants—

The taller boy barely gives him long enough to sit his weight down on his thighs, before he's tugging Tweek back down again.

Their mouths clash together, teeth clicking, pulling each other impossibly closer, heat and pressure and so right it hurts—

"—mean fucking hell, dudes, get a room!"

Tweek's eyes fly open. Freezes. Draws away a little.

Blue eyes stare back, about and inch from his.
Someone is making a fuss – several 'someone's, in fact – behind them; beyond them.

He struggles through the haze of alcohol and desire. Easier said than done when the body beneath him shifts, setting his nerves alight because – oh God, oh Jesus Christ – he's hard.

And his very first kiss almost turned into a public dry humping session.

Making a startled sound somewhere close to, "Nnyurgh," he scrambles back so fast that he falls straight off of Craig's lap and onto the feet of the kid stretched out in front of their beanbag.

The kid swears loudly, shoving at him, and people around them are taunting, whistling, laughing about what an idiot he's made of himself.

His face burns so hot his eyes water.

It's all that he can do to struggle to his feet and run from the room.

Barging past the group clustered in the doorway, he ignores Craig calling out for him to wait over the angry shouting of those he shoved past, and bass thrum of music downstairs.

He makes a beeline for the closest bathroom.

Chapter End Notes

hm... what'd you guys think?
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

ooh jeez guys, you almost got a double update tonight, until AO3 started glitching out and i had to spend like an hour trying to reconnect LOL. still, at least the next update is ready to go up after i finish work tomorrow, right? right. (provided i don't decide to add on another 3000 words in the meantime, ahaha'')

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The bathroom, it turns out, is not empty. There's a couple getting handsy in the tub, and Pip Pirrup is babbling heavily accented nonsense in between hurling into the toilet.

Tweek, quickly reaching his wits end, makes a sound like someone's set his hair on fire and spins, continuing down the hall as fast as wobbly legs will take him. Thankfully, due to the immense humiliation and stress, certain areas of his anatomy that were rising to attention just moments ago have once again retreated.

That doesn't stop the shame, though. Jesus Christ, what had he been thinking?

In the same manner that he burst into the bathroom, he approaches a closet, a couple of guest bedrooms and another study. All packed with writhing bodies, shouting voices and the stink of spilt alcohol and sweat. Each new room intensifies the sting of tears in Tweek's eyes, and by the seventh door he's slammed shut in failure, he's barely holding back a wail.

Fine, he thinks. Fine, he doesn't need to be here anyway. He should take this as a sign from some shitty, cruel higher power that he ought to go home and try smothering himself with a pillow.

He's halfway down the stairs, gripping onto the banister rail to save himself from falling face first to his death (not like that'd be such a shame, but he does think it'd maybe put a damper on the party), when warm fingers wrap around his wrist.

"Jesus fucking wept!" He screams, flails, and nearly topples right over the railing in his bid for freedom. It's only a second hand pressing into his belly and hauling him back against a firm chest that stops him.

"Tweek, babe, calm down!" The scent of whiskey and tobacco accompanies the familiar voice.

Gasping for breath but instinctively relaxing against Craig's chest, Tweek reaches back with one hand and slaps his palm against his pseudo-boyfriend's shoulder. Ignoring the surprised grunt, he lets Craig guide him backwards, until they're sat together on one of the steps, back to chest and Tweek perched between Craig's thighs. "You douchebag! I think I had a fucking heart attack, man!" His words are slurred, but he's at least aware enough to hear it.

"Sorry, sorry." Craig sounds like he's choked up somewhere between laughter and worry. "I called, but you didn't seem to hear me."

Turning around to glare at Craig, he says, "And you couldn't have, I dunno, maybe not have grabbed me on the stairs?" He thinks about going on, about highlighting the national average of how many
accidents happen on an annual basis on staircases (he's got the rather alarming ability to recite all kinds of nasty, bizarre statistics), when his eyes slip down to Craig's lips. They're pink and damp and all Tweek can think about is—

A garbled sound of panic (maybe some kind of apology) is halfway out of his mouth and he's jerking back around when Craig's hand settles against his face and stills him. The air between them is warm with their mingling breath, and Tweek can't bring himself to meet Craig's gaze.

A thumb brushes just under his eye. "Dude, were you crying?" The dark haired boy's voice has raised an octave, and the fingers threading through the hair at his temples tightens a little. "What's wrong?"

For someone so damn smart, sometimes Craig is an absolute idiot. The kiss was wrong – Tweek acting like an idiot and kissing him was wrong. "N-nothing," he says, frazzled. His cheeks are burning and his nose tingling and he can't help the fluttering in his stomach as Craig leans further into his space. (And when did he think of it as "his"? They've always shared everything.) "Nothing's wrong, I was just getting stressed 'cause of the noise."

Craig doesn't look convinced, but drops it. Apparently knows better to press for a reason. "Wanna go outside, get some fresh air?" he says instead.

All Tweek can do is nod emphatically, wild blonde hair bobbing and chin dislodged from Craig's fingers.

They clamber to their feet (note: Craig practically has to hoist Tweek up by his armpits. Apparently when he drinks too much, his coordination's worth jack shit), and Craig leads the way down.

His hand remains pressed against Tweek's back, and the fluttering in his stomach doesn't stop.

Retrieving their coats and scarves from the cloakroom (Craig has to clamber elbow-deep into the pile on the desk just to find their things; Tweek remains propped up on the door frame), they eventually stumble out of the front door.

It's quieter out here, and for the most part the garden is empty. There's a group of goth kids stood in a cluster of bushes smoking joints and drinking something that looks suspiciously like Moonshine, but Tweek is too far away to make it out, and he can't bring himself to care. He's feeling too jittery.

The air is still and sharp, and something about it settles over him - the quiet, breathless disconnect from the heat and light and noise inside. It's like the world has been put on pause.

Tweek's head swims, and he sways with it.

Craig distracts him by knitting their fingers together and leading him down the porch steps, off to one side of the garden path. They crunch through the thick snow to duck under the eaves of a large oak tree, and Tweek takes his chance to pull away from the other boy, leaning against the rough bark of the tree trunk instead.

He watches his pseudo-boyfriend reaching into his jacket pocket and retrieving his pack of American Spirits. His hands aren't shaking like Tweek's are, and he doesn't seem to care at all about what happened inside, or the fact that Tweek's upset. Doesn't seem to care about the hurt and humiliation bubbling up in his stomach.

"Why'd you have to do that?" he blurts out, and his voice is all high and wobbly. He clears his throat and tries again. "Everyone was right there and they were laughing at me and Clyde was being a d-duck and—"
The dark haired boy pauses midway through withdrawing a cigarette – gives Tweek a look he can't decipher. Then he's sliding the cigarette away, flipping the pack shut and pushing it back into his pocket. "Does it matter what anyone else thinks?"

"Of course it matters, dude! I just had my f-first kiss in a room full of drunken dickwads and they all saw and they were— they were laughing." The tears start in earnest, and he's scrunching up his nose to stop the sobs that are building in his throat. God, why's he so damn sad? He scrubs his sleeve over his face, thinks maybe he should just let his wobbly knees give way so he's slumped in the snow. Maybe the bite of ice on his skin would cool him down. Maybe Craig wouldn't care if he just curled up and died.

Then there are arms around him, holding him so tight it should hurt, and Craig is pressing his mouth against Tweek's hair. He doesn't resist the urge to wrap his arms around Craig's waist, doesn't have any reservations about burying his cold, tear-streaked face into Craig's neck.

"You're my boyfriend, dude. They don't know we haven't done stuff like that before. They think we're just touchin' 'cause we can't keep our hands off each other, and they're jealous 'cause most of them up there haven't got people to fuck around with."

Tweek leans into him as he talks, and something in Craig's calm, low drawl has the pain in his chest easing, the sobs quieting down to hiccups and sniffles before they've even really started. The other boy runs his hand over Tweek's back, bringing him down out of his spiral. The touch feels good – slow and heavy – even through Tweek's muzzy head.

Once he's calm enough to talk, he mumbles quietly. "You really didn't mind? Y'didn't just do it to get out of drinking the shots?"

Craig pulls back from him, and Tweek takes in the furrowed brow, the flat line of his mouth. "No." He lifts a hand to cup Tweek's cheek, and he can't help but lean into Craig's palm.

"Can I kiss you?"

Tweek blanches. Blinks hard. Wonders if he's drunker than he'd thought. "W-what?" His voice is a squeak.

"Can I kiss you?" Craig repeats slowly, and for the first time Tweek notices the flush rising in the other boy's cheeks from the cold.

All he can do is nod blankly.

His 'boyfriend' angles Tweek's face up, with the heel of his palm against his jaw. Craig's lips are parted and his gaze is flicking back and forth from his mouth to his eyes, and he's leaning in so slow, Tweek's breath hitches.

This kiss is different from the others.

It's a soft, lingering pressure. A chaste, deliberate touch that has Tweek's eyelids fluttering.

Craig is solid and real and he touches Tweek with no hesitation. He's steady in a way that leaves him breathless, his numb fingers twisting in the back of Craig's jacket as the taller boy tilts his head a little further to one side. The sound of the music and voices inside the house is an echo, far off; a stifled hum in the soles of his shoes.
When the darker haired boy pulls back, Tweek unwillingly opens his eyes. He's still piecing his world back together as Craig starts to speak.

"That should've been it. Not some shitty kids game."

"Huh?"

"That should've been your first kiss." He's drawing the back of his knuckle over Tweek's damp, spiked eyelashes. The downward tilt of his mouth and the tightness around the corners of his eyes say he's unhappy. "I'm sorry I fucked it up, babe. I'm more drunk than I thought."

This is funny, because Craig makes Tweek look like a living, breathing disaster right now. (Always, in fact.) He swallows, hard. Leans into Craig's chest and lets his eyes drift shut. "I – nngh – don't care," he says, and even though he really did just a few minutes ago, it's true. He's drained, and he's dizzy, and all he wants is to be with Craig. Just Craig – no judging eyes or nasty comments. The rest of the world can go fuck itself, right now. "Take me back to yours, dude?"

"You don't wanna go home, sleep in your own bed?"

He shakes his head. At Craig's, they'll be left alone – allowed to just be together. That's all he wants.

"Kay, let's go."

They sidestep out from under the low-hanging branches and walk back down the drive, passing the guard at the gate and proceeding across the street. Gravitating towards Craig, Tweek doesn't even notice when his friend wraps an arm around his shoulder and pulls him in close. It's as normal to them both as breathing, and the gesture lulls him into a woozy, peaceful state. His twitching slows and the erratic clamour of his heart continues to even out.

The walk passes in a blur, neither breaking the silence. Tweek thinks that Craig might have pulled his phone out at some point to message someone, but he isn't sure and he doesn't ask. The streets flash and dance around him, and he's beginning to wonder if the walk back was a good idea, so soon after drinking. His feet drag, and Craig moves to accommodate him. Every now and then they stop to gather themselves, leaning on one another until they're steady again.

As the music drifts out of focus, other, quieter noises come to life. A siren trilling in the distance. The croon of pigeons in the bare-branched trees. Thrumming of a car engine in the next street over.

Snow begins to fall around them somewhere along the way, and Tweek tips his head back to watch it drift into Craig's hair, like salt sprinkled in black pepper. Wonders where his chullo cap is, and thinks that his ears must be cold. His hair's too short to cover them.

Eventually they get to Craig's house. The lights are off inside, but Craig retrieves the spare key from beneath the doormat and lets them both in. He returns it to its hiding spot right after, and pulls the door shut with a click. Before Tweek can sink down onto the floor and work stiff fingers into his shoelaces, Craig pulls him towards the stairs.

"Nguhh, my shoes, man."

"Don't bother."

If walking in a straight line is hard, then trying to navigate a pitch-black staircase is close to impossible. His legs aren't working properly and more than once, he stumbles - almost loses his footing and yelps. A hand that isn't his covers his mouth.
Craig snorts a quiet laugh, lost in the darkness, and whispers, "Shh, dude, c'mon."

After a brief fumble for the right door handle, they're in. The blonde shuts it as quietly as possible behind them, and squints reflexively when the lights are flicked on. The purple carpet swims, and Tweek keeps one hand planted on the wall so he doesn't fall right into it. As always, his best friend's room is spotless.

Somehow Craig makes it across to the bed without tripping, and sits down on the edge. This is an incredibly impressive feat to Tweek, who has to work up the courage to follow. He puts it off by wriggling his way out of his coat first (almost getting strangled by his scarf), and toeing his shoes off as an afterthought.

When he does cross the room, he only manages it in one go because there are arms reaching out to catch him, and he's pulled down onto the edge of Craig's bed. He flops backwards unceremoniously, shutting his eyes so he doesn't have to watch the lamp waltz across the ceiling. A *fwump* and dip in the mattress tells him Craig's followed, and the pair lie there, floating in the warmth of the room and the weirdness of the night, their legs dangling off the side of the mattress.

Tweek feels kind of... removed from it all now, but that might just be because the walk home through the cold kicked his drunkenness up about five notches... 'Drunkenness'. Hm. Is that even a word? He should make it a word. It should definitely be a thing.

Head lolling to the side, he opens his mouth to share this great idea, when he catches Craig staring at him. Just... staring.

Cheek catching on a tick as he tries to smile, he says, "Jeez, dude, what?"

"Are you angry?" The words hang, heavy, between them.

Struggling to figure out what he's talking about, Tweek reaches out, runs trembling fingers across Craig's forearm, over his jacket sleeve and right down to his hand. He slots their fingers together like pieces in a puzzle and lifts them up into the air to study them – sees Craig watching him, too. "What — what've I gotta be angry about?"

"I kissed you. Like, more than once."

"Oh." He rubs his cheek against the grain of the blanket, and tries to think about what that implies. It's probably because Tweek's his best friend, and he was an easy way out of the dare, despite what he said before... it's not like he'd do it, otherwise. And the garden? That was just because he felt bad, wasn't it? For taking Tweek's first kiss.

That thought stings. And... yep, there it is. He's remembering why he was upset.
It's not fair that Craig gets to make nasty, dumbass mistakes and then know just the way to calm Tweek down right after. It's not fair that he only kissed him a second time out of pity, and that *that* was his consolation prize for losing something he hadn't even realised he'd wanted to cherish. It's not like he'd been saving his first kiss for anyone, and he knows it sucks ass that he's still not ever been kissed before now, considering how old he is, but...

He kind of wishes he hadn't had to lose it in such a lame way, with all the dickheads from school leering, joking like it wasn't meant to be a private moment.

*No.* It's not fair. They're alone now, somewhere familiar and as much a home to him as his own house. He wishes this was where it had happened. Just him and Craig, no dares, no pretences. He wishes he'd done it properly.

Before he even gets the chance to register what he's saying, Tweek's mouth opens of its own accord, blurring out:

"Kiss me, dude. Do it again."

Chapter End Notes

so, what'd you guys think? ;))
“Kiss me, dude. Do it again.”

Craig blinks. Rolls onto his side, too. "Huh? Now?"

"What, so you- you can't, now? Don't wanna?" Drunk Tweek feels like this night is incredibly unfair. He kind of wants to hit someone. As Craig's the only person nearby (and also the cause of his distress), he shoves the taller boy's shoulder. "Jerk," he says, eyebrows pulling down into a scowl. "Only wanted to 'cause some dumb dare—"

"Tweek—"

"No, y'know what, dude, that's fine. I – urgh – get it." He sniffs, turns his nose up in the air a little to hide the hurt in his eyes. Speaks straight over Craig because he just doesn't want to hear any words of rejection. It was a dumb idea anyway, and this shouldn't mean anything to him. (But it does. Being turned down by Craig would hurt. Even for something like this.) "S'not like you'd actually wanna do that shit with me, man. I get it, 'kay? Twitchy Tweek, the fake boyfriend. Don't have to— to feel bad for not— was stupid to even say—"

The rest of his jumbled rant is cut off by Craig's mouth meeting his. It's a breath of warm air, teeth scraping lightly over his lower lip. It's a gentle suck and a wet stroke of tongue, heat curling at the seat of his spine.

It lingers.

Even after their mouths part, their foreheads stay together, noses brushing and eyes slipping to half-mast. Tweek reaches his free hand up to Craig's face, just like the other boy kept doing to him all evening. He strokes his fingers over the sharp lines of Craig's cheekbones, drags his thumb over the barely-there stubble on his jaw.

He gulps, searches Craig's expression, still feeling uncertain. "Again?" The word isn't even a whisper.

Craig complies.

This one starts off slow, like the last. Eyes slipping shut, Tweek meets every careful brush of lips with his own, mimicking the slide of Craig's mouth.

For a long time, it stays like that. The sound of shared breath and soft kisses fill the room.

The blonde shifts closer, strokes the silky black hair at the nape of Craig's neck – grazes the soft skin of his throat with trembling, feather-light touches. A hand settles on his hip, and fingers dip below the hem of his tee to press into his bare side. He squirms. Shifts a leg forward, up onto the bed so his knee presses against one of Craig's.
They draw to a stop, catching their breath and hovering in place, noses against cheeks and lips so close that when Craig speaks, they brush. "Again?"

"Mmn… again," he agrees.

His mouth is covered almost instantly.

It's different. More pressure. There's another swipe of tongue, and Tweek can't hold back the groan that rises in his chest, lips parting around the sound. Craig leans into the kiss, tilting his head so that the slant of their mouths change. Their tongues brush, and it's heat.

His hand curls into the hair at the back of the other boy's head, and the response is fingers sliding up his ribs, a firm touch that has him arching, ticklish in a way that he isn't usually - in a way that's good. His chest brushes the front of Craig's coat. That hand flexes against his skin, and Craig's pulling away just enough to bite down of Tweek's lip.

Pleasure unfurls in his belly, a feeling he finally recognises.

He whimpers. Loudly.

There's a pause and - no, no, no - Craig is pulling away. Staring at him with hazy eyes and flushed cheeks and damp, swollen lips. His voice is low and throaty in a way that makes Tweek shiver. "Dude, Tweek, maybe we should— is this a good— we should stop... right?"

No, thinks Tweek. They shouldn't. Not ever. But his brain is fuzzy and he doesn't want to— to, what was it? Doesn't want to force Craig into something he doesn't want. "Only if y'wanna," he says, shifting restlessly.

He watches the bob of Craig's throat. "D'you?"

Shakes his head. "No."

The smile that he gets for that is crooked and fond; so open it makes Tweek's stomach flip. "Thank fuck."

Craig drops Tweek's hand, props himself up on his elbow and leans over him as Tweek rolls onto his back, claiming another kiss.

Right from the start, it's different. Hard and hungry and their tongues slide together, and - oh God - Tweek surges up to return it, slings both arms around Craig's neck to draw him closer. The hand under his tee runs, palm flat, over his ribs and up his chest, right over a nipple.

He arches again, craving more contact, makes a sound of frustration – what the hell - when Craig pulls away, sits back, unwinds his dangling scarf and shrugs out of his jacket. Both articles fall to the floor, and then he's kicking off his shoes – taking forever.

"Craig." His voice is all weird, stuck between a whine and a growl. He clears his throat; throws an arm over his eyes to stop the spinning. His jeans are too tight.

"C'mon, dude, budge over. Can't get under the covers this way."

Rolling, Tweek sits up with another strangled noise of frustration. But Craig doesn't give him long to wait - just hoists his t-shirt up over his head (oh wow, shit, he's seen Craig topless a thousand times before, but—) and tugs the cover back so Tweek can slip in first.
The blonde scrambles under, heart trying to jump out his throat, and fingers clutching at the hem of his tee so he can yank it up over his head. The other boy waits for Tweek to settle down, head on the pillow, before shuffling in next to him. The way his eyes run over Tweek's chest and flat stomach has him covering his face with the back of his arms again. "Dude, stop."

A huff of quiet laughter. "Sorry, I just—" He gently tugs at Tweeks wrists until the blonde's staring him in the eyes. "Babe, you're..." He gestures towards Tweek's chest, and makes a noise that's... good? Bad? Honestly, Tweek's not sure. He's just embarrassed and turned on and too drunk for this crap. "Can I kiss you?"

"Jesus fucking Christ, Craig, yes." Get on with it, he wants to yell. And, thank fuck, he does. Finally.

What starts as slow pecks quickly devolves into hot, open-mouthed kisses and hands running up arms, over shoulders, across necks. At some point Craig ends up pressing his weight down on Tweek and – oh God – sweet friction.

He moans into Craig's mouth; shifts his legs so the other boy's between them; runs fluttery, uncertain hands over every inch he can reach. When their bare chests touch it's electric. He pulls Craig closer. Wants more.

But he can only go without breathing for so long – has to stop for air, heaving in great lungfuls of it. Craig apparently doesn't have the same problem, because he's biting, licking, kissing a burning trail from Tweek's chin to the underside of his jaw, and then down the length of his throat. He's helpless but to tilt his head back, allowing better access and stifling a moan into the back of his hand when his friend starts sucking on the sensitive skin.

One of Craig's hands settle on his chest, and a thumb rolls across a nipple at the same time as he scrapes his teeth over his earlobe.

"Fuck—"

His hips buck up against Craig, and the taller boy groans, returning the gesture. It's then that he feels it:

Craig's hard.

That information makes his own arousal spike and, desperate, Tweek knots his fingers into short hair and pulls Craig's face back to his. Their teeth clack painfully, but the other boy's doing something with his tongue that matches the roll of his hips. It's good, it's such good pressure and it's right and thank merciful fuck— but his pants are in the way, his pants, his dumb damn pants.

Flying on blind instinct, he reaches down between them, tugs in frustration at the zipper on his jeans. Craig's hand is right behind his, not giving Tweek the chance to get frustrated at his badly shaking fingers.

Dark bangs falling into his grey-blue eyes, Craig leans back. Looks like he's going to ask again.

"Dude, I swear to God if you ask me one more time, I'm gonna scream."

Needing no more invitation than that, he shoves his hand down the front of the blonde's pants and right into his boxers. That first, glorious brush of skin on skin has his head falling back on the pillow, his hips rising off of the bed. As Craig fists him in one, long-fingered hand and pumps – slow – Tweek grips onto whatever he can of the other boy. His arms, his shoulders, his hair. And all the
while, Craig's gazing at him, eyes hooded and mouth twisted in concentration.

"A-aahn-"

Between gasps and thrusts, the blonde reaches down between them, running fingers over the bulge in the front of Craig's jeans without any of his usual reserve. When the look of concentration slips off of Craig's face and his hand falters in its task, Tweek takes that as permission to dive right in. He tugs at Craig's buttons with a vengeance, floundering only for a moment when they finally give way.

The taller boy's stopped to watch him again, eyes transfixed, and Tweek pushes his hand into Craig's underwear. He wraps his fingers around the smooth, warm flesh and, despite the awkward angle, begins to pump his fist.

"Fuck, Tweek." A long, low moan escapes the other boy's mouth, and then he's burying his face against Tweek's neck, hot breath sending shivers down his spine. And Tweek's fine, totally in control, able to keep his cool right up until Craig starts jerking him off again.

"O-oh Jesus."

Unable to stop himself, he bucks into Craig's fist, screwing his eyes shut as the heat in the pit of his stomach reaches a crescendo. He's unable to do anything but rock desperately against the tight grip, chest heaving and leg curling up over the other boy's hip. He tries his best to keep up the rhythm of his hand for Craig, but coordination is impossible, he can't catch his breath, and damn it, the other boy's sucking, hard, on the skin just under Tweek's ear. It's all over the second Craig bites down, just so.

"Cr-raig nnngh I— ahh!"

His vision goes white and his hips thrust erratically, coming harder than he thinks he ever has before. His free hand claws at the sheets and his head snaps back against the pillow, wet lines painting his stomach where his tip emerges from his pants. If it weren't for the hand Craig presses down against his mouth in an attempt to muffle his keening cry, there's a good chance the whole house would've woken up.

Still, the other boy helps him ride out the waves of his orgasm, passing his fingers up and down his length until Tweek is shuddering, breath shaky and eyes glazed. As he comes back to himself, he wades through an odd mix of bliss and vertigo. He's boneless and relaxed from his head to his toes.

Even as that heavy, draining lethargy starts sinking into his limbs, Tweek tightens his lax grip on Craig, running his thumb over the head and smearing pre down the underside of his shaft. The quiet, inarticulate noises the other boy makes against his oversensitive throat and the rolling of his hips keeps Tweek's heart thumping hard in his chest. It only gets worse when Craig's hand overlaps his, guiding the movements and leading him into a twisting motion.

The blonde turns his head, shifts just far enough away to make out the grimace of pleasure. His wrist aches from the angle, but it's worth it to see unswayable, calm Craig Tucker falling to pieces. A warm surge of affection clutches at Tweek's chest and, passing a trembling hand over Craig's back, he leans forwards to kiss him. Bleary eyes crack open and lock onto his, and then, he's coming into Tweek's palm.

Fascinated, he watches as Craig unravels. A broken moan that sounds uncannily like, "Tweek," has him leaning in for another brush of lips. Desire tingles in the base of his spine and the pit of his stomach.
In the aftermath, they lay there, Craig's full weight slipping off to the side but their legs remaining tangled. The taller boy throws an arm over Tweek's torso and pulls the blonde closer, and it is warm and safe. (If not maybe a little sticky.)

Through the tired, drunken fog that is clouding his mind, though...

Tweek is beginning to panic.

*What the hell just happened?*

---

Chapter End Notes

oh geez, the joy of writing sex scenes... i'd really appreciate hearing what everyone thought :'}
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

/takes cover/

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tweek doesn't sleep.

He has no idea how long he lies there, flat on his back and staring blankly up at the ceiling, but no matter how heavy his eyes are, he can't shut off. Craig doesn't share this problem, slipping so easily into dreams that he might as well be dead. This isn't an uncommon occurrence, but it isn't comforting in the way it normally is.

There's something bad about what just happened between them, a troubling sense of foreboding that stifles the lingering afterglow and leaves him unable to shut off.

At first Tweek's thoughts swim, the surface of his mind barely disturbed by the darkness leaking out beneath it. But he doesn't like the murky loss of control that being drunk offers – it makes his skin crawl the same way that taking Ritalin does – and he fights it. As the hours go by, tiny snatches of common sense begin to break through the haze, and as they do, ripples form.

He just got a handjob. The turquoise walls throb - he shuts his eyes, but that's even worse. The light is still on overhead and it turns the insides of his eyelids the orange-pink of smoked salmon. (He hates salmon.) Opens them again.

He just got a handjob from his best friend. Tweek exhales something that might've been a laugh, if only it hadn't trickled out silent. His throat closes up behind it, barring the way.

Handjobs count as sex, don't they? He isn't sure – doesn't know how those sorts of things work between two guys, even if he does understand the physical side of things. "Sexual intercourse isn't all about penetration, kids," Mrs Foster had said way back in sophomore year, during Sex Ed., nasal voice grating. "There are many ways to spread venereal diseases, and you must be vigilant when it comes to taking precautions and using protection."

Her speech rings through Tweek's head in time to his pulse. It plays over and over, on a loop, until his temples ache and he's fighting a tic in his cheek.

If handjobs count, then that's two firsts that he's lost in one night—

Craig shifts in his sleep, the arm over Tweek's chest tightening, and his face nuzzling into blonde hair. Tweek doesn't watch – just keeps staring upwards, heart bucking against his ribs until the other boy settles back down. He got kissed by his best friend, so many times he's lost count, and every time… he actually enjoyed it.

But he's never really liked sex – not enough that he has any fantasies, or to have bothered experimenting much with himself. He's never seen the appeal in porn and hasn't wanted to be with anyone in that way. Sure he's jerked off, but he doesn't like thinking of other people touching him or doing things to him when he does. For Tweek, it's always been methodical, a means to an end. It's
just friction. It's just stress release.

(Won't ever be again. The feel of Craig's long fingers, the press of mouth, the stroke of tongue, wet heat and tight grips—he won't ever not envision that when he touches himself now.)

In one night, Tweek's lost two things he never even knew he'd wanted to keep, and he's gained something that can never be undone. He swallows around a dry throat, starts in on the breathing exercises his therapist, Olive, showed him. In through the nose for four beats. Hold for seven. Out of the mouth for eight. She says it's meant to help with anxiety and panic attacks but—

It's doing nothing.

His best friend saw him come, had his fingers around his dick and jerked him off and they aren't in love. That much, Tweek is sure of. He doesn't need to be a fucking genius to work out it was just sexual tension, or some shit. They're in a fake relationship, for God's sake—have been since Elementary—and they're horny teens. This sort of mess up was bound to happen eventually... right?

(Wrong.)

Oh God, he's ruined everything. He should have gone back to his own house when Craig offered to take him. He shouldn't have drunk anything. He shouldn't have gone to the damn party in the first place, no matter how much Craig begged and pleaded. And now, because he didn't use his common sense, everything's messed up.

He's terrified of the morning, and the conversation that he knows is inevitable. Craig will tell him to think about it logically, will tell him it was just a drunken mistake, and that they can get past it; Tweek won't. This isn't the sort of thing he can brush off, and Craig is too important to him. Eventually, whatever friendship that was between them will end, and it'll be painful and drawn out and ruinous on the rest of their lives. Ultimately, if he pretends like everything's alright the way Craig will want him to, he'll lose Craig as a friend forever. He's sure this is the direction it's going to go in, because whenever Tweek let's his feelings take charge, things go bad. Even knowing this, he thinks that it shouldn't feel like he's about to lose a limb.

Like someone's started hacking off a part of his body with a rusty shiv.

If Tweek is going to lose a limb one way or another, he's gonna be sure to deliver the severing cut. He's the one who fucked this up anyway, so he might as well end things on his terms. He'll end them neat and clean, and hopefully that way, whatever wound is left will heal over with time. Hopefully.

(But he's never been an optimistic person, has he?)

The burn in Tweek's eyes gets progressively worse, until he has to lift Craig's arm off him and roll onto his side, curling around himself and pressing his forehead to the cold wall. He pulls his arms tight against his chest, nails biting into the heels of his hands. At his back, Craig turns onto his stomach, throws one leg over the edge of the bed and starts to quietly snore.

And all Tweek does is lay there, tucked so tight into himself that he can't breathe in the air he needs for the exercises.

When the tears start, he doesn't fight them.

... By the time the other boy begins to stir, the sun is starting to rise.
Somewhere in the night Tweek deteriorated from still, silent crying to dry-eyed twitchiness so bad the back of his neck aches and his shoulders are tensing against the spasms. He's pretty sure his nails have sunk into the flesh of his palms, but he can't bring himself to look down at them.

His temples are pounding like someone's been trying to scoop his brains out through them, and he isn't sure if it's from dehydration or an impending caffeine migraine. Maybe it's the stress. Whatever the case, it's helping nothing.

"Mnnng," Craig says behind him, rolling onto his back and stretching.

Tweek lies stiffly, listening to the change in his friend's breathing. He doesn't turn over to look at him or acknowledge him in any way, but his pulse jumps and he can't help the violent spasms of the muscles in his face.

"Nn… dude, what…? What time…?" A sigh. A groan. "We left the light on?" There's a rustle of covers and a dip in the middle of the bed that says Craig's sitting up.

A long stretch of quiet follows and he can't see anything, but he can feel. Can feel eyes on his back as he twitches – as his breath hitches.

He's scared. He should've left before Craig woke up. Should've written what he had to down on a note and gone home.

"…Tweek?" The sound of shifting fabric, and Tweek can see Craig leaning over – looking down at him – through his peripheral vision.

He scrunches his eyes shut. Oh, Jesus Christ, he feels like he's gonna throw up.

"Babe, y'alright? What's wrong?"

A hand grazes his shoulder and Tweek jolts up, a strangled shriek escaping him. He scrambles away from Craig, who tries to steady him, and towards the far end of the bed. The blankets are dragged with him, tangled around his feet.

Back against the wall and bare chest heaving, his gaze finally flickers over his best friend.

Looking at Craig is like looking at a stranger. With his torso bare and his unbuttoned jeans hanging low on his hips like that, Tweek can see the long, subtle lines of muscles in his arms, the definition of his stomach from Craig's games of soccer and basketball with the guys. He tears his attention away from the dark hair trailing down under the hem of his boxers and back to the hand that's held aloft, in his direction.

His dark hair is rumpled and there's a pillow mark running down the length of his cheek. Blue-grey eyes go from wide to hooded in the time takes for Tweek to reach some semblance of stillness.

The hand reaching out for Tweek drops, and Craig settles back against the headboard, stretching out long legs, posture relaxed. The way his eyes travel over Tweek's bare torso makes goosebumps rise on the blonde's arms—

"Nggghh, would you stop that?" He brings his knees up in front of him and hurriedly yanks up his zip when he realizes that it's still open. "Stop fucking staring."

Craig actually has the nerve to chortle, rubbing his hands over his face. "Sorry, dude. Sorry," he says, lips curling up in a small smile. "This," he gestures briefly between them, "is just really surreal. Y'know?"
Surreal? Surreal? What the hell—is this some kind of joke to him?

"The— urgh— the fuck does that mean?" He can't help how shrill his voice is. Ears ringing, he takes great handfuls of his hair and tugs.

Tweek watches the smile slip away. Good, he thinks. Maybe he'll stop laughing and just let Tweek get on with it. Get on with ruining the last bit of anything good between them. "I just… didn't expect this. It's not like it's something I planned on doing last night." All Craig offers is a jolty, one-shouldered shrug. "I mean fuck, dude, we must've been really hammered."

Yep, there it is. Denial. Pushing off the blame. Step one to shoving everything over to one side and pretending they're alright.

Still, the words stab right through Tweek's queasy stomach. Even though he knew this was inevitable, it hurts. "Yeah, and I guess— augh— I guess dumb shit just happens, huh? Is that it?" Dumb shit happens but it doesn't matter because, hey, it's not like anything's lost between friends, right? Tweek'll just be fine with losing his virginity in some kind of emotionless one-night stand. He'll be fine losing his only real friend because of the ramifications of them sleeping together.

"What?"

He ignores the furrowing of Craig's brow and slings his legs over the edge of the bed, stumbling upright and kicking the clinging blanket off of him. His world tilts on its axis, and he wobbles—

"Shit. Babe, you alright? You don't look so—"

Tears himself away from the hands that try to hold him up.

"Don't fucking touch me, man. Just… don't." As soon as he's able to, he gathers his green t-shirt up off of the floor, thrusting his arms through the holes and then tugging it over his head. (Can't bring himself to care that the damn thing's inside out.) "I can't, nnggh, deal with this shit right now."

He's been thinking it through all night, steadying himself for the worst possible outcome, but… all he wants now is to run. To put it off a while longer, after all. It'll be easier if he just gets out of here; if he can just be alone to think this through.

"What? Wait— Tweek, slow down."

He turns away, crosses the room on legs that don't want to cooperate and throws himself down onto the floor by his shoes. His vision is trying to warp the world around him, even as he's cramming his feet inside his trainers, the laces still triple-knotted from the night before.

"Where are you going?" Craig's up too, crowding into his space and trapping him right by the door. "What the hell is going on?"

"Where do you think I'm going?" His eyes are stinging again and, fuck, hasn't he cried enough in the last twelve hours? Just let me go home, he thinks. Just let me go home without making this worse. (Gotta make a clean cut, or the wound won't heal right.)

Second shoe on, he makes a grab for his jacket; Craig beats him to it, snatching it up off of the floor as Tweek's fingertips brush over the hem, and stepping back so that it's out of reach.

"What the fuck? Give me my coat, you asshole!"

"No." There's a sharp note to Craig's voice that Tweek hasn't heard in a long time. "Not before you
tell me what I did wrong."

An inarticulate wail of frustration escapes him. He doesn't care that Craig's family are likely all still sleeping. "Why are you doing this? Why're you—nnn— making this so goddamn difficult?"

"Because I don't understand!" Craig's shout cuts over the rapid wheeze of breath in and out of Tweek's chest. And then, he says more quietly: "I don't get what the fuck's going on, dude. I thought we were cool." He runs a hand through dark hair. "I didn't think this would be such a big deal."

(Tweek's going to hyperventilate. Doesn't know how to stick to his plan. Everything's falling apart already.)

"Yeah, well, you were wrong." He's losing his voice, unable to meet his best friend's eyes.

"But," Craig says, sinking down to crouch in front of him and ducking his head to try and meet Tweek's gaze, "it's not, dude. What happened... it doesn't have to be some huge drama. Not if we talk about it, figure it out."

"Drama? You... you think I'm being overdramatic?" He does look up at that, gut twisting at Craig's frowning face.

"A little bit, yeah," Craig says, quiet but gruff. "Just tell me what was so bad about it that you're freaking out so much... please."

The edges of Tweek's vision goes fuzzy. He wants to scream. "Stop acting like it isn't a— a fucking mess." When Craig opens his mouth to say something, Tweek's hands fly up over his ears. "No. Stop." His words are a dry sob.

It's only when his friend's lips presses into a flat line that the blonde pulls his hands away.

"Yeah, okay—nrgh— maybe it was nothing to you, but that was my fucking virginity, man. I think it's alright for me to be pissed off over losing it for some meaningless, drunk-ass groping. I wanted to lose it with someone who— at some time special. Not... like this. Not with you."

Craig rocks back on his heels. Looks sort of like he's been slapped. His grip goes lax on Tweek's jacket, which falls into a heap on the carpet. "We've been through everything together; I might as well be your boyfriend. Isn't that enough for you?"

A high, strained laugh. Oh, God, his chest hurts. He's definitely gonna start crying any minute now. "No, dude. No, that's not 'enough'." Nothing's worth losing Craig over.

Tweek reaches out again, and this time Craig doesn't stop him from taking his jacket, or from gathering up his scarf.

Arms full, he stands, wrapping one badly shaking hand around the door handle.

"Babe, please..." There's something small about Craig's voice. "Don't go."

He gulps. Blinks back the rising tears. Tells himself it's just the alcohol messing him up still. "Mmrph... I just wanna be on my own right now. I-I'll message you." His voice is thick, his throat tight. (Clean cuts, he thinks. Clean cuts.) "See you in school, Monday."

With that, Tweek leaves.

Chapter End Notes
... sorry? :’D
Snow's been falling all night, and Tweek is forced to wade through it. The icy wind is like a slap, and he can't help but think that he deserves it.

By the time that he gets home, stumbling through the door, the streets are light and people are starting to slump outside to shovel their driveways. One or two stop to watch him, smiling and waving, but he pays them no mind. Just steps inside and tugs off his sodden shoes.

He's halfway up the stairs when his mom calls out a greeting to him from the kitchen. Not just him, though. "Morning, boys. Did you have a good time at the party?"

'Boys'.

Tweek doesn't wait around to reply, darting up the stairs in damp socks.

As soon as he's in his bedroom, he locks his door. Well, he does once he can get hold of the latch.

Scrubbing at his head in aggravation, he starts pacing across the cluttered floor, from dresser to drawer, from wall to window, until his stomach lurches up into the vicinity of his throat and he has to stop. Has to sit down, knees to chest, and breathe through it.

Problem is, it's difficult to 'breathe through it' when he's crying so hard that his throat stops working. He makes no effort to bite down on the sobs now he's on his own, and they wrack his body so hard he's rocking with the force of them. Soon he can't see, can't hear anything over his laboured breathing and loud, inarticulate wails.

At some point during his breakdown someone stops outside his bedroom; knocks on the door. They call something through the walls, but Tweek can't make out the words.

When it's clear he's not going to give them any kind of response, they leave him be.

It takes the blonde over an hour to cry himself out, by which point his rolling stomach gets the better of him. The rush to the bathroom makes him lightheaded, and he barely falls to his knees, pushing the toilet seat up, in time for his first heave.

Spectacularly miserable, he wraps his arms around the toilet bowl and shudders, his wet and swollen eyes streaming. He can't tell if he's vomiting from the stress or from the alcohol still in his system (the first is an unfortunately common occurrence, and the latter... well, he doesn't drink enough usually for him to tell), but it hardly matters. This feels like something he deserves.

During his episode, his mom enters the bathroom behind him, not saying a word, but sitting on the floor and rubbing his back in slow, circular motions.
Once the worst is over and all he's bringing up is bile, he slumps forwards, clammy forehead against the cold rim, and mouth burning with the bitter taste. His mom reaches around him, pulling the lever on the toilet and, while the acid contents of his stomach are washed away, tears off a length of toilet roll to dab at his damp chin.

His eyes are closed, and he allows himself a momentary lapse into the quiet, unassuming comfort that his mom offers. There are none of the pressing, needy questions and ramblings that his dad is prone to in times of immense stress, and for that he is unspeakably grateful. When she's done combing back his wild blonde bangs from where they stick to his forehead, she stands up to fetch a damp washcloth and a glass of tap water.

Tweek lets himself be propped up against the side of the shower, pressing the cold flannel to his sore eyes.

"Here, Tweek, take a drink," she steadies the jolting of his hands so the glass reaches his lips without sloshing down his front. "Slowly now, dear."

After he manages to drain half the glass in stops and starts, she takes it out of his hands and sets it on the side of the sink. With little to no fuss, Mrs Tweak manages to get her son onto his feet, and helps him to the basin so he can brush his teeth. Tweek doesn't look in the mirror - he knows he's probably blotchy faced and haggard without needing visual confirmation - but he does take extra care in scouring the blood out from beneath his nails, and then rubbing away what's crusted around the crescent-moon furrows in his palms. His mom waits until his hands have turned a vibrant pink from the hot water and the excessive scrubbing, and pats them dry with a quiet tutting. She applies antiseptic to the gouges in little dabs, dragging his hands back to her every time they lurch away.

Pulling his arm around her shoulders, she supports him as they make their way back out onto the landing, calm and quiet where Tweek is trembling so hard he can barely stand upright, unable to stop the involuntary noises he's making under his breath.

Inside his room, Mrs Tweak leads him over to his bed, drawing back the covers and fluffing the pillow as he collapses against the mattress. She hums as she moves, a soft, familiar tune that stops his breathing from escalating again. He lies on his side and watches her. He loves his mom, and the way she potters about picking up all the dirty mugs that have gathered on the tops of his nightstand and desk, and clearing a path through the mess of strewn clothing and scattered crafting materials that live on the carpet.

"I'll go turn the kettle on, sweetheart. You look like you could do with a nice, strong coffee." She leaves him with a small smile, carefully shutting the door.

In the quiet of his room, Tweek let's his itching eyes slip closed. His head is full of noise; it's a little like his ears have been stuffed full of cotton wool, and he can't make anything out. The headache that's been hanging over him all night has amped up to something not far from a migraine, but he lets himself sink back into the pain, finding an odd sense of peace in it. There's a box of naproxen in the front drawer of his bedside table, but he doesn't even consider getting himself any. Focussing on his headache means delaying having to confront what happened.

He drifts, weightless and temporarily numb, and doesn't even notice when his mom comes back in with a huge mug of black coffee and his cell phone, which he must have left downstairs yesterday morning.

...
reverie when he returns from Tweek Bros. and calls out a jovial greeting from the front hall. If he
had the energy he'd get up and lock his door, but as it is, his dad doesn't often infringe on the privacy
of his bedroom anyway. There's very little danger of him being disturbed - especially as he can trust
his mom to cover his tracks for him.

What Tweek does do though is retrieve his cell from his nightstand and, with hands that are doing
their best to make his life difficult for him, reaches down the side of his bed for his charger chord. He
knows just from the fact it's not been trilling nonstop all day that it must've died overnight.

As much as he'd rather leave it untouched and try to ignore the world beyond his bedroom walls, he
said he'd text Craig. One of Tweek's few redeeming qualities is that he doesn't break his word. If he
says something, he means it.

He holds the screen a short distance from his face and, after a few minutes it starts up, the battery
sign switching to a loading screen.

Almost as soon as he enters his pass code, the damn thing starts buzzing with a vengeance.
Swearing, he drops it on the pillow in front of his face. Tugs at his hair until it stops. As soon as he's
able, he picks it back up.

Three missed calls and seventeen texts.

There's a message from Token asking if they were going to turn up to the party last night, and
another dozen from their group chat that he ignores.

All of the calls and the last four messages are from Craig. He taps on the missed calls first, and holds
his breath as the phone goes through to voicemail.

There's rustling in the background, and wind whistles over his words, making it clears that he was
outside. "Tweek, babe, come on... pick up. This is fucking ridiculous. Why are you running away
when all I'm trying to do is sort this out?" A loud sigh. The screech of a crow in the background.
"Just, please... phone me back."

In the next message he must be inside (Tweek thinks he can hear a T.V.), and his voice is lower and
more level. It almost comes across as patronizing. "Look, okay honey, I'll give you some time. You
seem to need it right now. Do your breathing exercises if you're stressed, and remember you can call
Olive if you need someone to talk to about it, okay? I'll try again in a couple hours."

The final one is the shortest, and it makes Tweek grit his teeth. "Seriously, dude, it's half-five, and
you haven't even let me know if you're okay. Stop being a fucking baby."

He has to take a moment to compose himself before reading the messages, in case he ends up hurling
the damn cell phone at the wall. (It's not the cells fault Craig is acting like a dick, after all.)

08:34
babe, let me know when u get home, yh? im worried xx

11:17
can we just talk about it? i dont get whats wrong, just tell me dude srsly xx

14:09
look, this isnt cool. im trying my best to be chill about this but im starting to get fucking pissed x

17:56
u know what dude? fine, go fuck urself. when u want to grow the fuck up and talk about this like
Tweek stares down at the texts and lets all the thoughts he's been trying to ignore swarm up around him. He's so angry with Craig for not giving him the space he needs, and honestly... he made it clear what he was upset about, didn't he? Does he have to *spell it out?*

*Maybe you do,* a small voice whispers, almost lost in the onslaught of hurt and frustration. Perhaps he needs to think it over properly himself first, too. To figure out why his reaction was so bad.

(He knows Craig was right on that count, even if admitting it makes him feel belittled.)

Honestly, it doesn't take too long to put his finger on the cause of his awful mood that morning. Not now he's sobered up properly.

It's the same damn thing that makes him pull back from Craig every time the other boy gets a little too touchy. It's the way he doesn't contest to his parents' rules about sleeping in different rooms despite the minuscule chances of anything ever happening between them, and why he doesn't get upset when he sees people trying to flirt with Craig at school. It's in his frustration at kissing in front of the guys the previous night, and the fear in what happened when they got to Craig's. Everything comes down to *that.*

(Everything always does, when it comes to Craig.)

The event that changed everything so much for Tweek is in the past - years ago, now - but thinking about it still makes his stomach drop. The fingers of his free hand run over his thigh of their own volition, tracing the lines hidden beneath his jeans. He likes to think he's worked past those events now - it's something that his therapist ensured him would get easier to accept with time, but... it never stopped affecting him. Everything’s been different for him, since then.


But he's good at keeping that to himself. Mainly because people don't see past his shrieking and his twitching to the person underneath. Not even Craig.

(*Especially* not Craig. It's better that way. For both of them.)

He digs his nails into his thigh. Sucks in a long breath. Reconsiders the problem.

Okay, so... maybe all this is *not* so obvious, in retrospect. It's hardly something they've talked about. He's not sure Craig even realizes what started that whole shitty phase in Tweek's life. What's most likely is that the other boy has no idea Tweek knows about any of it. Craig just assumed Tweek would never figure it out, that he didn't need to know and that even if he did, it wouldn't affect him in any way.

(He was wrong. *He was wrong.*)

But it isn't something that Tweek can bring up now, after so long, without seeming petty or bitter. And he supposes that yeah, okay, maybe he *is* those things somewhere deep inside, but he's also scared. Of the ramifications if it gets out, and the damage it might do to whatever else they're going through. So for the last four years he's determinedly ignored that chapter in their lives, has pretended everything is fine, and that Craig hasn't ever hurt him.

(Yet another thing shoved under the rug.)

The damage that whole short, miserable period of his life had on him is enough to
make *anyone* freak out in the aftermath of the previous night, he likes to think. Common sense decrees that he won't put himself through all the lies and secrecy again. It's easier to end it before it can grow out of hand. Before his world crumbles beneath him like so much dirt and dust.

 Eventually he returns to his phone and, painstakingly slowly, starts typing up a reply. He has to go back over it several times, correcting mistakes and changing sections. It takes him half an hour to finish it up.

19:12
Look man, it Old you I didn't wanna speak about it right then and that I had to think but you havent let me. I get you wanna figure this shit out and that your pissed off but I know 'talking' just means shrugging it of, going back to before and acting like nothing ever happened. f uck dude, I can't do that. not about this. Thats not somrthing I'm gonna put myself through. We're not okay and Im not fucking cool with this shit. I can't just fuck around with you and then forget it. sex isn't easy for me. it's meant to mean something. If I've gotta do that shit with someone I wanna do it with someone who I love that wants to be with me bc it's not just convenient and . I don't want this to make stuff worse, but it will if we act like nothing is different. This won't just go away man

He stares down at his message for a long time before sending it. The reply is almost instant.

19:13
what then. what are u saying. spell it out for me dude

His fingers shake as he types out his reply. If he hadn't cried himself out earlier, he's pretty sure he'd be sobbing again right now.

Dry eyed, he reads it over.

Presses enter.

19:26
it's nothing you've done. I'm not angry at you. But I think we should stop pretending like we're dating. Were too involved and We need to stop so I can figure my shit out. I took things bad and I'm sorry. Your still like, my best friend dude

This time he has to wait longer, and when it does eventually come through, his heart sinks.

19:43
whatever. im done with this shit.

Well, he thinks. There's his clean cut. He should be happy.

(He really, really isn't.)

Chapter End Notes

i'd really love to hear what everyone's thoughts are on this chapter. it's been one of my favourite to write. (i'm weird, i know.)
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

this chapter was almost double this length. and then Word crashed.... and i maybe cried a little. (just a little.) so, yeah, here's another short, do-nothing chapter. (there'll be more going on in the next update, i promise. including the stuff i didn't have time to rewrite today LOL.)

also, i'm really sorry for any mistakes in this update. due to having to rewrite almost all of this, i had close to no time to check it over after. i'll double-check it again tomorrow. :'))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Spending the remainder of the weekend in his room means that Tweek can ignore the world outside his window and just... vegetate. This way, he can work on all his crafting projects and focus more on regaining some emotional stability (whatever that's meant to be when in reference to Tweek Tweak).

He ends up dragging his miniature potters wheel out from where it's been stuffed under his bed, and eventually finds a bag of clay that hasn't dried out completely. As he begins working the pale, goopy mess onto the tabletop, he plays old Terrence and Phillip episodes on Netflix.

Sunday goes by in a blur of wonky, badly thrown cups, sore hands and fart jokes. He put the group chat on silent the night before since every time his phone buzzed it was giving him heart palpitations; he isn't surprised that no one else has messaged him, though he does periodically check his cell, just in case. Tweek isn't exactly what you'd call popular, outside of his 'relationship' with Craig. (Which was one of the few things he ever seemed to have going for him, by everyone else's standards.)

Skipping his meals isn't necessarily a good thing, but he doesn't think he could stomach anything much anyway, and his dad would end up asking him a lot of questions. As a general rule Tweek fucking hates having to lie. He'd do it, but it wouldn't shake his dad off his trail for long (that man is like a bloodhound when it comes to anything involving his son's emotional wellbeing), and it'd make Tweek's anxiety so much worse, having to weigh every little thing he said and did. He knows his dad means well, but being around him isn't good for Tweek's health, most of the time.

Mrs Tweak brings her son sweet coffee and cake ("To keep your blood sugar levels up, hon.") in the evening, after he failed to eat the chicken noodle soup she left out for him at lunch. He chokes the cake (chocolate fudge) down despite the unhappy rolling of his stomach and practically inhales his drink while it's still hot enough to scald his tongue. At least it'll stop his mom from worrying too much.

By the time he goes to bed, the cups he made that didn't collapse have been shelved to dry out, and the clay residue that he's trodden into the carpet and smudged onto all the furniture is flaking. His knuckles are cracking and the cuts along his palm sting like mad, but it's fine. He's fine. Really.

He still doesn't sleep well. This isn't an uncommon occurrence, considering he has insomnia, but it's still a lot worse than usual. Craig's not been there all day – he hasn't heard from him since that final message – and it throws everything in Tweek's life off balance.
His room feels too large. Too empty. And there's no way to relieve his excess energy other than the little meditations and tricks Olive's shown him over the last few years. If he has a night terror again, there's no spare bedroom for him to tiptoe into – no one to listen to him and comfort him and reassure him that there's nothing to be scared of.

The house seems like a vast and empty space, and Tweek feels very small in it.

Come the morning, he's managed maybe a couple of hours sleep and it shows in how jumpy he is. A hot shower and three mugs of coffee might help gear him up for school on a normal day, but all he can do is tiptoe through the house, flinching at every small noise and tugging nervously at his hair.

Somehow the morning is made worse (which is pretty impressive, considering he's already smashed his favourite mug, stubbed his toes on the edge of his desk, and had to sit in a corner breathing in and out of a brown paper bag for half an hour), when he stumbles back into the steamed up bathroom to brush his teeth.

It's while he's wiping away the worst of the condensation on the mirror that he sees them.

Hickeys.

Great big purple and red bruises down the side of his neck, from directly under his ear, to the base of his throat. One has very defined teeth marks. Frozen in horror, Tweek reaches up and prods at it with one finger. (Maybe shrieks a little bit when it throbs.) He looks like the victim of a pretty useless vampire mauling.

He'll have to wear a scarf for the next week or so if he wants to keep them hidden.

Oh God, this really is the worst morning.

Great news is, it doesn't get any better when he leaves the house.

Five steps down the street and he nearly jumps out of his skin as a car speeds down the icy road, right past his shoulder. He's so off balance that his feet slip against the sidewalk, and he ends up on his ass in the half-cleared slush.

Unfortunately, this means that the 'takeaway' style cup he's been clapping in his hands goes everywhere. All down his jacket, over his bandaged palms, his satchel and his pants, before clattering to the floor, empty, and rolling into the gutter.

He yells so loudly that a dog starts barking somewhere down the street.

An hour and a half late, he makes it to school.

Having missed the bus after going back to change, he was forced to walk through the snow to Tweek Bros. so his dad could drive him instead. The conversation in the car mainly consisted Richard Tweak waxing poetic about a new shipment of coffee grounds from Peru that had just arrived, and how he was planning to go up into the attic at some point soon to dig out his first-ever coffee grinder so they could, "Give them a proper test run." (It's an ancient, rusted contraption that used to sit on a shelf in the kitchen looking like some kind of medieval torture device, until Mrs Tweak bought him a new one for their twentieth anniversary and made Richard put it somewhere that they wouldn't have to keep looking at it. Unfortunately, whenever his dad gets in new stock that he's particularly proud of, the horrifying thing comes out of hiding for a visit.)
To say that Tweek is happy to clamber out of the car is an understatement. And then he remembers that Craig is here at school too and he considers that maybe this isn't where he wants to be.

Still, he continues on inside, going straight through to first period, since he missed homeroom. Art is normally one of Tweek's favourite classes. He's not a particularly academic student and often struggles with subjects like math and lab. In art class, he's got the chance to express himself. It's an emotional outlet without any of the extra stress. He doesn't care if it's drawing, painting or crafting – anything's good.

What he doesn't like is when Mrs Christie wastes the whole damn hour running through out-dated slideshows of certain, 'edgy' art movements. Tweek didn't take the class because he was interested in learning about some pretentious shits smacking a single dollop of paint on a canvas and calling it art.

Unfortunately though, that's exactly what they're doing in today's class, he discovers as he tries to sneak in through the side door. It seems that the practical element has been firmly eschewed for their first day back, and instead they're learning about a piss-stained urinal that a guy called Duchamp put a fake signature on for a practical joke and then claimed it was some ground breaking new movement. They've had this exact lecture before. Twice.

(It's almost as bad as that one guy – whats-his-face… Manzoni, or something – that put honest-to-God shit in a load of cans, sealed them up and sold them for a fucking bomb. The fact people actually wanted to buy tinned human turds is infuriating to Tweek.)

He's so put out upon seeing the black-and-white photo projected across the front wall of the classroom that, halfway into his seat, he lets out a frustrated yelp.

The painfully dull lecture pauses.

Everyone turns in their seats. His skin crawls, face flushing.

Mrs Christie, the old bat, peers out from behind the blinding light of the ancient projector and clears her phlegmy throat. "Mr Tweak… so nice of you join us."

"F-fuck, I'm really sorry – ARGH – M-Mrs Christie. M-m-my eurgh goddamn coffee spilled all over my— had to go nnn back home and—"

"Yes, yes, well… you've not only missed the first half of my lecture on your very first day of this semester, but you've been rude enough to disrupt my class with foul language and excessive noise." She pauses; makes a face like someone's just spit in her eye. "Detention, Wednesday, Mr Tweak. Perhaps that will improve your manners."

Tweek has one huge, seizure-like twitch and slumps down into his seat.

The girls on either side of him – Allie Darson and Meagan Ridley – shoot him side-long glares that make it plainly clear they don't want to be near him and his spasmodic lurching, and scrape their stools as far across the laminate from him as possible.

He's too busy trying to tear his own hair out to notice.

(It's nothing new. They're always bitches.)

At lunch he forgoes sitting in the cafeteria with the others and instead finds a free spot to sit down in one of the second floor stairwells. He tears his sandwich to shreds – first the soggy crusts, then the
soft white of the bread, and finally the drooping, clammy cheese squares.

Bit by bit he flings the torn off, rolled up little lumps over the metal banister like missiles, and feels a thrill of vindictive satisfaction when he hears someone on the level below freaking out. Especially when he realises it's one of the girls from Art class.

"Oh my God, ew, something just landed on my head. What— what is it?"

"Hold still, Meagan… what the hell? It… it looks like cheese? What kind of sicko goes throwing cheese around?"

"Oh hell no. Get it out, get it out! It took me three hours to style this just right."

Sometimes, when he's in a bad mood, Tweek is a bit of a bastard.

(Hey, look, don't judge a guy. He's got to find joy in life somehow, right?)

Sending another squidgy little projectile over the railing as the girls hurry off, Tweek doesn't notice when someone steps out onto the landing behind him.

"Tweek, man, isn't that a little fucked up?"

Propelling himself away from the voice, he throws the rest of his butchered meal into the air and screams.

Small, squidgy bullets rain down on him, bouncing off him and ricocheting across the stairs. There's a sound of amusement from behind him.

The blonde spins, the remainders of his lunch tragically scattered on the floor around him (including a perfectly edible apple, which he had actually been planning on eating), and watches through wide eyes as Token flicks a lump of bread off his shoulder.

"Rrragh, dude, what the fuck?" he says, spitting out the words. "What is it with everyone jumping out at me on the— the goddamn stairs?" Doesn't anyone understand how dangerous it is? He could seriously end up dying.

Dark eyes crinkling, the other boy shrugs. "Sorry, dude. Couldn't help it."

"Ugh, you're ju-just as bad as Clyde." He brushes shaky hands over his front and scatters the crumbs that caught in his scarf, before giving the apple a sharp nudge with the toe of his boot. He watches as it rolls over the side of the stairs, and only barely flinches at the smacking sound of it hitting the ground below.

Token just laughs a deep, low laugh. "Whoa, tone it down dude. I can practically feel the hatred radiating off of you."

This makes Tweek look away. Shoving his hands in his pockets, he says, "I don't, nng, hate him. He's just a dick." The fact that Tweek hasn't had to share any of his lessons with the brunette yet today means he's slightly less anti-Clyde than he tends to be after long stints in his presence, but Token doesn't need to know that.

Humming, the taller boy leans back against the wall to openly watch him, and Tweek does his best to ignore this by hooking his hand around the strap of his satchel and hoisting it off the floor and up onto his shoulder.
He's managed avoiding his entire friendship group so far today, aside from having to share English Lit. with Kyle, Cartman and Wendy Testaburger, who spent the whole lesson in an increasingly aggressive debate over *Animal Farm*, until the teacher ended up sending the boys to Principal Powers. (Kyle had hurled his book at Cartman's head, and the rotund boy had retaliated by standing up and flipping over his desk.) Tweek, unsurprisingly, went unnoticed.

After an awkward moment (on Tweek's end, that is; he isn't sure that Token knows how to feel awkward about anything, he's always so chill), his childhood friend speaks up. "Why're you out here, man?"

"Because it's a free fucking country?" It's not fair of him to be so waspish, but he feels tired and sick. "Urgh. M-mind your damn business, dude."

The smile he gets for that is warm and relaxed, like he just said something funny. "Fair enough. Only, I thought it might have something to do with Craig."

Almost instantly, Tweek's shoulders slump. His brief distraction from the misery hanging over his head is destroyed. He doesn't say a word, just sinks back down to the ground and wraps his arms around his legs.

Token joins him, long limbs folding with an easy grace. "Yeah, that's pretty much what I thought," the taller boy says. "I knew something was up when Craig wasn't replying to my texts yesterday. Then I saw him this morning and… man, he looks like crap."

"Sto-stop it," the blonde mutters. He knows Token's digging for gossip, trying to find out what's wrong by guilt-tripping it out of him. The fact is, he's digging in the wrong spot – there's no treasure to be found out here. At least, not any that Tweek'll freely share.

"Look," Token says, face straight and voice lower. "I know it's none of my business, but I'm here if you want to chat, man. I won't take sides. I don't know what happened, but I'll still be a friend to both of you until you sort it out."

Tweek says nothing; just presses his face to his knees and tries not to shake too hard.

They sit together in relative silence for a while longer, until other students begin trailing into the stairwell below them, making their way to fifth period.

Standing, Token offers the blonde a hand. Tweek ignores the offering as per usual, clambering to his feet himself.

Before leaving, the dark haired boy gives him one more thing to think about.

"I'm not trying to freak you out, dude, but… I hope you're preparing yourself for a storm, because when it comes out that you guys are fighting, people are gonna lose their shit."

Jesus fucking Christ. He's not wrong there.

Chapter End Notes

i know it was a dull one (//weeps//), but i hope you guys still enjoyed it <3

(fear not, Craig'll be back next chapter ;O )
Chapter Notes

OHHH MY GOD, THIS CHAPTER HATED ME LOL.
but. it is done. (and it's pretty long, too) :')

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He manages to go until the end of the day before he sees Craig. He's walking ahead of Tweek in the parking lot, clambering onto the coach next to Stan and Kenny. The other boy doesn't look around or see him, and Tweek takes this as his first break of the day.

Even though it's started snowing again, he diverts from route towards the bus and walks home instead.

Because South Park High is some way outside the town proper, it takes him over an hour to trudge back through the snow. He's soaked to his skin from wading up through the snow banks along the edges of the roads and plodding across open fields to get home and he's shivering so hard he thinks it's putting his nervous jitters to shame.

It's worth it though, he stubbornly reminds himself, half dragging himself up the stairs to his bedroom. Even if he's so unfit that it feels like the walk took five years off his life. At least he didn't have to interact with Craig.

As soon as he's shut the door he's shrugging out of his heavy jacket and stumbling out of his pants, which must have absorbed half the damn snow in the entirety of South Park. He's left in his scarf, his green checkered shirt and the same unattractively long type of boxer shorts he's worn every day since he was fifteen. (He doesn't ever take them off outside of the shower if he can help it.)

While rifling through a pile of clothes close to his bed, Tweek finds it: Craig's favourite chullo. Tweek gave it to him on his sixteenth birthday, and the other boy is rarely without it. There's a cold twist of pain in Tweek's gut as he scoops it up off the floor, running fingers that won't stay still over the blotchy, hand-knitted weave. Tweek had spent the better part of a month knitting the damn thing under the guidance and instruction of his mom, and had almost stabbed his eyes out with the huge, hooked needles several times a day. But he'd managed to keep the gift a secret. (He thinks, with an aching chest, of how worried Craig had been every time he saw new bandaids on Tweek's fingers, and the way he'd clutched the finished hat to his chest and smiled one of the biggest smiles Tweek had ever seen on his face).

Heavy hearted, Tweek forgoes changing into anything else and clambers straight into bed. He takes the hat with him, pressing the fuzzy bobble on top to his lips and playing with the plaited chord at the end of one earflap.

The blonde recalls seeing it on the carpet on Friday evening, before heading out to the party. He can still feel Craig's fingers ghosting along his ribs, breath on his neck and quiet voice in his ear. It had been a good evening, before everything fell apart.

For a little while, he allows himself to forget his worries.
Monday night is almost as bad as the previous, though at around three in the morning, sleep deprived and heavy limbed, he ends up blacking out. His sleep is for once blessedly undisturbed, though he’s jolted awake at just past six o’clock the next morning. Hunger pangs are clenching down around his empty stomach, so strong he’s doubled over. He presses his flat of his sore palms against his abdomen until the worst subsides.

It takes him all of five seconds to scramble out of bed, throw on the first clean shirt and pair of jeans he can find, and trip his way down the stairs to the kitchen. He feels almost bad when his mom lights up so much at seeing him downstairs, herding him straight over to the table. He knows that she worries about him, even if she doesn’t talk his ear off about it the way his dad does, but it’s hard to remember that when he’s in a bad spot. It’s something he’s always trying to work on.

The table is set as it is every day, with a freshly brewed pot of coffee in the center of the table, and various fruits, syrups and condiments laid out around it. (Mrs Tweak has always made a point of not serving cold breakfasts if she can help it, claiming that, "You might as well not eat at all if you’re not going to eat properly, hon. If you’re going to have breakfast in this house, it’s going to be something that can keep you fuelled up all day.")

Taking huge gulps from a mug of coffee so black it seems to absorb light, he practically falls on the plate of pancakes and bacon that his mom sets in front of him, a loud groan muffled by his first, bulging mouthful.

"Y-you’re the best," he says by way of thanks, between bites. His mom pats his shoulder briefly as he walks back towards the kitchen sink, humming a cheery tune.

As usual, it takes very little to fill him up – he just barely finishes a third pancake, generously soaked in syrup and butter. He allows himself to bask in the heaviness of his first meal since Friday, and is so relieved that he doesn’t want to puke it straight up – that his stomach seems to be holding it down – that he’s almost stopped frowning.

After the hassle of the yesterday morning, Tweek forgoes his takeaway cup and moves to reach straight for a metal flask, filling it to the brim with what’s left in the cafetière on the table. He pops his plate into the bubble-filled sink and ducks away in horror as his mom leans over to give him a kiss on the cheek. She laughs at his scrunched up face and flicks the hand towel at his back as he darts back up the stairs.

His surprisingly relaxed mood continues up until he re-enters his bedroom.

Only upon stepping inside for his bag and his textbooks, does he spot the chullo poking out from underneath his pillow. He considers, as calmly as possible (which translates into pacing back and forth across the carpet and trying not to swear), what he ought to do with it. More than once, he makes to reach for his cell so he can send Craig a message about having found it, only to freeze halfway. Does he really need to let Craig know he has it right away? It wouldn't hurt to keep it a day or two longer, would it?

Besides, he doubts that the other boy wants to hear anything from him right now. Silence would probably be better. Kinder, even...

He slows to a halt, picking the woollen cap up and bringing it to his face. The smell of Craig’s citrus shampoo permeates the fabric, and it soothes his tattered nerves, warm and familiar.

For a long moment he stands, fingers tight and eyes closed. Undecided.
Inevitably his conscience catches up to him, the memory of Craig's smile when he'd unwrapped it for the first time etched into the back of his eyelids, and he shoves it into the front pocket of his satchel.

Tweek snatches up the pile of relevant textbooks from his desk and slips into his trainers, his face drawn. He has no idea how he's gonna give it back, but that's a problem he can think about later.

(He doesn't, though. Even as he leaves the house, he's obsessing. Planning. Worrying.)

Scuffing the rubber sole of his shoe across the tarmac and chewing noisily at a loose bit of skin along the edge of his thumb (it's a sure sign that he's stressed when he reverts back to his kindergarten habit of chewing on his nails, but he can't help himself), he walks to the bus stop just outside of his house. Despite living on the same street as several other kids in his year, most people in his year at South Park High drive themselves to school these days, or at the very least carpool. Only a handful of seniors take the coach on a regular basis. So, like most days, the only other people at the stop are a handful of younger girls, huddled together and gossiping loudly about... Jesus, Tweek doesn't know. Or care.

All he does care about is the bus coming into view around the corner with its distinctively unhealthy rattle a few minutes late. As per usual the bus driver, Mr Clustervok, looks vaguely homicidal (and definitely a little high). Tweek twitches his way on board after the girls, holding his pass up for the driver to see and slinking down the aisle. He keeps his chin tucked and his eyes low, heart hammering against his ribs, until he gets to his usual seat (seventh row back, left side of the bus, window seat) and finds it...

Empty.

His hammering heart does a weird little flip at that, like its torn between unspeakable relief and a sinking disappointment.

Surreptitiously glancing around, the blonde spots Butters and Kenny are a few rows further back, talking animatedly about something in Kenny's bag. The group of girls settle in the very front of the bus, giggling the sort of high-pitched giggles that make him want to bash his head off the windows. Small clusters of students fill out the rest of the bus. Couples, holding hands and leaning heads on shoulders. Best friends teasing, whispering, laughing over inside jokes.

He realises very quickly that Craig isn't here. He doesn't need to be told it's because of their falling out, but the empty seat beside him is like a gaping hole. If he looks hard enough, he can see Craig sitting there, slouching back with his knees spread out and his head tilted in Tweek's direction. He can feel a hand patting his thigh when his knee starts jumping, and fingers pushing his hair back from his eyes when he dips his head too far forwards.

To alleviate the pressure of his overactive imagination, the blonde pulls out his headphones, popping them into his ears and blasting Cigarettes After Sex so loud his eardrums buzz. He pulls his legs up onto the seat in front of him, threads one hand into his hair, and brings his thumb back up to his mouth to chew. Greg Gonzalez' soft vocals and the relaxed beat help lull Tweek back down into some sort of normalcy. The empty space at his side doesn't miraculously fill itself in, but he at least isn't falling apart over it. Over something so dumb and small.

The whole ride to school, he's so busy trying to distract himself from his loneliness that he doesn't even once think to freak out about the structural integrity of the bus or the questionably murderous intent of their driver. (This, in itself, is a small miracle.) He remains quiet in his seat, rocking lightly against the styrofoam backrest, and stares blindly out the window.

When the coach screeches to a halt in the parking lot, he stumbles off in a daze, blood like treacle
and music still blaring in his ears. He follows the back of Kenny's hood and Butter's bright blonde head around the maze of badly parked cars and up into the crowded corridors, cringing as several people swarming around him brush against his arms, or knock into his shoulders.

By the time he reaches homeroom, he's remembered Token's warning, thanks to several people turning to him with wide smiles and eager apologies upon hearing him freak out.

He and Craig are the most popular couple in school – have been since fourth grade – and he has no doubts that people will start noticing the fact they aren't hanging out together. It'll only be a matter of time before the entire school's abuzz with the news of their break up. Tweek doesn't know how he's going to deal with that. Being with Craig has been his safety blanket for so many years that having that comfort torn away makes him feel exposed. Naked.

(Even if it was his idea to end things.)

Loitering outside of the classroom door, he squeezes his eyes shut and tries to work the courage up to peer around the doorframe. He doesn't notice anyone's waiting behind him to get into the room until, apparently fed up with waiting, they shove their way past. Having had no warning thanks to his music, the blonde presses himself up against the wall, screeching at being pushed.

Bill and Fosse continued past him, snarling something he can't hear, and Tweek's pulling himself together, face settling into a thunderous scowl—

when Craig passes by him.

For the first time since Saturday morning, Tweek meets blue-grey eyes.

His stomach does a funny little lurch. The other boy's steps falter – he thinks for a moment that he might stop, might acknowledge him in some way – but then Craig tears his eyes away, and the moment is over. He leaves Tweek pressed against the wall and walks inside. Not a single word. No expression on his face.

A short moment later, the blonde breathes out, long and slow, and forces his body to relax.

He follows Craig inside a few moments later, and wonders if he's just imagining eyes on his back, the way he pictured Craig beside him on the bus.

...  

Surviving homeroom together settles Tweek's nerves enough that math and world history – both classes the boys share – aren't so daunting. They sit at opposite ends of the classroom anyway, thanks to their teachers separating them on seating plans for being a distraction to their classmates. This allows Tweek to keep his head bent low over his work and avoid anymore awkward eye contact.

At lunch break, he wanders the halls, picking listlessly at his sandwich (homemade, peanut butter and jelly, and infinitely better than yesterdays) and contemplating his existence.

(This is something that Tweek does when he's left to his own devices too long, in between feeling anxious about the inevitability of his death and obsessing over the fate of humanity. He's not nearly as bad as when he was younger, but just the same as biting his nails, bad habits resurface when he's stressed.)

It's while he's licking a smudge of jelly off the back of a knuckle that he remembers the chullo cap in his bag. He pauses, finger sucked into his mouth. The corridors around him are empty. This would
be the perfect opportunity to sneak it back into the other boy's locker, returning it without Craig ever knowing any different.

Mind made up, he ignores the desperate part of him that wants to keep it for himself and picks up his pace, changing direction and slipping into one of the side halls. With every step that brings him closer to Craig's locker, his chest constricts a little tighter. His footsteps echo off the walls, seeming so much louder than moments ago, and he's vastly aware of every classroom doorway that he passes. The corridor the other boy's locker is in is one of the stretches with the least amount of footfall – towards the back of the school, near the boys locker room and the gym – so there's close to no chance of anyone seeing him here.

Unceremoniously stuffing his sandwich back into his satchel, he approaches the locker with more of a spring in his step than he's had for days. He can't believe he hadn't thought of doing it this way sooner. Sometimes he's such an idiot.

Tweek doesn't even have to pause to think, before scrolling through to the correct combination on the lock (it's Craig's old guinea pig, Stripe the Fourth's, birth date – hardly difficult to guess, considering how he's used it for almost everything since they were kids). The locker swings open with a click and a high-pitched squeak that has the blonde wincing. He's so busy tugging the woollen hat out of his bag that, door swinging wide, he doesn't notice it at first. Only when he raises his head, cap in hand, does he see it.

Taped to the inside of Craig's locker is a picture. Just one, about the size of his palm.

In it are Craig and Tweek, aged around thirteen and holding a patchy, frail-looking Stripe up for the camera as he chews on a carrot stick. Both boys are smiling, Craig's braces poking out from behind his lips and Tweek's cheeks sunburnt. There's a window behind them and the summer sun shines down into the shot, lighting their hair – short, straight and black next to wild, frizzy blonde – up like halos.

There's a pang in Tweek's gut as he peers at the scruffy-edged photograph, thinking back to days spent building pillow forties and reading comics under the covers after lights out. To toasting marshmallows over the hob and sneaking beers out of the fridge. To talking about their celebrity crushes, and slipping in through the back of the movie theatre to watch R-rated movies. Riding their bikes out into the woods on the edge of town in the evenings, just to watch the sun setting across the skyline. Making a 'time capsule' to bury in Tweek's backyard. Drinking so much coffee that they couldn't sleep for two nights straight, Craig ending up violently sick. Playing piano and guitar together and singing made up songs at the top of their lungs. Tweek snapping a ballpoint pen in a fit of pique and splatting blue ink everywhere. (They'd both laughed so hard they couldn't breathe; Craig had rolled off the edge of the bed, limbs flailing and face bright pink.)

That... that was undoubtedly the best year of Tweek's life so far. Nothing was complicated, back then.

Chest aching, he reaches a trembling finger out to trace the edge of the picture—

"What are you doing?"

He screams. Drops the hat like it's burned his fingers and lurches away. (Jesus Christ, what is it with people scaring him all the damn time?)

Craig's several feet away, watching Tweek with a blank face.

Gulping, Tweek tugs at his bangs and then the loop in his scarf, eyes darting over everything but
Craig. "Aurgh, just— just putting your – NNG – hat back, dude. F-found it.. in my room..." His voice trails off, lost in the cavernous stretch of the corridor. His back is to the lockers, and his shoulders are up around his ears.

The other boy steps forwards, slow and steady, and leans down at Tweek's feet. Unable to help himself, his gaze finally settles on Craig, watching the way long fingers pluck the hat off the ground.

Straightening up brings them only a foot or so away, and Tweek is frozen. The taller boy brushes a bit of dust off of one of the flaps and turns to put it up on the top shelf of his locker, retrieving a book while he's in there. His eyes are dull, the stubble on his jaw stark against his too-pale skin.

Token was right. It's only been a few days, but... Craig doesn't look well.

"Are you eating?" Tweek blurts out the words before he can stop himself, and slaps a hand over his mouth. Goddamn it, now he sounds like a fucking creep.

Craig must think so too, because he turns slowly, brow furrowed. "What?"

"N-nothing." He tugs again at his scarf, loosening it so that he can breathe. Craig's eyes dip to follow the movements, and the momentary break in eye contact gives Tweek's dumb mouth the perfect opportunity to keep on blabbing. "It's just, you look – urrk – kinda shitty. Not like shitty's bad but mnn." He makes a sound of distress. Hides his burning face behind his hands as he prays that he'll stop. (He doesn't. His brain seems to be short-circuiting.) "Actually, the zombie look – oh Jesus – kinda re-really suits you, dude, even though vampire would be better. Not Twilight vampire. I mean like, Interview with the Vampire or— or Bram Stoker-esque and hhrn I can't shut up, I'm so fucking s-sorry. Urgh please man, stop me, just put me out of my misery–"

"Tweek."

The blonde's mouth closes with an audible click. He remains behind his hands, breathing hard and pressing the bandaged heels of his palms to his eyes to relieve the sting there.

"Look at me."

Against his will, his hands drop – clenching and unclenching – to his sides.

When he still fails to meet Craig's gaze, he repeats himself. "Look at me, dude."

Finally, through blurring eyes, he does. He hears Craig sigh, watches as the boy runs a hand through his hair. All the words that were pouring out of his mouth like verbal diarrhea only a second ago are lodged into a solid lump in the back of his throat.

"You were right. This isn't going to work if you don't give me some time to adjust."

"Hunh?" The sound is choked up.

"You want me to be fine with all of this, with everything that happened, and you don't want to talk or give me any kind of proper explanation—" he holds one hand up to stop Tweek from interrupting. "And it's cool, dude, I get it... or I'm trying to. I just need some time too, okay? Like you do. But that doesn't mean you have to tiptoe round and avoid everyone, okay?"

Craig's voice isn't angry or sharp; it's just tired. (It hurts worse than Craig being angry would have. This Craig seems distant, shut off in a way that Tweek isn't used to. He's all walls where before he was open doors.)
The blonde clears his throat – ignores the burn in his eyes. "Eurnngh. Yeah, dude, sure. O-okay.” He pushes himself away from the locker, standing straight.

"We cool?" Craig asks.

No, thinks Tweek. No, we’re not.

"Yeah," he says instead. Forces a smile that hurts. "Why wouldn't we be?" The lies taste like tar on his tongue. (He does lie, not normally. He doesn't.)

"Hn." He's getting so sick of hearing Craig sigh, but he stands there and listens anyway because at least this way they're next to each other, even just briefly.

"Well, look... I'm— I'm just gonna go. Over there." He jerks a thumb over his shoulder. "This is great- this's been real – erk – good. Good catch up. Hnnng."

He's turning to go, but Craig calls out to him one more time. "You might wanna pull your scarf back up, dude. Or people'll see."

Tweek pauses. Looks over, face scrunched up in confusion until Craig taps his fingers against the side of his throat, one corner of his mouth kicking up in a stilted smile.

The flood of heat to his head makes him dizzy, and he's not sure if it's from the small grin or the fact that the other boy acknowledged the marks. "Oh, God, oh jeez," he mutters, tugging at the offending item of clothing until it's tight enough around his neck to strangle him.

The last thing Craig says before he can flee is, "And don't worry, dude, I won't say anything. I'll keep the break up quiet on my end."

... 

It's only when he's lying in his bed that night that he realises he hadn't had to say a word to Craig about his worries at all. The other boy had just known.

Chapter End Notes

ilu guys. i don't feel like i've been telling you enough. it's only because you're all such sweethearts that i'm so crazy about writing and updating this fic. <33
okay, oh my god, it's 4am and my brain is not working right now so guys, please bear with the (undoubtedly huge amount of) mistakes. i promise i'll come back and edit the chapter tomorrow, when i'm a little more lucid... LOL :'))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Detention, it turns out, is not a solitary affair.

It's after school on Wednesday, and Tweek just wants to be in his bedroom alone after being overwhelmed by the stress of Phys. Ed., and their weekly whole school assembly in the gymnasium. He even made the effort of sitting with the guys for the first half of lunch, until his twitching grew so bad at having Craig on the opposite side of the table, completely ignoring him, that he sent his tray careening up into the air. His burger, potato wedges and coffee went with it. Most sailed straight into Eric Cartman's head.

Almost the entire table had cracked up laughing at the sight of a bright red Cartman covered in grease and ketchup, a lone wedge sliding slowly down one wobbling cheek.

Tweek hadn't laughed. He'd taken one look at Cartman's convulsing fingers, imagined them wrapped around his neck, and fled before the brunette could fly into one of his legendary, apoplectic rages.

(Looking back on it, he still can't really see the funny side. But that's probably just because he's got no sense of humour. Or maybe it's because he doesn't think of his nervous tics as anything other than frustrating.)

So, here he is, standing at the front of the classroom that the school councillor, Miss Behaviour, chose for their detentions today. It's one of the Geography rooms, though Tweek's not sure which teacher uses it. Next to him are Kenny, Butters and three younger girls who all have their arms crossed or their hands on hips, and have thus far refused to stand anywhere near one another.

Miss Behaviour is a small, bucktoothed lady in her mid forties, with a high-pitched voice and all the dress sense of a drunken lamppost. She's also a huge pushover, from Tweek's (fairly limited) experience in dealing with her. He's heard many a story from the other boys about how she's given cookies to students who turn up to detention pretending to be upset, and often lets people head home early. Therefore, it's hardly a surprise when she sets the six of them the task of sitting down and writing apology letters addressed to those that they've offended or wronged, and then proceeds to leave the room, "So that y'all can write in peace."

She's laid out fancy paper, floral envelops and glittery pink pens for them to use, as well as a jug of water (with a slice of lemon floating in it, of course) and half a dozen plastic cups. No one touches any of them.

The six of them loiter in a loose half circle around the teacher's desk, looking down at the spread she's left them until, one by one, the younger girls snatch their sheets and pens up and stalk off to three separate tables, fuming silently.
Meanwhile, Kenny's circling around the desk to play with the lock on the top drawer, and Butters is turning around to park his butt on top, smiling easily and swinging his legs back and forth.

"Nng," Tweek says, reaching for a sheet of paper and deciding to get this misery out of the way.

He doesn't get so far before Butters is speaking up. "Heya, that was real funny at lunch today, Tweek." When he looks back over his shoulder at the other blonde, Butters is offering one of his big, gentle smiles, fingers twirling around section of blonde bangs he's pinned back behind a unicorn themed hairclip. His cutesy appearance is so at odds with his next words that Tweek can only stare at the boy in blank confusion. "It's nice seein' that fatass get a lil something nasty thrown back at him once in a while. He deserves a bit of misery."

Behind the desk, Kenny laughs. "Amen to that." He digs something sharp and shiny out of his pocket and shoves it into the lock. (At least, that's what Tweek assumes he's doing. He can't really tell from this angle.)

Uncertain what he's meant to say in reply to the cheery boy's statement, Tweek twitches, shuffling his feet. He wonders if he should just go sit down and get on with his punishment; takes another small step back.

"Yo, Butters, pass me your hairpin?"

"Oh, alright then, Ken. Just don't bend it too much this time. It's my favourite."

Curious in spite of himself, Tweek watches as Butters pops the clip open, his bangs flopping down into his eyes, and hands it to the other boy. With his tongue poking out the corner of his mouth, Kenny returns his attention to the drawer. Tweek circles the desk to watch Kenny's progress without realising he's even moving. The other boy slides the thin edge of the clip into the top half of the keyhole, alongside the weird metal rod thing, and starts jiggling them around. Butters shifts, eyeballing Kenny's progress too. He shoves over the writing equipment and slings one leg up onto the table top.

Kenny gives the lock a few more experimental wriggles before something gives, and with a toothy grin and a muttered, "Aha!" he wrenches the improvised lock-picks around.

A quiet snap later, the drawer slides open.

All three boys lean forward with bated breath and peer inside.

Kenny lets out a long, low whistle of appreciation, and Butters actually fist-pumps the air. If Tweek weren't so busy cringing at the contents of the drawer, then he'd cringe at Butters instead.

"Jackpot!"

"Yeah dude, sweet."

Is it, though? Is it really? Tweek isn't sure he's looking at the same things they apparently are, because to him it looks a heck of a lot like a porn mag, a bottle of lube, a hip flask and a couple of suspicious looking baggies. As far as he's concerned, this is just a little cliché. (Also, ew. Why the fuck would someone keep lube and porn at a high school?) "Urgh. Sick fucker," he says loudly.

Both Kenny and Butters chuckle at his reaction. Kenny's handing over the other boy's hair clip and reaching inside for the baggies. One is filled with a sizeable, pale green lump of dried weed, and the other, with suspicious white powder. "Sweet," Kenny says again.
Butters, meanwhile, extracts the magazine. On the front cover is a bodacious lady in nothing but strips of shiny black leather, ball-gag in mouth and shoulders arched so far back, it's gotta be painful. He begins flicking through the pages, stopping every now and then to tilt the thing from side to side, as if he's confused. A good portion of the pages seem to be gummed together.

Almost feeling cheated, (though what he was expecting, he isn't sure), Tweek leaves them to their rifling, taking his paper, envelope and sparkly pen, and flopping down at the nearest desk. While Kenny and Butters empty the drawer of its contents and bag all their new finds, Tweek stares down at the blank paper, wondering what the fuck he's meant to be writing.

Eventually, he settles on a single, sloppily written line:

"Mrs Christie
I'll try not swearing or being late but let's be real, your lectures are shit and you're a bitch, so I can't promise anything.
Tweek Tweak"

Satisfied with his work (it's not like it's ever going to get back to Mrs Christie anyway, so there's really no point even trying), he crams it into the envelope and starts scrolling through all the latest news stories on his cell. The other boys settle at the desks on Tweek's left, apparently growing bored of their filching. Butters hunches forward over his desk to doodle on a double spread in the porno mag, and Kenny's leaning his chair back on two legs in a way that makes Tweek's eye tic (goddamn, he could slip and break his neck if he's not careful), and rolling joints. He's using torn off squares of Miss Behaviour's fancy-assed paper in place of rizlas.

Tweek spends his time skimming through articles on the current political climate (Jesus Christ), the national suicide rates in different professions, and the health risks of obesity in children under the age of ten. Mostly, he just ends up shaking and muttering under his breath about it all.

At about half five Miss Behaviour returns, peeking around the door with a smile and a wave that ought to be endearing, but just makes Tweek feel a little like a toddler. (Arguably, even a toddler would feel patronised by the way she walks inside and holds her hand up in the air to get their attention.)

"Alright, everyone! How're y'all doing?" Silence follows her question, but she continues on regardless. "D'you need anymore time? I can come back in another half hour if you'd like-"

"Nope," Kenny says (shouts, really), the legs of his chair slamming back down onto the floor with an almighty bang. "All done."

"Me too." Butters chimes in.

"Argh," says Tweek, shoving his cell into his pocket and waving his letter up in the air perhaps a little manically. Fuck, he wants to get out of here.

From the back, the girls (who Tweek honestly forgot all about), also give affirmatives about having finished and, with a round of enthusiastic clapping, Miss Behaviour says, "Oh, children, I'm so proud of you. I can really sense the hard work you've put into your detention today, and how good this will be for you, as you move on ahead and continue to grow."

Listening to her wax poetic about the "healing powers of the written word" makes Tweek twitch so bad he thinks he's strained his neck, but eventually they all get out, traiiling down the corridors and into the parking lot in time for the final bus. It's dark out, and the air is so bitter that his nose is going numb by the time they're clambering on board. The inside of the coach is barely any warmer than the
air outside, and their breaths escape them in plumes of white. Tweek curls down into his usual seat and doesn't question the boys slipping into the spots directly behind him, though the hair on the back of his neck does stand up.

They don't have to wait long until the door at the front of the bus rattles shut and the engine splutters to life.

As they're pulling onto the main road, Kenny rises out of his seat and leans down over the top of Tweek's backrest. "Yo, dude, we're gonna go light up some doobies round the back of City Hall, maybe try whatever's in the flask. Wanna come?"

"E-eurgh, why?"

Kenny shrugs. "Why not? It's not like we've got anything better to do, is it?"

"Yeah, c'mon bud! Don't be a wet blanket," Butters pipes up, face poking out from the aisle.

Holding back from his gut reaction to shoot them both down, Tweek pauses. Actually considers the offer. Funnily enough, he doesn't want to go home. The idea of spending another endless evening in his room, fighting back the urge to text Craig and generally just feeling sorry for himself, sounds like utter horse shit. He'd rather hang out with Stotch and McCormick than be left to his own devices.

(Huh. Now ain't that a revelation.)

"No one else is—is gonna be there, right?" Because if any of the others from Kenny's little gang do turn up, Tweek thinks he might actually have to kill himself. Especially considering just how obnoxious all of them are.

"Nah, man. Just us. I mean, it's hardly like we planned this out, y'know?"

"Come on," Butters says, wheedling.

Feeling like he'll probably regret the decision later on, Tweek just averts his eyes and shrugs. "F-fine, whatever."

The hand ruffling his hair a moment later is almost enough to have him reconsidering his agreement.

When the bus pulls up to a stop just outside the Police Station, the three of them slump down the steps and walk out across the road to the open stretch of grass on the far side of City Hall. The snow's still pretty deep from the weekend, but it seems that since the temperature's dipped below freezing now, the clouds have taken a temporary leave of absence. The sky overhead is deep, deep blue, and already hundreds of stars are starting to glow in the inky darkness. Tweek follows behind Kenny, who's stomping them out a path with his steel-capped boots, to a small, tightknit gathering of fir trees.

One after another, they duck under the low branches to the slightly less snowy ground below, sitting close together in a circle. Tweek pulls the bottom of his jacket further over his ass before sitting down, back to a tree trunk and knees pressed uncomfortably close to the other two boys'. His fingers and face have already gone numb, and now there're pine needles poking him through his pants. The sidewalk, only about twenty feet away from them, is completely obscured by the dense press of branches, and Tweek feels like he's been wrapped up in a whole different world.

He shivers, shoulders hunched, and only half listens as Butters chatters quietly about his Psychology
From his other side, Kenny's retrieved a slightly wonky joint from his parker pocket and, balancing it between his lips, digs out a zippo lighter. It takes a few long moments for a flame to catch on the end of the joint, but soon Kenny's sucking in such a deep breath that Tweek's chest aches just from watching him. Holding his breath, Kenny passes the rollup to his right, and Butters pauses in his prattling long enough to follow Kenny's lead, sucking in a long mouthful and barely spluttering at all.

When it's handed to him, Tweek fumbles, almost dropping it right into his lap. This has Kenny snorting and Butters choking on a giggle, clouds of smoke floating up around their heads.

Irritated by his own floundering, he shoves the end of the joint into his mouth and inhales. Hot, sweet smoke floods over his tongue and scorches its way down his throat, and he fights back the instinctive urge to cough.

Eyes watering, he passes it back over to Kenny, and holds his breath in for as long as possible before letting it go. He watches the smoke curl up into the still air in a long stream from his nose, and he tugs at the ends of his scarf.

The circle lapses into relative silence, spliff being passed back and forth amongst them until, after his fifth drag, Kenny's waving his hand in Tweek's direction. "So dude, I never asked. What'd you get stuck in detention for?"

Clearing his throat, he shrugs one shoulder. "Hrmn. Nothing good. Just came in late to, uhm, art class first thing Monday. Then swore by accident."

"Aw geez, that sucks," Butters says, voice wheezing a little around another large breath. He passes it on to Tweek and, as he's taking another toke on it, continues, "You shouldn't have got stuck with detention for that."

"Nah man, not when you compare it to the fact that you got put in for burning all the books in the Religious Education section of the library," Kenny says as he retrieves the flask from his rucksack and gives it an experimental sniff.

"Eurgh?" Tweek grunts in surprise, and ends up with a hacking cough. All he can do is shove the joint at Kenny, lean forwards and let Butters pat his back until he's able to suck in ice cold air again. He's starting to feel a little lightheaded, though he's not sure if it's from the weed or an aftereffect of having almost just choked on his own tongue.

"Oh come on, Ken, it was a couple of books. Not the whole section." Butters rolls his eyes - maybe pouts a little. "Besides, I'd rather that than being caught spankin' the monkey in class."

Tweek, vividly recalling how Kenny had admitted to jerking off several times during Chem Lab while they'd been playing truth or dare at Token's party, can't help the shrill, grossed out giggles that escape him. "Sweet Jesus, what the fuck is wrong with you, McCormick?"

Apparently having deemed the flask safe, Kenny takes a long swig. "My dudes, a little less judgement, if you please. Can you really blame me? I'm a healthy teenaged boy, and Ms Night's a fucking babe."

"Urff, sick."

Scowling, Butters reaches out and slaps Kenny upside the head. "Now, that's no way to speak about a lady, Ken... Besides, Tweek's right. That's gross. She's gotta be at least fifty. I don't even wanna
think about what's goin' on for her down there."

"Aw, c'mon baby, don't be jelly. She might be a fine specimen of womanhood, but you're still the only person I wanna bend over, if you know what I'm saying." He actually waggles his eyebrows.

(Butters' round face blotchy-red and strained, and Kenny's bony arse pumping away—)

Oh God, no. That is not an image he needs stuck in his head. Tweek thinks he might throw up. "Augh. Fucking hell man, I don't need to hear this shit." He waves off the flask when it's offered to him (there's no way he's touching alcohol again anytime soon, thanks), but does take another drag from the very short rollup.

The look that Butters gives Kenny is utterly unimpressed. "Yeah, keep on dreamin', pal."

Once they finish their first joint, Kenny pulls out a second, and they continue to make jabs at each other as they share it. Tweek stays quiet for the most part.

The weed does a nice job of taking the edge off his frayed nerves, and the silence of the world around them, moon glowing faintly throw the branches, is an added balm. He drifts, head soft and fingers tingling, in a nice middle ground between relaxed and hyper-alert. His senses shift in a way that's hard to pinpoint, like sand through his fingers.

After about eight o'clock, Kenny's finished the hip flask and is contemplating the little white baggy (Tweek doesn't have the energy or the focus to express in words how much of a dumb idea he thinks taking that stuff is, but he aims to convey the sentiment through a series of grunts and sighs). Seeing the time, Butters starts complaining about how he's gonna miss his curfew if he doesn't head back home soon, and all three unanimously agree to call it a night.

They half crawl, half shuffle their way out from under the fir trees and zigzag their back across the crunching snow towards the sidewalk.

Tweek pauses, standing out in the open, and tilts his head back to look at the stars. He watches them glisten and shimmer, thinking about how much Craig loves space. There really is something magical about them that he wishes he could share with the other boy.

And then Kenny mentions City Wok, and the moment is broken.

Tweek's dry mouth waters.

Chapter End Notes

so just out of curiosity, what other south park pairings do you guys like? just asking bc if there are any that really strike your fancy, i might just end up throwing some more in, in the background (provided it fits with the plot) ;))
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

I promise that there will be more fluff and humour again soon. soon..

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Raiding the refrigerator is the first thing Tweek does when he gets home, gathering bowls of leftover chicken wings, steamed vegetables and mash into his arms, and piling it all onto a plate. He zaps it in the microwave and, as he waits for it to finish, returns the dishes to the fridge.

Meal hot and steaming, Tweek walks back through the living room, straight past the television (which his parents are watching from the couch) and towards the staircase, feeling like he's floating.

"Did you have a good night, Pumpkin?" his mom asks, and the words take a moment to sink through the pleasant softness of his head.

Tweek pauses, grins wide and easy. "Yeah, mom. Real— real cool. The sky's huge tonight. You can see the entire universe out there."

"And Craig – was he with you? How is he? I don't think we've seen him for a few days," says his dad. "I hope everything's okay between the two of you, Son."

Of course he has to be a downer, Tweek thinks. It's not enough that his dad constantly stresses him out with his interference and general pushiness, but now he's got to try killing Tweek's buzz, too. Can't the man just let him keep one thing for himself? "Hrn. He's fine." The blonde rolls his eyes and starts walking again. "I'm going upstairs now to eat."

"Alright, hon."

He continues up to his room. (Maybe stomps a little as he goes.)

Unfortunately, there's only so much that being high can do to help combat stress, and thanks to his dad's unwelcome mention of the other boy, the rest of Tweek's evening isn't quite as pleasant as it might have otherwise been. He tries to catch up on the Netflix series they were watching together over winter break, but struggles to focus on the plot line or see humour in any of the cheesy jokes. Tweek gets about halfway through his dinner before he goes from ravenous to queasy, and it isn't just because Craig's not there beside him. He sets the plate aside and tugs the lid of his laptop shut halfway through a fight scene.

Mostly, it's the little things getting to him. The mess on his bedroom floor itches in the soles of his feet and catches his eye until he has to get up and begin tidying, folding jumpers and pants, and kicking coffee-stained tees into a pile by the door. He sets all the art equipment he finds scattered about on the floor in a row along his desk and is dismayed as the surface is buried. Hundreds of pencils, sticks of charcoal, chalks, oil pastels, gel pens, pallet knives, paintbrushes, scrapers, sponges, fountain pens, crayons, glue sticks... it just keeps going.

The blonde has to move away from the desk eventually, feeling inexplicably frustrated, and instead begins ordering his craft papers and stretched, unused canvases. Those, too, he has to abandon when
he realises he’s got no where to store them.

He stumbles across abandoned Lego blocks in dusty nooks along the skirting board, and even rediscovering an ancient, dried out box of cheap face paints he'd used in a lot of his childhood games, shoved below his wardrobe.

His room is huge, and it feels like he's clearing up years and years worth of clutter – stripping away all the bits of him that he doesn't need. The bin at the end of the bed is filled with old receipts and pencil nibs, and ends up overflowing when he starts getting rid of all his broken childhood projects. (His first clay figurines – more deformed blobs than anything distinguishable – and the lolly-stick houses he was obsessed with making when he was eleven get binned.)

Somewhere along the way he digs his old keyboard out from under his bed, and he runs his fingers over the greyed keys. Tweek stops his manic, disorganised cleaning. He pulls the cheap instrument up onto his lap, back against the side of his bed and legs stretched out in front of him, and finds himself wanting to play but unwilling to move. He has no idea where the power chord is, anyway.

(Hasn't played in so long he isn't even sure he'd still know how.)

Scratching a smudge of dirt off of some of the special effects buttons near the speakers, Tweek realises that he misses taking piano lessons. It was one of his 'embarrassing' childhood pleasures. When he hit middle school, instead of following his dreams of becoming a musician, he quit his lessons to spend more time with his friends. (Mostly Craig.) He knows he wouldn't have ever been good enough to make a career out of his music, but he'd been passionate about it in the same way he was about his crafts.

Eventually he comes back down to earth, realising the lights are out on the landing and that his parents must have gone to bed. The half eaten plateful of food has long since turned cold, and his neck is beginning to ache from the awkward angle he's been sat in. The blonde shoves the keyboard off the one side and clambers to his feet, stretching out his limbs and peering around at the progress he's made; he blinks hard, cringing at the sight that greets him.

Holy shit.

For all of the cleaning he's just done, he thinks his room looks even worse than before. Somehow, he was expecting it to Rapunzel itself into tidiness. What he forgot to take into consideration is that he's goddamn awful at any form of housework, so the effort was doomed to failure before he'd even started. He isn't a neat person by nature. (Also, he isn't a Disney princess, so there's that.)

After a quick shower, he climbs into bed, muzzy headed but not nearly as jittery as usual. Marijuana apparently works wonders for his anxiety.

For once, it doesn't take long for sleep to find him.

... 

He can't breathe.

He can't breathe, the tears won't stop, and he's trying to run but it's like wading through tar. The flat ground keeps surging up around him – tries to knock him off his feet – and he's scared, so scared. Alone. Losing his mind.

Tweek's going to the only place he can think of, the only place where anyone'll ever listen to him and let him be himself. The only place that someone might understand.
The only place left where he could be rejected for this.

Craig. Craig.

By the time he gets to the door he's fallen twice, maybe three times. His palms are scraped open, his pants torn at the knee, and his cheek bloody where his arms gave out under him. His head feels like it's going to burst, or maybe his chest will cave in, and it's hard to keep himself upright.

It takes him stabbing at the doorbell for what feels like an eternity before anyone answers. When it's yanked open, he falls into the warm, bony chest and gangly arms of the only person who gets him. The only person that really matters.

Craig says something, but Tweek can't hear it over the thundering of his heart. The other boy struggles to hold him up, ends up dropping to the floor with his arms around Tweek and his back against the carpet.

"Sorry, I'm sorry, sorrysorrysorrysorry," is all that he can say.

If he could, Tweek would cling to Craig's t-shirt and never let go, but his hands won't curl into fists and he can't make out anything but warmth-

(And Craig will understand, Craig will have the answers, he always does. He's okay. He's okay, there's nothing wrong.)

Before he knows it, he's being pushed away from the ground and hoisted up to his feet – half carried up the stairs because he can't make anything out past his tears and apologies. His feet are filled with cement.

Stripe squeaks out a loud, wavering greeting as they stumble through the door and it should make him happy but Tweek can't stop crying.

He's pressed down onto the edge of the bed and he collapses onto his side, face in Craig's pillow. Turns his nose into it. The bed dips as Craig climbs over him, starts rubbing his back in slow circles —

And Craig is the only person Tweek ever wants to touch him. Craig is the only person he can cry in front of. Craig is the one he falls asleep thinking of and the first person he wants to tell when anything happens. When he's with Craig the rest of the fucking world stops mattering.

When he's with Craig, he realises that the lie he's been living for the last four years isn't a lie at all. "Eurgh. Th-ey were r-right, they were- were all right," he says, once he can breathe a little easier.

"Shh, dude, it's okay."

"N-no it's - urgh - not. It's not. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, sweet Jesus. Y-you're gonna - hng - hate me. This is gonna mess up e-everything."

"You can tell me anything," says Craig, and Tweek wants to roll over, wants to press his face into Craig's stomach and wrap his arms around Craig's waist and—

Fuck! Fuck, he can't believe it. Everyone was right. All along.

(They knew before Tweek ever did.)

But he trusts Craig with his life, and even though he's terrified – so scared he thinks his heart might
stop – he's got to do it. Got to say the words out loud.

"Mmrph. Y-you promise? Promise it won't— won't change anything?"

"Of course it won't. You're my best friend, dude."

He sucks in a huge breath, scrunches his face up tight and says:

"Th-there's someone I like."

It's you, he thinks.

"It's a boy."

It's you, he thinks.

"They, nngh- they were all right."

It's you, you, you, he thinks. Doesn't say it out loud, but it's so obvious it hurts.

"I'm g-gay."

The hand rubbing his back stops.

There's silence, the kind of silence where Tweek can hear the laws of the universe shifting.

It's the catch of his breath as he waits for some sign that this is okay; that being in love with the one person he thought he wouldn't fall for doesn't matter.

It's in the prayer that's been rattling through his head since he was nine, without even knowing what it meant – God, please God, I'm sorry but please let me have this, please let me have Craig, just Craig, I don't care about anything else – and the way those words have flipped him upside down.

There is a world of possibility in the silence that follows his statement - a world where they're more than just a fake couple that the town forced together for their own gains. There is a world where he can really, truly love Craig, and where the other boy could love him too. Life will never be the same again.

And then Craig pulls back from him. Jerks away like he's been burned.

"Get out."

In that moment, he knows he's made a huge mistake.

...

Tweek's eyes drift open to the darkness of the room. He's shifted onto his back at some point during the night, and his limbs are spread out wide around him, the blankets caught around his legs and his night shirt riding up high over his stomach.

It's cold.

The blonde rolls, reaching down to untangle the blanket and tug it back up over him, until all that's left exposed is the top of a wild blonde head.

Below the blankets, he wipes his hands across wet cheeks and exhales, slow and shaky. There's that
familiar feeling of regret that sinks into his bones and slowly crushes down on his windpipe. When he
loses his eyes, he could be there again, the boy he loves pulling away from him in disgust, and his
entire existence crumbling.

He isn't.

Instead he's here, alone in a room filled with a thousand little fragments of half-forgotten memories.
He lost a lot three years ago when he came out to Craig. For a while there things only got worse, and no
matter what his therapist told him in the aftermath, it hasn't gotten easier to think back on. There
were blessings in amongst the steaming shitheap of his freshman year, though. Somehow,
miraculously, Craig came back to him – forgave him for ruining their friendship with his ugly,
unrequited feelings and his selfishness – and they almost managed to piece things together again.
They were almost back to the uncomplicated friendship they'd had before. Back to letting that awful
fucking year fade away into nothing more than a well-healed scar.

Almost.

Not quite.

Because wounds with ragged edges never really heal right, once infection sets in.

That's why this time, Tweek wanted to end things properly. He wanted to suture the wound before it
could tear open any wider. Before he lost Craig for good. Neat, clean cuts that would have a chance
to stitch themselves back up.

But Tweek has never been a very neat person.

(And love doesn't just go away because you want it to.)

Chapter End Notes

please don't hate me? :'DD
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

i got woken up by my cat just now and realised i hadn't actually uploaded this new chapter before passing out at my desk. LOL.

(it's largely unedited, so as usual, i'll come back in the morning to read it over again :')) )

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thursday... doesn't happen, as far as Tweek's concerned. He's more than happy to strike it off the record.

It goes by in a nauseating blur of physical discomfort, lightheadedness and flashbacks to his nightmare. He's pretty sure that at one point he spots Craig down the length of the corridor, but he isn't sure. All he knows is that he has to be taken to the nurse's office because he's hyperventilating, and apparently panic attacks frighten the other students. He spends the afternoon curled up on one of the emergency futons, rocking back and forth between cold sweats and a dizzying, nonsensical fear.

Tweek's picked up by his mom some time before the end of the day and is taken home. He's violently sick, but he doesn't think that he cries, which some small, apathetic part of his brain categorises as a positive result. More tears would just be an embarrassment, at this point.

His mom is as sweet as ever, quiet and steady. They don't tell his dad about Tweek having to come home, because the less that the man knows, the less he'll worry. And the less Richard Tweak worries, the less overbearing he is.

It's only the reminder that he has an appointment with his therapist on Saturday that settles Tweek's nerves. He can get through this – he's been through worse. This is nothing. Olive will let him talk it all out.

The blonde lapses into a dreamless sleep some time in the early evening and blacks out right through until Friday morning. He wakes up groggy and heavy headed, but otherwise... okay. Slightly removed from the situation, and certainly in a better state.

Despite his mom's quiet concerns, Tweek leaves for school. He doesn't want to draw anymore attention to himself in school than is necessary, considering the severity of his breakdown the previous day, and he's not about to let this thing win. Tweek Tweak iss past letting his shitty mental health rule his life.

... Walking down the aisle to his seat on the bus, Tweek is surprised to see Butters and Kenny in the row directly behind his favourite spot, again. He adjusts his grip on the strap of his bag and slips down into his seat, receiving a distracted wave from Butters and a light smack on the shoulders from Kenny by way of greeting. Their previous conversation pauses with his arrival. "Yo dude. We didn't catch you, yesterday. Heard you collapsed after fifth period, or something."
"Yeah, you alright, little buddy? You look kinda washed out in your cheeks."

The bus driver revs the engine and they lurch forwards, the floor rattling a little beneath them. Tweek digs his fingers into the seat in front of him and tries his best not to flinch too much. "Ragh— hrm. I'm fine. Had a bad turn's all." God, he hates being a jittery freak. He hates it when people treat him like he might fall apart. Tweek doesn't want to talk about this. "What— what were you guys talking about?"

Even though Butters is peering through the gap between the seats with a furrow in his eyebrows and a wonky tilt to his mouth, he doesn't press. Tweek's fondness for the round-faced boy grows a little in that moment. "Ken's just bein' an idiot again, is all."

The blonde in question snorts, quick to pick up the thread of their last conversation. "No, I was being philosophical. I was contemplating a future as a vigilante and a vagabond." He waggles one eyebrow at Tweek. "You know, Robin Hood style."

"Well, dang Ken, I get that you don't like being super poor and all but I'm still pretty sure the answer isn't gonna be to break into someplace like Skeeters, which is what you were actually talking about. That ain't got nothing to do with philosophy – just stupidity. Besides, Skeeter's not rich, so you're not some hero for thinking of robbing from him. You're more a bad apple, than anything else."

Kenny mutters something that sounds suspiciously like, "He's still better off than us though, isn't he?" After a moment he fires back at his companion, much louder, "Dude look, I'm not saying I'm actually gonna do it, but hypothetically speaking it'd be easy, right? What's the worst that could happen?"

"Eugh. Y-you could die a slow, painful death after b-being impaled on one of the bar taps. And then the mutant rats could find you," Tweek says before he can help himself, even though he's not a part of this discussion. He's probably not the best person to try answering this sort of question anyway, considering his proclivity to look at life from the worst possible angle. Especially when he's already in a morbid mood.

Both of the other blondes rise out of their seats to peer down at him, eyes wide. Tweek turns so that his back is against the window, and they're both in his line of sight. (He doesn't like people leaning over him.)

The beat of silence following his statement is broken by Kenny letting out a loud, slightly hysterical laugh. "Dude, holy shit, so true. I'd definitely die from something like that."

"Oh shut it, Ken," Butters is saying, looking very pale and more than a little rattled. "Th-that sorta thing wouldn't happen, and you're not getting out of talking about how dumb this is, just 'cause you wanna make a joke out of it."

Tweek squints at the other teens, feeling like he's missing the punchline of a really fucked up joke.

After wiping his eyes, Kenny slouches against Tweek's backrest on crossed forearms, his trademark grin still in place. "Ugh, go on then. Tell me why I shouldn't do it. What else could go wrong? Get this over with."

"Oh, dunno... for one, you could get caught by the cops and put in prison," Butters says, face going from pale to flushed in a heartbeat.

This idea is waved off. "With this town's backwards police force? Please."
It doesn't take long for Tweek to think up another possibility.

"Erk. Marsh's weirdass uncle goes there a lot, right? Well, he might've – Jesus Christ – set up traps round the bar to catch all the shit that lives in the basement. Get caught by the pointy end of one of those a-and you're fucked, dude. Fucked. Class A poison e-everywhere." He gesticulates wildly to emphasise his point, and then tugs at his scarf.

"Skeeter could catch you on tape and tell your parents. Then there'd be heck to pay."

"Hagh. Forget CCTV. There might be some kind— some kind of infrared tracking device set on the doors and windows to scan for intruders, and then shoot 'em up with horse tranquillisers, like in that one hunting show." He's seen far weirder in this town over the years – it wouldn't even warrant any kind of special acknowledgement.

"Community service. With Barbrady." Oh, that is a bad one. (Tweek can't think of any way to beat that, but tries anyway.)

"You could slip on the ice outside and brain yourself on the door handle."

"The till could be empty."

Kenny holds up a hand, looking between the two of them. "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Okay, I get it. Though honestly I don't know who I'm more worried out, between the two of you. Your imaginations are fucking weird. Especially you, dude." He shakes a finger at Tweek, tutting. "Jesus, it's not healthy to overthink everything this much."

Tweek glowers, but can't refute any of that. (Story of his life, really.)

"Yeah, well, it ain't healthy to be a dumby, neither," says Butters, adjusting the rainbow pin holding back his bangs.


"Hypothetically, a crowbar, I guess." Kenny shrugs.

"Oh, good," Tweek says. "Be-because you don't even wanna hear – urk – the statistical odds of you shooting yourself in the head."

This actually seems to catch Kenny's attention. "Uhm... yeah dude, I kinda do."

(Tweek catches him glancing down at his rucksack, and twitches. Shrieks a little.)

He's opening his mouth to release a tirade of gruesome, panicky statistics (and maybe try saving Kenny from his own stupidity, because holy fucking hell, what's he even doing with a gun in his school bag?), when Butters throws his hands up in the air and falls back into his seat. "Hamburgers, you fellas are just as bad as each other. I give up."

Tweek pauses. Looks between an irate Stotch and a grinning McCormick.

"Hey, cheer up, sweetcheeks. I could be talking about robbing the bank." Only when Kenny chuckles and reaches over to ruffle Butters hair does Tweek contemplate that this whole conversation might have been a joke. As in, actually hypothetical. Which is kind of awkward, considering how serious Tweek was being about it all.
(This isn't the sort of humor he's used to.)

Still, it's a great distraction from the stresses of the previous day.

... 

Despite how undeniably awful Thursday had been, Tweek likes to think that he's gotten a good hold over his emotions again, and in a particularly short span of time too. He's only had to be sent out of class once for disturbing the classroom with excessive shrieking, and when he's called on by Ms Night in Chem Lab, his answer isn't just an incoherent screech, even though his conversation with Butters and Kenny the other night makes him want to retch. (Please, God, don't let this be the seat McCormick got caught jerking off in.) He actually manages to say, "Aurgh, shit. I don't even— how am I meant to know, man? My hand wasn't even raised."

Unfortunately, peering down at his timetable after first period, he realizes that one thing has slipped his mind. In the whirlwind of the last few days, he completely forgot he had Photography last period. With Craig.

He's shaking for hours after this revelation, horrified that he'd somehow forgotten.

The problem is, while most teachers choose to separate them, Mr Phillips makes the conscious decision to pair them together every class. At first Tweek thought it might be because the guy's one of their crazed fans (a creepily common occurrence), but over the course of the last semester, he's come to respect Mr Phillips' teaching method. With Craig working on all the physical elements of the class with Tweek, he makes less mistakes. None of the equipment tends to explode, and he rarely sets anything on fire. In fact, Tweek's only fucked up a couple rolls of film, which is nothing short of a miracle. Craig's been invaluable when it comes to preventing things from going wrong around him.

This isn't necessarily going to be the case today, though.

It's already been a long day, and right around fourth period, Tweek's poor mood crashes and burns. He's got Math with Clyde, and even though they don't have to interact in any way, he spends the entire lesson on the receiving end of a very heated glare.

There's no doubt in his mind. Craig must have let slip to the brunette that they 'broke up', and while Tweek really should understand - Clyde has always been close competition for the spot of Craig's best friend, so it makes sense that Craig would go to him to chat about the whole thing - he can't help but feel a little stung. Tweek hasn't talked to anyone yet. Not one person. (This isn't something to brag about, he realizes. It's just a sad truth that he isn't close to anyone else the way that Craig is with Clyde.)

At the end of the class Clyde barges past his desk, muttering, "You're a selfish shit."

In a fit of pique (Goddamnit it, he hates Clyde and his stupid interfering) Tweek snarls, bunches up a sheet of his notes and lobs it at the back of his head. (It somehow misses its huge fucking target, and he isn't sure Clyde even notices, but still. The intention is there.)

That short interaction really doesn't endear him to the idea of spending more time with the gang, and so he skips lunch again. He sits on a low wall out in the courtyard and isn't particularly surprised that Token and Nichole just so happen to walk past, though he is a little embarrassed. They stop to chat with him about a potential study group they're setting up with a few other kids for Sunday, thankfully avoiding any kind of mention of his panic attacks, even though he knows everyone's heard about it. (He's caught people pointing and whispering behind their hands all day, when they think he can't see them.)
"You can come over and join in if you want, Tweek," Nichole says through a smile that softens her heart shaped face.

"Yeah man, it's just going to be a chill evening at mine. We'll probably end up ordering pizza."

"But – nggh – guys, I'm not smart, or good at studying. And I don't need to be pitied just because I've been a little messed up recently. That's just way too much pressure." Even if it is a considerate thought, Tweek is about as likely to go hang out with a group of childhood acquaintances – labouring over schoolwork for hours, in total silence - as he is to go on a road trip across Europe. A study group sounds like hell.

The long-time couple share a look, Nichole leaning into Token's side, her hands tucked into the nook of his arm. "Just... think about it, okay? If you change your mind, send one of us a text." She begins to tug the tall boy away.

But he digs his heels in and holds Tweek's eye contact. "We're not doing it because we pity you, dude. It's just that we haven't seen you around, and we don't want you to spend the whole weekend on your own, moping."

"Token."

The boy shrugs, looking just a little like he's trying not to smirk. "What?"

By the time Tweek's thought of something witty to fire back at him, they're halfway across the courtyard.

Their offer actually makes him feel better, even if he has no intention of accepting. He supposes he can think more on that after he's survived an entire class with Craig, though.

Chapter End Notes

you guys ready for some more Creek interaction? :DD
Heart thumping, Tweek enters the classroom, feeling weirdly exposed. Even though the table he's been set to share with Craig is empty, every step towards it has his heart trying to climb up into his throat.

He's one of the earliest students to arrive, having slipped out of last period the second the bell rang, and navigating the corridors as fast as humanly possible in order to avoid the rush, or the stress of walking in and approaching the other boy when he's already sat down. This way, Tweek has control of his space, and doesn't have to feel as though he's unwelcome by approaching his table when Craig's already there.

With fingers that don't seem to be receiving any messages from his brain and a cold sweat breaking out across the back of his neck, Tweek shoves his notes down on the desktop and bounces the toe of his shoes against the linoleum. The tic under his right eye is pretty bad, but he's brought a flask of coffee with him into the class (whether Mr Phillips likes it or not), and he takes the occasional, lukewarm sip to settle his nerves.

One by one the other students file in, chatting amongst themselves and generally just loitering by the door instead of sitting down.

Photography is a popular elective among the seniors in South Park High, and as a result, there are a couple of separate classes spread out over the course of the week, like all of their main subjects. It just so happens that this is a class Tweek shares with Kenny, as well as Craig. Although they don't usually hang out, his recent chats with the other boy makes his thundering heart ease a little in recognition.

He gives a jittery wave, and Kenny spots him.

The scruffy blonde saunters his way across the room, forgoing the group of girls – Bebe, Red and Sally – that he'd walked in with and shooting Tweek one of his usual sharklike grins— with the addition of an uncomfortable amount of blood. Whoa. He looks like he's been in a fight with a brick wall.

"Hey dude, you look like shit," Kenny says by way of greeting.

Tweek, eyeing his busted lip and his rapidly swelling eye, thinks this is maybe a little rich, coming from the other boy. "Hah. At least I don't look like I just got the crap kicked outta me, m-man. What the fuck happened?"

Waving it off, Kenny leans against the stool in front of Tweek’s desk and amps up his bloody smirk.
"Ah, just roughed it up a little with one or two of the guys in lunch break. Good fun."

This... this isn't something Tweek is sure he believes. They aren't actually allowed to roughhouse in the cafeteria (surprisingly enough), so he thinks that Kenny must have gotten into an actual fight. Still, he's not about to be hypocritical and dig where he isn't invited. If Kenny wants his privacy, then Tweek'll let him have it. "Your lip's – *hnnng* – split real damn bad. Looks like you'll need stitches or, or some shit, dude. God."

The idiot reaches up to poke at his battered face, and pulls back with a wince. "Nah, it's cool man. I've had worse. This is nothing."

Still, it's making Tweek uncomfortable to see the two halves of the cut shifting around like that. (Jesus, did he bite *right through* his lip or something?) "*Urk.* Dude, you seriously need a— a bandaid. Or some tissue, at least. That's messed up." He begins rummaging through his jacket pockets for something to press against it.

Nothing.

"Man, it's fine. Really."

With a twitch in his cheek, he stands up, shoving away from his desk and walking towards the sink area of the studio classroom, near the darkroom. He grabs an unnecessarily large fistful of paper towels from the dispenser over the basin (it's a good thing it's still the first week of term, because otherwise it'd be empty), and rushes back to Kenny, almost tripping over his own feet on the way.

"H-here."

When he holds the scrunched up towels out and all Kenny does is raise his eyebrows at Tweek like he's being overdramatic, he scowls and shoves them roughly against his face. The other boy yelps and flails, grabbing at Tweek's wrist in order to push him away. "Fucking hell, *ow* dude. Easy on the face. That's my best asset."

"Take the fucking towels and clean yourself up then, man. No one wants to see that shit."

Fingers still wrapped around his wrist to hold his trembling hand still, Kenny tugs at the tissues until Tweek lets go, and gingerly presses a clean section against his busted mouth. "There, happy?" he says, voice muffled by the paper.

Tweek yanks his hand free and shakes the appendage out (really, *ew*, people need to stop touching him for no reason), scowling. He's about to reply when a body looms up behind Kenny's slouched figure, and a familiar voice says, "Move, McCormick. You're in my way."

This time it's Tweek's turn to yelp (*"Sweet Jesus!*") and jerk away like someone's jabbed him in an open wound.

Craig's standing beside them, one hand shoved into his jean pocket. There's a smart blue folder tucked under his arm. He's got a scowl on his face like someone just deleted his Instagram account, and he's wearing one of his old, faded blue bobble hats rather than the chullo. Tweek can't help the way his eyes linger on the ugly fleece thing for a little longer than necessary, or the grimace that works its way onto his face.

His attention's drawn back away from Craig briefly when Kenny clears his throat. He waggles his eyebrows at Tweek like he's sharing some kind of inside joke (Tweek can't think what the hell it could possibly be, given the circumstances), and says around the bunched up tissues, "Sure dude, sure. I was just off anyway."
With that, he pushes himself away from the stool and makes a beeline for his seat, which is nicely tucked in next to some of the ex-Raisins girls. They turn towards him and titter at whatever undoubtedly cheesy greeting he gives them, like it's the best thing they've ever heard.

Tweek makes a disgusted, panicky sound in the back of his throat because, shit, he's been ditched in favour of chasing skirt, and now he's left with the one person he could quite happily avoid for another year. He turns to glance at Craig, half expecting the other boy to still be frowning down at him, but is shocked to see that he's been walked straight past. The taller boy is easily settling into his half of the desk.

And so it is that despite making sure he arrived early, the blonde still ends up feeling like he's intruding on Craig's space.

(How is this fair?)

Choking back a wail of frustration at himself for getting up to help the stupid blonde prat, he stumble around the desk, giving Craig a wide berth, and plops himself down in his seat so smoothly that he knocks his elbow against the edge of the table. In the process of clutching at the sore appendage, his knees knock into Craig's.

Warmth.

Sparks shoot out from the point of contact and he freezes, eyes wide.

It only lasts a heartbeat though, because in the next the other boy is shifting away from him and breaking the contact.

Gulping, he jerks his leg back onto his side of the desk.

A moment later, Mr Phillips enters the room with his usual dramatic flare, shiny silver dress shirt and hot pink tie clashing awfully. "Hello, students! Happy New Year to you all. I hope everyone had a pleasant holiday." The man moves and talks with such a natural flare that he draws all eyes to him. (This could also just be because he gesticulates wildly as he talks, and it's kind of like watching a human-sized mosquito flailing around.)

A handful of the girls in the class reply in kind, but Tweek just slumps back in his seat and shakes. His leg starts nervously jumping and his fingers play with the tassels at the end of his scarf. Sweet Jesus, he's got another full hour of sitting here with his fake ex-boyfriend, who doesn't seem to be in a good mood, before he can leave to go home. Maybe Mr Phillips will let them do their own projects for the day - work on their photography portfolios, or something. Maybe. Hopefully.

(Please God, please, make today a little bit easier, he thinks.)

"Today, I thought we could do something special, as it's the first day back," Mr Phillips says, bending over to pull a large, apparently heavy box off the bookshelf beneath the board. "And we could pair off to do abstract shots around the school grounds."

Tweek's heart sinks. No luck, then.

The teacher sets the box down on his immaculately clean desk with a thud, and lifts the lid to show the group something that they haven't yet been allowed to use: traditional polaroid cameras.

Everyone around him begins to buzz with excitement, and Tweek shoots his friend a glance. Craig's leaning forward in his seat, back straight and eyes unblinking. There are spots of colour high on his cheeks. Agh. Cute. Tweek's stomach does a funny little flutter, and he resolutely turns his attention
back to the teacher.

The blonde personally doesn't see the appeal in polaroids, but he knows that they're pretty fashionable - aren't they considered aesthetically pleasing, or something? It's hardly a surprise that they're not allowed to use these cameras regularly though, since they cost a fucking bomb. He wanted to buy Craig one for Christmas, but there was no way he could afford it - not even a pre-owned one. A pack of eight monochrome films on their own started at about twenty bucks. Honestly, he's wondering how the school can even afford this lesson.

Mr Phillips continues to explain the project, saying something about each pair sharing a standard pack of film between them, and how they should make the most of their shots if they want to use them in their portfolios. He explains how he's going to be handing everyone passes for this period, so they can roam around the corridors at will. He highlights that he expects them to be quiet and well behaved – and how they can stay on after class ends, just so long as the cameras are returned by the time that the last clubs finish up. Most of the way through the lecture, Tweek blanks out, too busy trying not to look over at Craig, who's flipped open his folder and is bent over a blank sheet of paper to mind-map possible ideas.

Only Craig Tucker would take a fun, throwaway class like this and turn it into some sort of personal project. It makes Tweek feel weirdly on edge, but... not in a bad way. (Maybe if Craig's in a serious headspace this'll be more business-like, and less awkward.)

After a five-minute demonstration, and a reminder to check (and double check) the lighting, angle and focus of each shot, the cameras and their class passes are handed back along the rows to them. The noise level in the room instantly starts to rise.

When theirs reaches the table, Craig's hands are straight on it, turning it this way and that like he's studying some kind of precious gem. All Tweek sees is a particularly battered, clunky old camera, so dented and scuffed he's got no doubt it's been dropped on several occasions.

While the other pairs stand up and begin rushing out the room to hunt for their perfect shots, Craig sets the thing down and returns to his paper. Already expecting this (if there's one thing that Tweek's learned over the years of being his best friend, it's that there isn't a single thing that Craig Tucker rushes in life, if he can help it), Tweek pushes away from his desk and begins to walk around the emptying room, studying the well-placed posters on the wall, and poking at the dried-out sponge left in the basin, in order to fend off his impending restlessness.

My Phillips is lounging behind his desk, sipping on a bottle of Seltzer and flicking through a copy of Visionaire magazine. He totally ignores Tweek and his twitchy loitering, the same way that Craig does.

It takes fifteen minutes of wandering between desks and pacing over the stretch of space along the back wall, before Tweek finally snaps.

"Nrrrruuh. Dude, can we please just get on with this shit?"

"Language, Mr Tweak," says their teacher, in perhaps the blandest tone that the blonde's ever heard used for reprimanding.

His disturbance does the trick though, because Craig's blinking out of whatever thoughts he had, and is rising out of his chair with a grunt. He hangs the camera around his neck on it's dodgy-looking strap, pockets their class pass and reviews his notes. Everyone's left their papers and books on their desks, and after one last review of his mind map, Craig does the same.
With a whine of relief, Tweek barges through the door and out into the hallway, followed shortly after by Craig.

Said relief lasts maybe another thirty minutes, before he's back to fidgeting and biting down on his tongue to stop from saying anything rude. He's trying to be patient, he really is, but there's only so much of Craig stopping to peer at cracks in the walls and cobwebs in the corners of the janitor's supply closet that he can take. They haven't taken a single picture yet, and his nerves can't take the strained silence.

Class is going to be out any minute now. At the rate they're going, they're gonna have to spend the entire damn weekend here.

(Thoughts of the previous weekend filter into his brain – heated kisses, tongue and teeth, warm fingers—)

"Augh, damn it. Could you hurry up? This isn't some high-end goddamn photoshoot, y'know." His face is turning red, and he's blinking so hard that he thinks his eyes might roll straight out of his head. "Just take the pictures you need so that we can go." He wants to go home, back to his miserable, messy, quiet bedroom with nothing but his miserable, messy, buzzing head for company.

Craig pauses mid-inspection of some rust on the bottom of a radiator, and looks over his shoulder at the blonde. "No. I'm working." Then he turns back around.

Tweek shrieks, yanks at handfuls of his hair and stomps a few feet away to flop down onto the floor, limbs akimbo.

With no small amount of misery, he listens to the shrill ring of the final bell, and drags his legs in close as the classroom doors nearby fly open. They're on the far end of the second floor, so it's a little quieter here than the main corridors tend to be, but Tweek is still overwhelmed, as always, by the noise and the clamour and the bodies. He threads his fingers through his hair and presses his forehead to his knees until most of it dies down. Fuck, but high school sucks.

It's the sound of slow, steady steps catching on linoleum that has his rolling his head to one side, and watching as Craig approaches him.

At only a foot away, Craig peers down at him; Tweek cranes his neck back to maintain eye contact. There's nothing to read in the other boy's blank expression, and that stupid damn cap doesn't sit right on his head. Tufts of black hair poke out around his ears, and a section of his bangs are pressed flat against his forehead. He's gone all still and watchful, like a robot with really bad taste in hats. Twitching but somehow unable to break the eye contact, Tweek lifts his thumb to his mouth and starts chewing his nail, because really, what the fuck are they even doing—

Then the polaroid is up in front of Craig's face, and there's a quiet cl-click, whiiirrr. Tweek blinks.

He just... he just took a picture of him. Just wasted one of the stupid damn films that he's been labouring over for almost an hour.

Reacting on pure instinct, he surges up to his feet and, with a strangled noise of frustration, slaps Craig hard on the shoulder. "Eurgh. You asshole. Stop joking around."

The taller boy steps back, holding the camera up out of the way as the undeveloped picture starts
sliding out of the slot, and huffs a quiet laugh. "Sorry, babe-

They both freeze. Tweek's pulse bucks, as Craig's eyebrows furrow.

Clearing his throat, the blonde lifts his thumb up to his mouth and starts chewing again. "Hrrn. Let's just get on with this, please? I wanna go home." He turns away, an ache in his chest that makes it feel like he's been separated from Craig for five years, rather than just a week. It's the kind of feeling that sinks right down into the heels of his feet.

Silence falls back around them and they continue on, moving through corridors and slipping into abandoned classrooms. Craig takes an edgy shot of some grime on the window, lit up by the late afternoon sun, and another of some pretty graphic carvings on a desk in one of the Language classrooms. Meanwhile Tweek hangs back, peering around for further inspiration (he takes a few shots in the art classrooms of failed, deformed art projects – there's something beautiful in how broken they are).

It's no use, though. They're in their Spanish classroom, and Tweek's lurking in the corner close to the door. Something wriggly has taken up residence in his stomach, and it writhes when Craig breaks the silence hanging over them.

"I... about yesterday, dude. Are you... did you get home safe?" His voice is low.

Tweek watches him run his fingers over the edge of the windowsill, and has to fight the way he wants to block Craig off. He won't do that. (Isn't sure he knows how to shut off to Craig after all.) "My mom came and got me. Eugh. I-it was just an episode, man."

Craig doesn't look up. "It wasn't because of..."

"No, man." And that's true. It wasn't. Sometimes Tweek just goes through patches like that, when his brain and his body fall back into the pit he's worked so hard to pull himself out of. There's no way of explaining what triggered it without bringing up a whole sleuth of other problems he doesn't think they're ready for, yet. They've worked past that period as best they both can, and he doesn't want to let Craig know that there's a scared, selfish corner of Tweek's mind that still struggles to trust him because of what happened after he came out. Craig doesn't know he knows. It's not fair to hold any of that against him. And besides, they were both just dumb kids.

"Are you sure?" Finally, the blonde catches him peeking up at him over the length of the classroom. "It wasn't because we— it's not because of anything I did?"

It's Tweek's turn to avert his eyes, now. He releases a loud, gusty sigh and starts picking at the healing cuts on his palms. "Ugh, no man. It's not."

The dark haired boy begins to cross the space - slow, meandering steps that have him weaving between the desks and give Tweek a chance to back away if he wants to. (He doesn't.) "I'm kinda struggling to believe you, dude. You haven't gone down that hard for ages—"

Tweek jerks. The creature in his stomach twists. He glowers. "Stop it. I – mng h – told you it wasn't that."

"Well then, what was it? I want to help; I don't like seeing you like that. It was fucking awful."

He pauses. "Wh-what do you mean, seeing me like that?"

The other boy's face has shifted into shock. "Dude... they went and got me when you collapsed. I practically carried you to the nurses office." He stops at a desk a few feet away from him. "You
don't... remember?"

Tweek's face is scrunching up. This doesn't make sense – Craig had been a vague, far-off figure. Nowhere near close enough to have *seen* him. "What? No. *No*. You weren't there."

The color drains out of Craig's face. He doesn't say anything – just stares, his hands limp at his sides.

Tweek's chest is tight. He hadn't wanted Craig to see. He hadn't wanted to worry him over something stupid like that. "Hrm, *no*. It wasn't that bad. I— I would've remembered you being there, dude." A horrible thought occurs to him. "Did I do anything? Did— did I *say* anything?"

(Oh God, oh Jesus, *please don't do this to him.*)

Craig frowns. Shakes his head. "No."

All of the strength goes out of him. Boneless, he slumps against the wall.

Thank— *thank fuck*. He swallows. Loosens his scarf so he can breathe a little easier. "Good. That's good."

"Why?"

Tweek blinks out of it, running a trembling hand through the front of his hair. "'Why', what?"

"What were you worried about saying?" There's a growl beneath the words that sets the hairs on the back of his arms on end. "Why are you *lying* to me?"

He ignores the accusation – tries to stay calm. "I swear, dude, I'm not. It's probably just because the night before, I— I went out and got high after detention with Kenny and Bu—"

"Since when do you do drugs?"

Something about the thunderous scowl spreading across Craig's face rubs Tweek the wrong way. "What— urgh, what the fuck kind of question is that? I've done shit with you before." "Not enough of anything that it fucks you up the next day."

Really? He's taking the moral high ground? Tweek scoffs. " Shut the fuck up, dude. It was *weed*. It— it just made me have some weird dream is all."

"Yeah, and then it made you have a *full out breakdown*." Okay, this is too much. He doesn't like the way Craig's speaking to him like he's an idiot. "How the hell is that your business? *Argh*. Even if you care, why are you acting like it has anything to do with you? Like I have to— to get permission from you to do things, or something?"

"What? That's not what I'm saying."

"It sure as hell *sounds* like it." Tweek pushes himself off the wall, throwing his hands up into the air. "And you can stop with the — *hhrn* — accusations too. If I don't wanna tell you something, then I won't. I'm not gonna fucking *lie* to you about it, man." Unlike *you*, he thinks bitterly. Begins to walk away.

"Tweek, if you don't talk to me about things, then how am I supposed to do anything to sort it out?"

He stops walking – whirls around. "That's not your fucking *place*, dude. How many times do I have
to say I'll – *eurn* – share stuff when I'm ready to? And since when have I kept bugging you to talk about everything you've kept secret? Don't act like I'm the only one of us who's—who's kept things covered up."

That apparently derails Craig.

The silence stretches, and a chill sinks into Tweek’s limbs.

"...What?"

Fuck. No. *Backtrack.*

"Nothing," Tweek says, gritting it out past clenched teeth and turning away again. His heart hammers. "Let's just—just get on with this shit so we can go, man."

"Tweek—"

"I wanna go back to the Art rooms again."

"Tweek, *stop.*" Fingers wrap around his wrist, and the grip tightens when he tries to jerk away. "*Please.*"

He tugs him gently, and Tweek allows himself to be turned around. The taller boy's so pale he looks like he might pass out. His eyes are wide, and they scan over Tweek's face like he's desperately trying to find something there. In this moment Craig Tucker is an open book. Somehow that's worse than anything else, because he looks vulnerable. Scared, like he's starting to realise for the first time just how fucked up everything between them really is.

And Tweek's scared, too. If this comes out now, it might really ruin things between them forever; it might *hurt Craig—*

He doesn't want that. He never has.

So, he does the only thing he can think of to distract the other boy.

Pushing himself up on his tiptoes, he grabs Craig by the front of his jumper and kisses him.

Chapter End Notes

//slow claps @ both boys for being dumbies//
He presses his lips to Craig's mouth, and the other boy freezes against him. Heart pounding against his ribcage and fingers shaking where they clutch the front of the Craig's shirt, he tilts his head, moving desperately from one long kiss and into a second. And still, Craig doesn't respond.

Oh Jesus fucking Christ— stupid, he's so stupid. What was he thinking? There's no way back from this. No way to call it off or avoid whatever it is between them when he goes throwing himself at Craig the second the guy's in reaching distance—

Fingers wrap around his upper arms and he's being pushed off the other boy. Tweek stumbles back a step, breath catching like he's winded.

(Fuck, he's an idiot. A goddamn idiot.)

Craig doesn't shove him away like he expects. Just stares at him, eyes wide and eyebrows furrowed. It's a look that makes Tweek's cheeks heat up with shame. The thing in his stomach is tying itself in knots.

When the silence between them stretches so long Tweek thinks he might just explode, he cringes hard and tries to shrink back from his best friend. The other boy doesn't let him. He holds tighter, and reels Tweek towards him again as he's attempting to duck out of Craig's space. Normally he'd protest to being shoved around and pulled about against his will, but he still feels the sting of fear at the thought that Craig might somehow piece everything together.

The blonde watches as his friend's throat bobs, unable to bring himself to meet his eyes. He's afraid of what he might find there.

This is it, he thinks. This is the moment when he's pushed Craig too far because of his big, stupid mouth, and his inability to keep it to himself.

But then the taller boy's releasing one of his arms and cupping Tweek's jaw to tilt his head back, thumb hooked beneath his chin. The touch is gentle – so at odds with the anger that had been plain to see in him just a couple of minutes ago.

"This isn't what people do when they break up, dude," Craig's voice is nothing more than a murmur. He still sounds... wrong. Off.

(Tweek hates himself for it.)

Opening his mouth before he can think, Tweek says, "Good thing we were ne-never really together then, huh?"

There's a weak huff of laughter that eases the tightness around his chest, and the thumb under his chin moves to run lightly over his lower lip. The touch tingles in a way that has his breath stuttering
out. "True."

Tweek resists the urge to lean into his hand, wondering why it's only ever Craig that he's okay with touching him. Why Craig is the exception to everything. He swallows hard, eyes fluttering shut – tries to remember what they'd both been getting angry about. "Look man, I will. Tell you, I mean. I promise. Just... lemme do it in m-my own time, okay?" It's not the sort of thing he's ready for yet – this last week has shown him that much, at least – but he will be. He will.

He'll work harder on it.

A long sigh washes over his face. "Okay, dude. Fine." Craig shifts from one foot to the other, and Tweek thinks it must be his imagination that this draws the other boy further into his space. (Or maybe not, because that stupid damn camera brushes against his front from where it still dangles around his friend's neck.) "Are you gonna run away again if I let go of you?"

Forcing a scowl onto his face that he doesn't feel inside, the blonde snorts. "Urgh. It's not 'running away'; it's called 'making a tactical exit'." When the fingers against his jaw involuntarily flex, he stops joking. The sour expression drops away, and he forces himself to briefly meet blue-grey eyes. "Dude, I'm not going anywhere." Even though a huge, terrified part of him wants to. This isn't safe, it screams. We're going to get hurt again.

For once, he does his best to ignore it.

"Good." The grip on his upper arm eases, sliding onto his shoulder. This time when the other boy steps closer it's obvious, because the stupid damn camera bumps against Tweek's hand. Startled, he twitches away from it so hard he thinks he gives himself whiplash. Craig draws back and pulls it off over his head, clunking it down on the desk beside him and moving in close again right after.

"I want to..." The other boy's hands hover, like he isn't sure if each touch is okay. Finally, he settles them back at his sides. "If I kiss you, will you freak out?"

Startled, Tweek blurts out, "Why do you want to— to do that? With me?"

A muscle in Craig's jaw flexes. He looks away, stuffing his hands into his pockets. "Forget I asked. It's fine."

Tweek wants to bash his head against the wall. Seriously, what the fuck is it with him sticking his foot in his mouth all the damn time? He whines in frustration and yanks at the tasseled end of his scarf. In a rush he speaks up again, so that the moment isn't totally fucking lost. "Heurgh. No, I didn't mean that like— for fuck's sake, I'm such a spazz. I – nng – want to, but I don't get why you would. With... with me." There's nothing redeemable about Tweek, nothing lovable or even vaguely attractive. He's just a twitchy, jittery freak. Someone like Craig shouldn't want to-

"Dude." Tweek can't bring himself to look up at the monotone of his friend's voice. His cheeks burn. Craig's hands are cradling his face in a heartbeat, and he lurches a little when his fingers urge him to tilt his head back, but he complies. The taller boy leans down, pressing their foreheads together so Tweek can't keep averting his eyes. So close, all the tiny flecks of silver blur into blue, and Craig's warmth sweeps over him. "Have you looked at yourself recently? Of course I'd want to. I'd be crazy not to."

Those words don't ease the panic, but even in the fucking mess of his head, he can't see why Craig would lie to him about this. (He doesn't want to think about it too deeply.) "I try not to look in any mirrors when— whenever possible, man." He means to say it like it's a joke, but it comes out flat.
Craig shakes his head just slightly, his black bangs tickling Tweek's brow, and laughs. It's a soft, sad sort of sound that brushes over his skin. "God, you really are a dumbass."

Incensed, he opens his mouth to fire something back, but then Craig's catching his lips in a kiss that completely short-circuits his brain.

It's purposeful in a way that Tweek's wasn't, and there's a palpable frustration behind the contact, despite Craig's movements remaining slow. His fingers dig in just a little too hard. His kisses, for all that they are steady, and firm to the point of being punishing. Bruising.

And then it shifts, and there's a soothing breath, and chaste brush so light this it sets his nerves on fire.

Without even realising, he leans into it. This is so different to anything they'd shared when they were drunk. He's aware of every slight hitch in Craig's breath and every place where their bodies brush against one another. The thing in Tweek's stomach flutters, and he reaches out to clutch at the loops of Craig's jeans like that might keep him grounded.

When Craig pulls back so his nose is brushing Tweek's cheek, the blonde has to fight the urge to follow him straight into his space, despite how breathless he is. Instead he stares at the shadows cast by long, dark eyelashes over barely-freckled cheeks, and he lets the feelings that he's been suppressing for the last three years rise up.

He's almost choked by the strength of his affection for this infuriating, distant boy.

(Giving in, it turns out, is so easy it hurts.)

Tweek rises up to meet Craig's lips, more confident than before, and the other boy replies in kind.

Fingers sink into the tangles of his hair and gently angle his head. Even though they don't grow frantic in their movements, Tweek is getting weaker with every slide of the other boy's mouth against his. With Craig's tongue trailing over Tweek's lower lips, it's hard to care about anything outside of this moment. He sways into the taller boy, short of breath and lightheaded. There's the sweetest ache in his chest, like healed bones being pressed on just a little too hard.

(He's monumentally stupid for putting himself in a position to be hurt again – for not learning the first time, or the second, or the third... but God fucking help him, if this isn't love, then Tweek doesn't know what is.)

Somewhere along the way his eyes begin to sting, and as their kisses slow, tapering off into nothing more than soft grazes, he's overcome with a surge of emotions.


The blonde throws his arms around Craig's waist and buries his face into his chest. He grips so tight it must hurt, but he can't help it. His friend doesn't pull away – just wraps his arms around Tweek too, pressing his lips to the top of his head and holding him.

Inhaling the familiar scent of citrus and smoke and leaning into his warm, solid body is like coming home.

He has no idea how long they stand there, but the distant sound of the school janitor whistling a jaunty, out-of-tune rendition of *Never Gonna Give You Up* draws him back to himself.

Sniffling, he turns his face so his cheek is flat against Craig's collarbone and scowls, even though the
other boy can't see it. "This is so fucked up, man." His shaking's died down for the first time in days, and his overstressed body feels heavy. "What are we even doing?"

Craig laughs, but it sounds rattled – strained. His fingers settle against the back of Tweek's neck, thumb drawing slow circles in the soft hair along his nape. "Why're you asking me? I have no idea."

They lapse back into quiet for a few minutes, holding on to the end of whatever the fuck just happened between them. Tweek's got the irrational fear that if they pull away from each other, then it'll be over, and things will go back to—

"This has been the longest week of my life, dude," he says, even though it makes him sound like an idiot.

The fingers stroking his neck stop in their ministrations, instead sinking into his hair. "Mine too."

"One week away from—" he flails one hand in the air to encapsulate the two of them, together – only to realize that Craig can't see, because it's behind his back. He starts again. "One week of not being around you and I flip my shit."

"Then stay with me," Craig says, like it's the simplest thing in the world. (And maybe it is.)

It's the sun setting beyond the skyline that eventually draws them out of the classroom. Craig weaves his fingers through Tweek's and it's as natural as breathing for them, after all these years. (There's comfort in the fact that hasn't somehow changed in the last week.) The blonde sticks close to his side, his photos in his free hand. They've still got three more blank shots to fill up, but neither of them seems to care.

After returning the polaroid camera to the Photography classroom (Mr Phillips is still reading his magazine and doesn't so much as look up when they come in), they take their things to their lockers and gather up their bags.

Between them, they don't say a single word – just move through the empty, echoing school like they're wading through a dream. There's a group of freshman boys at the bus stop, sports bags slung over their shoulders and voices loud in the winter evening. It's bitterly cold out, and they have to wait an extra half hour for their bus to come back for them. That doesn't matter so much when Craig leans against the low wall just behind the bus stop and pulls Tweek's back against his chest. He perches his head on the blonde's shoulder and brackets him in on either side with long legs. Tweek doesn't mind. (Doesn't give himself the chance to.)

The blonde stares up at the clouded sky as long arms curl their way around his stomach, and lays his hands over the top. Likely feeling the roughness of Tweek's healing skin against his wrist, Craig flips the blonde's hands palm-up and runs a finger around the scuffed, peeling heel. He says nothing, just outlines the cuts over and over, like there are a hundred questions he wants to ask but is worried to. It's probably cruel, but Tweek is grateful for that. He's sick of talking and trying to navigate this weird, butchered mess of words and feelings surrounding them.

It's easier to just fall back on old habits, like climbing the steps up onto the bus and walking to their seats hand-in-hand. The only real difference is in the fact that when they get there, they spin around to face each other under the flickering lights, Tweek's legs up to his chest and one of Craig's beside him. The taller boy looks at Tweek with an intensity that makes him flush and twitch, but doesn't do
anything more alarming than brush blonde bangs back from his forehead the entire trip.

When the bus pulls up along Tweek's street, the shorter boy hesitates to stand. He isn't really sure of the protocol he should use here. Is he meant to invite Craig inside? Are kisses involved here somehow? They haven't really made up, they aren't 'boyfriends' anymore, and Tweek has no idea where they stand. On the other hand, they just had a pretty long make out session in a classroom after hours, and then proceeded to (ugh) *cuddle* for about thirty minutes straight, so...

Great. He can probably consider this the biggest, messiest botch-job of a 'break up' in the history of humankind. And all he wants to do now is curl up next to Craig like he used to *before* all of this went down. Or maybe kiss him again. Multiple times.

So instead he straightens up and, acting as casual as possible, tugs at the stupid damn bobble at the end of the other boy's ugly fleece cap. "Eurgh, dude. Your hat sucks," he says, by way of farewell. "You look like an even bigger idiot that usual."

"Yeah," says Craig, conceding with a nod of his head. "And the hickeys on your neck are showing again... babe."

Tweek slams his hand over his neck, kicks Craig lightly — *hah* — in the shin (the other boy doubles over his legs with a yelp), and bolts off of the bus.

If he's a darker red than a tomato when he stumbles through the front door, then his mom has the good grace not to mention it.

Chapter End Notes

honestly i'm really wondering what everyone's reactions will be to this... (i had something else to say here but i can't remember bc i just woke up at my desk again, realising i hadn't uploaded yet LOL. rip my head & neck)
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

i'm not sure if this is really necessary, but on the off chance that it is...

**trigger warning** for a very brief mention of past self-harm.

(i only just realised i haven't added it to the tags of the story, so i'll go to do that right away)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For a good portion of the night Tweek stares down at his cell, tapping listlessly on old messages and scrolling through his contacts. He has no interest in perusing the news, which makes this a particularly rare day, and can't bring himself to settle on anything to do on his laptop. Over and over, his eyes are drawn back to the silent, black screen.

Should he message Craig? Should he say good night? Every few minutes he picks it up from its spot beside him on the cluttered desk, types in his pass code and reads through their last messages. They're painful to look back on, and he hates that every time either of them go back onto their messages, that's all they'll see. He has no idea what's going on between them, but he doesn't want that adding to it.

Eventually, he starts typing out a text.

21:33
*Hey dude, whyd you kisss me? What does that mean? Do you liek me now? wtf?*

Deletes it. Begins chewing his nail.

21:58
*I kno you dont get it but I'm sorry. I'm trying. x*

Hits the back space. Paces a little, before settling back down.

22:26
*Yeh so funny story Ive loved you since we were 14...*

Almost presses enter because his hands are shaking so hard, screams, and flings it across the room. Once he gathers it back up, he erases the sentence from his phone (and from his mind).

23:11
*Does this mean were doing the dating thing again? X*

Nope.

23:12
*I'm not cool with doing the datign thing again.. x*

Not that, either. God, but this is frustrating.

23:28
Honestly you shou djust hate me again that would be better. I dont get aby of this .it hrurts. God damn i just want thign s like they were when we were kids pleease

Weaves his fingers into his hair and tugs. Stubs his toe repeatedly against the skirting board until it smarts. Deletes the message.

23:46
iw ish i never foun dout

Smashes the backspace, drops his phone on the side and has to leave the room. He goes down to the kitchen, walking past his parents who're snuggled up close to one another on the couch in front of the television. His dad is mid-rant about the new barista from Lakewood that he's hired, and when Tweek goes by he calls out, "He's a lot like you, son - I think that you'd like him, though it is a little much trying to get a spaz to do things properly in such a busy business."

Used to this sort of comment but still feeling overly touchy about the subject, Tweek grunts and continues through. He kicks at one of the cupboard doors, which has been left open a hairs-width, and jabs at the on switch for the kettle. Toes sore from the repeated abuse, he spends the seemingly endless time the kettle takes to come to boil biting at his fingers and rocking back on his heels. Since his favourite mug is gone, he reaches for the second-best, a red and white striped monstrosity that's difficult to carry one-handed when it's full.

When he's done pouring his coffee out – milky and with extra sugar, tonight – he leaves the room, shooting his dad a bitter look that the man undoubtedly fails to notice. His mom winks at him as he storms past, jittering badly enough that some of the scalding liquid sloshes onto his hands. He just changes his hold on the cup, yelping, and slows down as best he can. (Betrayed, by his favourite beverage...)

Instead of sitting back down again, he set the mug on the side with a clunk and goes to the bathroom. Turning on the cold-water faucet to stick his hand under makes him painfully aware of his rising stress levels. The water soothes the sting out of his burnt fingers, and he holds it under until long after his hand goes numb, watching the water run over his reddened skin. Eventually he switches hands, leaving the first to drip down into the basin from where it perches on the edge. He focuses on his breathing techniques, as the sound of rushing water fills the bathroom and sensation begins to return to him, tingling. Several times he switches back and forth between the two hands, until his knuckles ache and the snagged patches around the frayed nails he's been chewing begin to sting.

Wrapping his hands in one of the spare towels from the bathroom shelf, he's shuffles out onto the landing and back into his room. He sits back down on his spinning chair with his legs curled up beneath him, and presses his bundled up hands to his chest until the throbbing eases off.

Only when he can flex and clench his fingers without any lingering stiffness, does he let himself reach for his phone.

Uncomplicated, he thinks. Keep things uncomplicated. You can talk to Olive tomorrow, and wait for anything else.

00:29
Night Craig. x

He stares down at the message for a long time before hitting enter.

It's barely a minute when his cell pings at him. Upon reading it, the corners of his mouth turn up in a small smile.
They drive into Denver from highway 285 by late morning, and the traffic is easy enough to navigate around that he and his mom can go grab a takeaway coffee from the large, bustling Harbucks nearby before his appointment. This is one of their secret traditions whenever they come into the city; a guilty pleasure, which Richard Tweak would probably cry over if he ever found out about it. The man is very proud of his brew, even though a lot of it just ends up tasting like burned dirt thanks to the ancient machine they've got in their coffee shop. (Still, it's the only place in the centre of South Park that you can get coffee, so most people make do.)

At the entrance of the large building that Olive's office is located in, Tweek shakes his mom off, catching the twinkle in her eyes and the flush in her cheeks that says she's going to go shopping. They agree to meet up in an hour and a half, after his session. With that Tweek enters the clean, white-tiled foyer, punching in the correct floor number once he enters the lift.

The building is a huge network of private offices and different therapists specialising in all sorts, from marital and family counselling to addictions therapy. Tweek's therapist specialises in child and teenage psychology and does a lot of work with older kids, teens and young adults. She was the first person out of maybe ten different therapists that Tweek actually felt comfortable with. (Read: that Tweek didn't want to punch.)

Stepping out onto the correct floor, he walks down the carpeted hall past several doors, and into a wide waiting area. It's filled with comfy chairs, potted plants and light, pastel colors. There are windows off to one side of the room, with a view out over the busy city streets and a wash of bright winter sunshine. The other walls are white, and are broken up by many framed drawings – of flowers, smiley faces, families and animals. They're almost all wonky and scribbled, clearly drawn by children, aside from one or two prettier, more detailed pieces. As always, he firmly ignores the picture he drew the Christmas before last (of a group of polar bears emerging from their winter den wearing scarves and woollen hats), that's hung up along the back wall. He's embarrassed by all the mistakes he knows he'll spot in it, and is especially happy not to be associated with it thanks to how immature the piece seems.

Tweek approaches the desk that takes up and entire stretch of wall, and offers a twitchy smile and greeting to the cheerful lady sat behind it. She ticks him off on the computer to let Olive know he's there, and then shoos him away to go perch on one of the couches.

He doesn't have to wait long before Olive comes out to greet him with a warm smile and a wave towards her office. She's a pretty sort of lady somewhere in her late thirties, with a round face, wild black hair and big, dark eyes that seem to peer right through any sort of bullshitting. Also, never once has she tried to touch him – not even for a handshake – since they first met. He's liked her ever since. Tweek clambers to his feet and follows after the tiny woman, feeling long limbed and gangly even though he's only about five foot, six inches.

Entering the door with the shiny golden plaque reading Dr O. Chattering, Tweek makes a beeline for his favourite chair – an ugly, patchy thing with coffee stains on the arms and a green throw over the top to hide the spot where the stuffing is starting to poke out. He sometimes wonders whether it's a favourite with the other kids that she works with, or if she keeps it there just for him.

Once they're settled, the small woman wishes him a happy New Year, and asks him how his school break was. With little hesitation, he starts describing his time with his parents, and the presents he chose for them. From there he moves on to talking about how he saw New Years in with Craig. It's
a ridiculous sentiment but he finds it comforting, talking with her this way – like she listens because she's genuinely interested in what he has to say.

Which is why he hesitates for only a short while before telling her about the party, and the breakdown of events thereafter. He tells her about being intimate with Craig, and the way he'd struggled over the course of the following days. When he details the panic attack he had at school on Thursday, she pauses in her quite scribbling of notes in her little black book and asks quietly, "You said that you had a dream the night before that you think might have influenced it?"

He nods, movements jerky, and expands despite the flush of shame rising to his cheeks. "Nnng. It was of the time I came out to— to Craig. And he turned me down."

Olive hums, pressing the end of her pen to her lips. "This was the incident shortly after you mother was diagnosed, yes?"

Another jerky nod. "A-about a week, I think."

"Would you like to describe the dream? Talk me through it?"

Tweek swallows convulsively around the lump that's expanding in his throat. "It was j-just like that day. I hadn't slept right, since mom told me she had breast cancer, and I hadn't told anyone yet because we didn't know how bad it was – only that the mammogram had come back positive. We were waiting for her next lot of tests. I'd – aurrgh – been getting weird thou— weird feelings about Craig for a while already, you know? Just like, little things." He waves his hand rapidly in front of his face, trying to stay on track. "An-anyway. So one night I finally crash and I have this—" he rubs his hands over his heated cheeks, not wanting to keep eye contact, "this dream. Of us. Doing stuff. I wake up, figure out I like him that way, and freak the fuck out."

The blonde pauses to take a gulp of his drink, which he'd set down on the coffee table in front of him. Olive follows suit, taking a slow sip of her herbal tea (ugh), and sitting back in her chair to show him that she's listening.

"So, like I always did back— back then, I went straight to Craig. He was the only person I ever really talked to... about anything. I was a mess. Stumbled in, blubbered all over him, and told him I was gay. He – nrgh – kicked me out." He doesn't try to stamp down on the wash of bitter shame and humiliation – just lets it settle over his chest like an old friend. Shrugs. "That was it."

"Mm, I see," say Olive. "And was this the first flashback you've had for a while?"

Another nod. "Eurgh. I think for... about four months? Last time mom went in for a checkup."

"Why is it that you think you might have had this dream now, then? What might have triggered it?"

This time, Tweek stops to think a little longer. Olive knows all about his fake relationship with Craig – all about that awful mess of a year – so he doesn't have to hold back or watch his words at all. "He was the only person that I had to come out to, because everyone else just... just assumed we were gay for each other all along." He snorts. "I had no idea until then, and I don't think he did, either. But - hhm - when I told him, he dropped me. The only person I cared about, and he didn't want an-anything to do with it." His fingers sink into his hair, tugging hard enough that his scalp hurts. "After we m-messed around last Friday I thought he'd be disgusted with me. Hate me. O-or worse, that he'd act like it was nothing. Like he'd want to keep it a secret the same way he did all that other stuff."

"So you were afraid of rejection?"

Tweek vehemently shakes his head. "No. No, I'd expect that. Someone like me... I'm just a.. a spaz. I
didn't ever think he could w-want anything with me to begin with." He thinks back on the conversation he'd overheard three years ago, and of the disgust in Craig's voice as he spoke about Tweek. Of the way it had torn him to pieces, and he'd never quite managed to put himself back together again.

("Why would I like someone like him? He's a jittery little freak – just a fucking mess I'm always picking up after. I'd never be able to love him, dude. Sometimes I can't even be near him, he's so annoying.")

"I— I think he really hated me for coming out," he says, his voice choking out and his eyes burning. Scrubbing his forearm over his face, he clears his throat. "Back then, he even admitted to our friend Clyde that it was just habit, being 'round me. It was just so he could get what he wanted." Not because there was any kind of romantic attachment there. Tweek's positive that they were only ever good friends in Craig's eyes when things were going right. When they weren't he was just irritating, Twitchy Tweek, using Craig as a crutch.

It wasn't until last year that Tweek had started thinking that perhaps Craig's affectionate gestures were actually honest. They weren't all those years back, but maybe now... maybe. Either way, he'd soaked up whatever attention the other boy offered him (even after all of the things that kept cropping up for the entirety of that awful year), and had pushed off his own insecurities for so long that he'd barely even realised they were still there.

Olive gently pulls him back out of his thoughts, letting him talk through how they'd ended up together yesterday, and the panic and guilt warring one another inside his head now. He eventually moves on to describing his interactions with Butters and Kenny – how a few times over the course of the week, they've unknowingly been a comfort. She nods approvingly when he admits that he might like spending more time with them.

Finally, Tweek mentions the urges he's been recognising in himself over the last few days. "It's really tight, right here," he taps his chest, "like it might burst. And sometimes it's hard to think through. All I want is to... get rid of it. I want to just— to push all of this away. It's dumb, but when my head gets like that I want to..." Hands held above his thighs like claws, he mimes raking them over himself. "I mean, it's not really that bad, but it's there." He leans forwards over the coffee table, holding his hands out so she can see his raw nail beds, and then turning them over to show the scabbing cuts in both palms.

"Have you been keeping up with your exercises? Your hobbies?" she asks after a calm study of his hands.

"Yeah, especially the breathing one. Sometimes that helps." Sometimes not. "Mostly I've not been making stuff, though. J-just focusing on classes and..." he shrugs. Obsessing over the mess I've made with Craig, is what he doesn't say.

"Okay," says Olive, reading over the notes. "Well, all I'd really suggest for now is to keep an eye on your moods, and keep on top of the coping methods we've discussed in the past. It sounds like you've got a good idea of your emotional capabilities and limitations at present, which is brilliant to see, Tweek."

To be quite fucking blunt, Tweek's not sure he agrees with her there, but he stays quiet. Pulls a face.

Seeing the expression, she offers him a dimpled smile. "Just remember that there are always people you can open up to, and that you do have friends outside of your immediate circle, too. There's no harm in getting to know other people more, or trying out new things."
For a while they continue to talk, and Olive brings up a few other strategies to help calm him down for when he thinks that he might be getting overwhelmed. Mostly it's stuff he's heard before, but being reminded that there are other, different things to try out does help a little.

Right before he leaves, as he's gathering up his tepid, half empty coffee and all of his scattered thoughts, Olive gives him one last thing to think about.

"Talking, Tweek. Talking is always a good start."

Chapter End Notes

ahh, the joys of a good therapist.. :')
(YES, OLIVE, SPEAK MORE SENSE TO HIM. BE THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.)
Before they head home, Mrs Tweak insists on taking them out for a bite to eat. This of course means huge platefuls of grilled vegetables and steak (most of which Tweek doesn't eat, since he's still full from breakfast and feeling a little drained besides), with great big wedges of chocolate cake for them to pick at in the car on the way back.

She buys them each a small bottle of water too, since having more coffee is out of the question until they get to the house, on the off chance they get caught out by his dad. (Not that either of them will have much more than a sip from their water bottles, though). Tweek has the suspicion that his mom buys it just in case he's been crying, so that he can rehydrate. He doesn't ever have the heart tell her what a waste of money buying the things is. If it's something small she can do to feel like she's helping, he'll gladly let her.

Once they've gotten out onto the highway and his mom's given him ample opportunity to tell her anything he might want to – he says nothing – she switches on her favourite playlist. Dolly Parton hums through the car, chipper and chirpy and sweet.

(If there's one thing that he and his mom don't see eye-to-eye on, it's their taste in music. He once tried to get her listening to some of his favourite lofi hiphop and ambient pop songs, and the response was like she'd just found her toddler trampled by a group of angry cows.)

In order to avoid having 'Jolene' ringing through his head for the next week straight until he wants to dash his own head in, he pulls his earphones and his cell out of his pocket, and amps up the volume so all he can hear is soft drum and the gentle thrum of an electric guitar.

The first thing he does once he's safely ensconced in his own little cocoon of comfort, is check his messages. There's been nothing from Craig in the mix, which shouldn't be surprising but does still makes him feel a little off, but the group chat he put on silent has been going off the wall since last night, with about fifty new messages. Mostly it's picture of some female celebrity from that Netflix show everyone's crazy about, and a handful of cringe worthy 2010 memes. The only thing that does catch his eye is a brief mention of Stan saying, "dudes we gotta find us some hot chicks tonight. really go for it you know?" This would be an alarming prospect for Tweek, if he'd been invited to whatever event Marsh is talking about. As it is, he's safe.

(It'll probably something that involves them crashing another college house party, which is the sort of thing Tweek has never attended, and never wants to, thank you very much.)

It's actually one unexpected message from Nichole that has him pausing.

13:09
We weren't kidding around yesterday when we invited you over, Tweek. It probably won't change your mind but we know you've struggled staying above the grade in the past, and if there's anything
you’d like help with, we’d be happy to go through it with you. Especially since finals are gonna be coming up. Have a good weekend. xoxo

Tweek stares down at the message for a long while, mind blank. It doesn’t take a huge amount of brainpower to figure out that Nichole’s only texting him for her boyfriend’s sake. Honestly he’s a little surprised that Token’s still worrying over him failing his classes – especially since he’s been able to scrape by without any real problems over the last few years – but it makes his lips quirk up in a wry smile at the other boy acting like such a mother hen behind the scenes. (Not that his friend would ever admit to it, of course.)

On the spur of the moment, with Olive’s words of encouragement echoing through his head, he types back a quick reply.

13:13
Okay well what time should I get there?

The reply is almost instant.

13:14
Yay! We’re expecting everyone to turn up around 5pm, but whenever suits you is fine. See you tomorrow. :) xoxo

Despite his best effort to hold it back, his small smile widens at her enthusiastic reply. He sends back one final message, and finally flicks over to the news articles he hasn’t had a chance to catch up on over the last few days.

Not even an overview of all the stupid things the president’s been tweeting recently to aggravate other world leaders, is enough to dampen Tweek's mood.

He feels like maybe there are things he can do that aren't completely out of his control after all.

...  

Productivity seems to have returned to Tweek by the time they make it home. The house is quiet and it’s easier to think and move about now that some of the stress he’s been carrying for the last week has been released. Without it hanging over him like storm cloud, he returns to his room and looks around at half completed projects – at piles of forgotten sketches and tangled balls of yarn, partially folded origami paper and unbaked clay cups – and thinks, yeah, okay, maybe this is a good start. These things, he knows how to do.

Sometimes it just takes Tweek some help to remember that he can figure things out – can take back control of his life – if he just starts working on something small first. Instead of trying to tidy his whole room in one night, with its years and years worth of clutter, he should finish his newest projects and work his way backwards. Instead of running headfirst at all the issues he has with Craig and just hoping that the fallout will make sense, he can start with what he does know: he loves Craig in spite of their past, and Craig... well, he isn't positive he ever knows what's going through the other boy's mind, but what he does know is that Craig likes kissing him. That's something he can work with.

Stepping stones.

So he reaches up onto the shelf for the wonky, sagging cups he made and he figures that he might as well try to give them a bake and a paint. Since his favourite cup (granted, not handmade) smashed, it makes sense to finish these ones up.
Out of a total of five, three are completely intact and look like they'll hold a good amount of coffee once they've been properly glossed and finished. The two failed mugs – one with an underside that's totally caved in and another with a huge, ugly crack running right down from the handle to the base – he chucks into his trash.

Tweek carries the three remaining mugs down the stairs to the kitchen in his arms and, setting them down on one of the counter tops, moves over to the oven to preheat it. His mom, who was reading something in one of her ancient, taped-together cookbooks wanders over to inspect his projects, picking each one up in turn and humming appreciatively.

"While you're waiting, how about you try some of that new roast your dad bought in for the shop, kiddo? He left us a sample in the fridge last night but, silly me, I forgot to say," Oh Jesus, that must mean that he went up into the attic for his old coffee grinder after all—

And yep. Sure enough, there it is.

How he missed it he's not quite sure, but it's just as big and creepy looking as it's always been. The thing's comprised of a handle right at the very top, a bowl beneath that, with the base scooped out and replaced with vicious looking cogs, and underneath that, a little drawer to catch the ground up coffee beans. Tweek used to have nightmares about getting his hand caught in this thing.

Not one to be deterred though, he fetches the brown paper packet of beans from the refrigerator and begins pouring them into the metal bowl. Pauses. "Y-you want some?"

"Yes please, pumpkin. Might as well get it out of the way."

With a snort, he doles out the right amount of beans and returns the pack to the fridge.

By the time he's finished grinding, boiling the kettle, adding the grounds to the pot and leaving them to stew, the oven's ready. He sets the clay cups onto a tray, slides it into the shelf, and returns to their drinks. As they'll be in the oven for a good few hours, he sits and chats with his mom about which cake she's thinking of baking tomorrow, and how this new roast tastes an astonishing amount like rust. (It doesn't take a genius to figure out that that's thanks to the Contraption from Hell.)

They both sip on their drinks for a few minutes before their taste buds get the better of them and Tweek dumps the stuff in the sink. Shit, how had they actually managed to drink grounds from that thing for so many years?

After a while longer, he heads back upstairs. He won't be able to paint his cups until they've finished (which'll likely take up a good chunk of the evening) and had time to cool down (which'll take up the rest), but he still decides to try finding everything he needs.

It takes ages to dig his acrylic paints out from the depth of his cupboard, but he doesn't mind that; along the way, he discovers some scrapbooks he'd been making, and what looks like the badly chewed chord (courtesy of Stripe #4) for his keyboard. He sets both discoveries down by the head of his bed and goes back for the small, tightly sealed tubes of paint. In total he finds thirteen. Sets them down on his bedside table.

Satisfied, he peers around for something to do next.

He's in the process of thumbing through a pile of rough sketches he'd dumped down beside his dresser during his attempted clean up, when his cell pings. His heart lurches a little when he sees it's from Craig.

16:47
Instead of typing anything, Tweek stands up and takes an only slightly blurred photo of the pile. (He's not had as crazy an amount of caffeine as he would on a normal day, so his jitters aren't as bad as usual, and thus the picture ends up clearer than it might have otherwise despite the god-awful lighting.)

With that done he goes back to his rifling, and stops when he finds a chunk of doodles dedicated purely to his best friend – mostly uncoloured and messy (since he tends to draw them while the other boy isn't looking, and speed is of the essence. And yes, he's aware this makes him sound like a total creep), but all with more attention to detail than the rest of his pictures usually have.

One in particular, of Craig sleeping with his face smushed into the pillow and his mouth open, Tweek feels very proud of. The undignified flop of black bangs and the awkward angle of his head are so at odds with the aloof Craig Tucker that most of the world is shown, that Tweek can't help but feel possessive of it. He gathers all of the doodles of him up into a tidy stack after spending a disconcerting amount of time staring at the one picture, and sets them aside on the dresser.

Distracting himself from his embarrassment by digging out an old landscape sketch of the Stark's Pond from the crumpled sheets on the floor, he retrieves one of the blank canvases to copy the view onto. Since he's already gone to the trouble of getting the acrylics out, be might as well do a bit of painting.

The next time his phone makes a noise, he's almost completely forgotten that he'd been waiting for a reply, and has already managed to smear a good portion of the paint on his brush and his pallet all over himself. (The green shirt he's wearing is officially ruined.)

Wiping his hands on his front – his shirt's already fucked now anyway, so he might as well embrace it – Tweek reaches out for his cell.

17:23

*found anything good? *

A huge part of him cringes at the question, thinking of how awkward it'd be if Craig found out just what a creep he was. Probably because of that, his hands are typing out a reply before he actually gives them permission.

17:24

*Theres some of you actually dude. *

Oh yeah, *nice one* Tweek, he thinks, shrieking. Not gonna send the wrong impression *at all*. In a fit of desperation, he drops to his knees on the floor and scrambles through the pile until he finds a shitty cartoon of Manbearpig. Snaps a picture. Sends it over.

17:25

*--

wow.

such a good friend. *

He can't help the slightly hysterical hiccup that escapes him.

17:25

*That was 1 of the better ones dude.*

*What can i say? Your face is kinda meh*
There's a moment of tight chested worry after he presses the enter button. It's the sort of thing he wouldn't have thought twice about saying prior to the incident, but now... what if Craig takes it the wrong way? He should be more careful. He should be more friendly. He shouldn't-

17:27
so does 'meh' translate 2 'kissable' now then
be u didnt have a problem with it yesterday, babe

All the blood rushes to Tweek's face so quickly, he goes dizzy. Envisions his heart thumping so hard it bursts right out of his chest.

17:28
OMG CRAIG SHT IP
WHAT TH EHELL MAN
JESUD CHRIAT

He's still in the process of recovering when Craig replies again.

17:31
;)
goin out with some of the guys 2night and clydes coming round in 10 so i'll text later
if thats ok dude
its fine if not x

The mention of Clyde instantly has Tweek's hackles rising (when doesn't it, these days?), which is a pleasant distraction from the feeling of his head trying to explode. The thought of Craig going with the guys on one of their drunken nights out makes him cringe, since he knows the sort of crap they get into. But he bites down on the emotions and sends a simple text back.

17:36
Yeh sure dude
I'll be waiting.
Be safe x

He returns to his painting, but can't quite get back into the flow.

02:04
dude thisn plaxe isshit
acn ip hone u plz
liek if ur asaje
wawke
awake
xxx

Tweek stares at his phone like it's just sprouted a head. How fucking much must the other boy have drunk to be this bad? And two weekends in a row? He can't help but feel like this is his fault. His hands tremble as he dashes out a quick reply.

02:06
Yeh man. phone me. x

Pulling himself up from where he was slouching against his headboard, he shoves his laptop off of
his knees and cradles his cell in both hands, thumb poised to swipe into the call the second it appears. It gets approximately three beats into the first ring before his clumsy scrabbling pays off – he brings it up to his ear. "Nngh, Craig?"

"Yeah hey man it's Craig," comes the slurred voice on the other end. Tweek thinks he can make out tinny music and raucous shouting in the background. There's a metallic crash like someone just dropped a frying pan, and a stream of muffled swearing. "Fucking ow."

Most likely being unreasonable with his level of concern, the blonde blurts out, "What the— what the fuck was that? Dude? You alright?"

A snorted laugh. The clamour in the background fades out a little more. "Tripped over a trashcan. Who the hell's idea w's it to dump it in a bush? Tha's not where trash goes."

"Jesus Christ, why were you – heurgh – in a bush to begin with?" He can't keep the shrill note out of his voice. "Where are you? Who did you go out with? Isn't anyone there sober?"

Craig laughs again, throaty and warm in a way that would probably make Tweek's heart flutter if he wasn't already seizing up around nervous spasms. "Babe chill yeah—? A groan. "Shit, I'm such a fucking dick— sorry, man. Sorry. I keep calling you that."

Tweek waves his hand dismissively before remembering that the other boy can't actually see what he's doing. "Aurgh dude I don't care about that! It's fine. Where's everyone else gone—"

"It's okay? I can still call you babe, then?" He can hear a genuine smile in Craig's voice. It shouldn't hurt so much.

He makes a strangled sound, tugging at his hair with his free hand and trying his best not to freak out too much – because sweet Jesus Craig's on his own outside in the middle of the night and he's so drunk he can barely stand up and he could be murdered by some insane psycho and no one would know but Tweek who'd have to listen to it happen—

"Craig."

"Babe, you'll never guess what—"

"Stop talking. Shut up. Right now." Tweek grits his teeth as the silence stretches. After taking a long, deep breath, he repeats his question – slower, this time. "Where are you guys?"

"At some junior chick's place near—" Craig hiccups. Actually hiccups. "Near school. Why?"

A long sigh of relief rushes out of him, and he presses his palm against his eye, which has started up with a nervous tic. Not a college kid party in Denver, then. Still close to home. "Good. That's good. Are the others near you?"

"Yeah man, Jimmy's over there." The sounds of rustling, like Craig's waving his arm around. "Stan and Kenny went off somewhere; prob'y gettin' high. Clyde's here too and— oh man, you wouldn't b'lieve it. He got in real good with Bebe Stevens. Real good. Right on the kitchen table." Craig snickers. (Tweek wonders if the world has turned on its head, because that is not a normal Craig Tucker sound.)

And then his best friend's words sink in.

"Oh. Oh Jesus Christ. Fucking gross." He thinks he might actually hurl at that mental image because sick. The other boy's still laughing. "What the fuck, Craig? That's not funny. I feel like I
need my *brain* scoured. *How – nng – are you okay with that?*

"'Cause you're not angry with me anymore."

His mouth clicks shut around choked off words, totally derailed.

Craig, apparently oblivious, adds on, "And 'cause you're cute when you're flustered, babe."

A nauseating mixture of guilt and embarrassment curdle together in his stomach. His face feels hot. "Craig, I'm sorry for—"

He's interrupted.

"We're still friends, aren't we? And I can kiss you again, right? Wanna kiss you..."

Tweek scrubs a hand over his aching eyes, and sinks down further into his bed. "We— 'course we're still friends."

There's a long pause, and another loud sigh. "This place sucks. Don't wanna be here anymore. I wanna come see you, babe."

"I – ergh – don't think that's a good idea, man." He rolls onto his side and presses his hand harder against his face. "G-go home and— sleep it off, yeah? Sober up."

"... Okay, dude. Let's keep texting though?"

"Yeah," Tweek says, and for the first time since this conversation started, he's glad that Craig is almost nonsensically drunk. At least this way, he won't be able to hear how wobbly Tweek's voice is. "But I'm— I'm gonna hang up now, dude. So I can keep painting."

"Alright, babe."

Tweek pulls it away from his ear and punches the red button until the call ends.

God, alcohol sucks.

Chapter End Notes

ahhh, drunk phone calls & texts... always awkward the next day LOL
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

y'know, at this point it's hard for me to tell where the humour and sarcasm ends and the angst begins. :|

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They text each other until Craig presumably collapses at home, somewhere just before five in the morning. Tweek spends almost the entire time they're messaging lying prone on his stomach, pillow bunched under his chin and cell propped up in front of his face. Aside from having slightly itchy eyes and feeling a little dizzy when he finally gets up to go to the toilet and brush his teeth, he's fine.

In fact, he's pretty damn great, all recent events taken into account.

He curls back down under the covers after flicking the light switch off, phone still in hand, and scours through some of the highlight of their three hour chat - in which he mostly swore at and lectured Craig, and Craig mostly just seemed to smash his face against the keypad. There's one message, towards the end of their chat though, that Tweek doesn't really know how to interpret. He'd skipped over giving Craig any kind of reply, and thanks to the other boy being so shitfaced he probably couldn't make out the screen, Tweek completely avoided any fallout.

Now, in the darkness of his bedroom – cell finally silenced – he reads over it again.

04:20
when i tod u abotu ne3ding space the ither day
is was bc idon thinj i u kno btu babe
damnti ur alwsys rig ht ther and o want it 2 stay taht way froever
uknow? gayr ight.
so fuclin hay
omu man xxxccccx

Tweek can't even begin working out what most of this means (what the fuck does 'omu' stand for? Does he mean 'emu'? Why would he call Tweek an emu man?), but he's getting incredibly unplatonic vibes from it. Which should have probably been a given since they can't seem to shut up about making out with one another recently, but still.

Weird, drunken name calling aside, this is bordering painfully close to 'romantic' territory, and Tweek has no fucking clue what to think of that. It sort of makes him want to dig out a bolthole somewhere and take cover for a few weeks, until the festering mess of feelings between him and his best friend blows over. He knows without being told that running away or hiding won't help anything, though. He's already tried it, and look how that ended up. Not that he's sure he could consider making out in a classroom a bad result, but still.

Eventually the blonde shoves his phone onto his nightstand, draws his covers up over his head and calls it a night.
Perhaps it's just his vindictive streak, but the house is empty and he's sneaking a bowl of Lucky Charms and a cup of instant coffee (both of which his mom would firmly object to), when he decides to give Craig a call. Thanks to that one, dumb message, Tweek couldn't stop tossing and turning all night, and now he's kind of a mess. He's got three hours before he's meant to be going over to Dark Meadows Manor to study with the others, and he's not even out of his pyjamas.

Around a huge mouthful of soggy, sugary cardboard, Tweek scrolls down his contact list to Craig's name. He stabs the button so it switches onto loudspeaker, and sets it down on the table as it starts to ring.

It reaches eight rings before Craig answers, and for a long moment there's only static and the rustling of bedding.

"Gnuurgh," is his best friend's bright and cheerful greeting. "Dude... what...?"

"You called me an emu last night," Tweek says, between shovelling in another loaded spoonful. "You dick."

"...Huh?" Apparently the other boy isn't actually capable of making sounds much more complex than monosyllabic grunts. "I called you an emu?"

A loud yawn rings over the connection, and Tweek's mouth twitches.

"Yeah, in between – nnn – describing how hot you are for Mr Phillips." Okay, so that bit's a bold faced lie, but it's worth it just to hear Craig choking on his own spit.

"I did what? Holy shit, you're lying right? No way would I ever find that gangly-legged—" There's a thump and the connection is momentarily muffled. He can only assume that the other boy dropped his phone. Some scrabbling and groaning later, he's brought back up to his friend's ear. "Ugh... dude, I think I'm gonna barf."

The blonde muffles his undignified snort of amusement around another mouthful of cereal. "Aw c'mon, he- he's not that bad, is he? There's somethin' to his fluorescent shirts, man..."

"Yeah, something incredibly, obnoxiously gay."

Tweek rolls his eyes. "Hah. You say that like it's a bad thing. I'd have thought that was a- a positive." You know, considering how definitively homosexual Craig is. Or was it all just his imagination playing tricks on him, over the years?

"I prefer guys that don't try blinding people just by walking into the room," Craig says, monotone. Tweek's stomach does an undignified little flop at his casual admittance that he likes 'guys'. It's not something they ever really discussed – Tweek just thought it was common knowledge. Unspoken common knowledge, but still.

"Wow. Great. Sound logic, dude." He doesn't point out that Craig's preferences are far from normal, considering he seems to lean heavily towards the twitchy, loud, mentally disturbed types of boy. At least, from what Tweek's seen. Not that he isn't flattered to fit into this category enough to qualify for awkward make out sessions, but still.

"What, like you can talk. There's no way you'd go for a fuck up like that, is there?"

Humming as if he's really considering it, Tweek taps the end of his spoon against the rim of his bowl. "I dunno. There's a r-rugged appeal to a man that can wear hot pink and- and bright orange together, you know?" Yeah, it's so attractive that just the thought of it makes him want to gouge his eyes out
of their sockets with his own fingers. Neutrals and blues, man. That's all he lives for.

"Eurgh, you make me sick," says Craig. "I'm going back to bed dude. Fuck off and lemme sleep."
Almost as an afterthought, he adds on, "And take your weirdass preferences with you."

This time, Tweek doesn't hold back his ringing laughter.

The phone goes dead with one final grumble from the other end.

... 

He arrives at Token's at five on the dot, side-eyeing the country bumpkin that acts as their gate guard, and edging towards the open drive. The bumpkin in question chews open-mouthed on what Tweek can only pray is gum, and watches him walk by with a dead sort of expression that has chills rolling up and down Tweek's spine. Call him weird but the world is a large and terrifying place when he's walking around it on his own and the sun's starting to set...

As soon as the guy's out of his line of sight, Tweek bolts up to the porch with his satchel swinging precariously from his shoulder, and flings himself at the door. Alternating between pounding his fist against the wood and rapidly pressing the button for the doorbell, he can't help but throw wide-eyed glances over his shoulder.

The door swings open beneath his upheld fist and he almost pitches forwards into Token's mom.

"Ah, Tweek. I should have guessed it was you," she says, raising a sardonic brow and opening the door sooner. "Come on in, honey."

"Hrrng. So-sorry Linda, it's just your gate guy looks— looks like a fu— like a zombie." He corrects himself upon seeing the narrowing of her eyes. The blonde scrubs a hand through his hair and averts his eyes. If there's anyone who can make him check his bad language, it's Mrs Black. Something about the way she purses her lips when anyone starts cursing is just plain intimidating – especially considering the fact that she's such a lovely woman. Honestly it's no wonder her son has less of a potty mouth than any of the other guys in the group.

"Uh-huh, okay, I'm sure he does." He takes a glance up at he from the corner of his eye and sees that she's once again back to soft smiles and kind eyes. "You're here for the study group? They're all up in Token's room at the moment."

"Urk. Alright," he says, bobbing his head and toeing off his triple-knotted trainers. "Cool."

"Steve and I are heading out on a date night tonight, so you kids will have the place to yourself. Be sure to make yourself at home," she calls after him as he heads up the stairs.

The manor is so totally different – shiny surfaces, sparkling ornaments, expensive drapes, stretches of velvety rugs – than it was at the party, Tweek's positive that he's going through some sort of dissociation. By the time he gets to Token's room, he feels like he's walking into an alternate universe.

Instead of Clyde, Kenny and Jimmy sharing an ancient copy of *Playboy* on the bed, there's Kyle, Wendy and Annie, all pouring over a spread of Geography notes. Token and Nichole share the desk (and the desk chair) in the far corner, and Esther, Peter and Kevin sit in beanbags by the window, working on what he assumes is a group project.

Considering he was told that everyone was arriving at five, they all look like they've been there for a while.
Tweek shifts on his feet and makes an involuntary sound in the back of his throat as he edges into the room – several of the current occupants look up, though only Nichole and Token greet him.

"Hey Tweek, glad you could make it," says Nichole from where she's sat on Token's lap. "Come on in and sit down."

He gurgles on a sound of discomfort and moves to the only available sitting space he can find without just flopping down on the floor. Fuck... it's the damn beanbag he almost dry humped Craig on, right by the bedroom door.

This, he thinks, is already proving to be a vastly uncomfortable experience.

And so, after perching on the very edge and pulling out his Math homework, the blonde sits and twitches and generally just feels miserable about his decision to turn up here for a solid hour. In that time, the others return to their own work without issues, and aside from the occasional mumble shared between one another (or a brief, muttered debate on the formation and distribution of tertiary rock, courtesy of Broflovski and Testaburger), the room is filled with the sound of turning pages and scratching pencils. Every now and then someone drags a highlighter or a felt tip pen over a stretch of paper, and Tweek has to fight not to whimper in distress and cover his ears. The sound makes his teeth ache.

It takes him seven read-throughs just to absorb the first problem on his sheet. Every time he thinks he's figured out how to solve it, someone clears their throat or rifles through a pencil case, and he's disturbed. His butt keeps slipping deeper into the beanbag, and he combats this by leaning further and further forwards, until he's bent almost double, nose an inch from the paper and the muscles in his shoulders locking up.

At around six o'clock, after Steve and Linda have left for their date night and several other kids in their year have turned up (they do, indeed, end up sprawled inelegantly across the carpet), there is an unexpected turn of events.

"Well hullo there fellas! A-and ladies," says Butters Stotch, poking his head around the door and smiling a wonky, shy sort of smile. "Hope ya don't mind I let myself in."

"Sweet, merciful Jesus," Tweek yelps, shooting up to his feet and sending his notes all over the floor. "Thank fuck you're here, man. I thought I was gonna die."

Butters looks only briefly startled by the sudden yelling (as do most people in the room, with perhaps the exception of an amused looking Token), but then his small, forced smile stretches into a wide grin. "Oh, hey Tweek. I didn't know you were coming to this, buddy."

"Uergh. Y-yeah man, I figured—"

"Uhm, heartwarming as this all is, d'you think you could maybe keep it down?" says Esther, face sour. "Some of us actually have futures that we're trying to work towards."

"Ragh. Mind your own fucking business, Esther," Tweek says, right at the same time Butters blurts out, "Boy oh boy, Essie, go suck a turd."

"Guys, come on now," says Kyle, in that slightly nasal tone he uses whenever he's about to get patronising. "Let's try keeping things civil. We're all here to study."

Tweek just takes a note out of his best friend's book, flipping Broflovski the bird, stepping over the mess he's left on the floor and stumbling towards the door. "Whatever, man." He needs some seriously strong coffee if he's going to be hanging around here much longer.
Surprisingly enough, he realizes that he's picked up a tagalong on his way down the stairs. The other blonde is quiet as he falls into step beside Tweek, clutching the bannister railing and walking pretty carefully, like he's worried he might fall – a sentiment that Tweek can heartily appreciate. He's got his trademark smile and his cutesy hairpin in (a glittery, four-leaf clover today), and is wearing a shiny, light blue parker. Tweek, in his grungy, moss-green shirt, unfashionably ripped up jeans and odd socks, looks like a total mess in comparison to Butters. Neatness and sweetness, next to mess and stress.

(Oh God, he's *rhyming* now. His brain must be melting.)

From the foyer, Tweek stomps into the kitchen, making a beeline for the cupboard he knows the instant coffee is kept in. Butters follows at a more sedate pace, and stops to lean against the wall. Something in his stiff posturing – too straight shoulders, hands braced against the wall behind him – sets off all kinds of alarm bells in Tweek's head.

Something's wrong, and he can think of several possible causes. The first thought is that he's been in some kind of accident, which isn't unbelievable since, like him, the other boy seems particularly prone to clumsiness. The second... he doesn't know much about Stotch's home life, but it's sort of universally accepted that his dad is a total asshat. Tweek also remembers that the boy went through some pretty intense bullying back in elementary – it's the sort of thing that Tweek's always made an effort to keep track of, since it never hurts to be knowledgeable of the recurring trends. Especially in a place as fucked up as South Park, where violence and abuse tend to be viewed as acceptable day-to-day activities.

Of course, that also leads him to the memory of Kenny, turning up to Photography class bloody-faced and beaten on Friday. (He subtly glances down at Butter's knuckles, which are unblemished. Not fighting, then.)

Trying for once in his life to practice some modicum of social grace, Tweek stresses over what he should say in reference to the situation, if anything at all. In the meantime, he fills up the kettle, flips the switch and fetches himself a mug. Then, on second thoughts, grabs a second. There are long moments spent pottering about, before he finally just thinks, fuck it.

Keeping his back to the other boy, he says, "Look – *nng* – dude, it's none of my business or anything, and we don't really know each other that much, so just- just tell me to fuck off if you don't wanna – *hhrn* – but if you wanna talk about anything, I'll listen." It's the least he can do after Stotch and McCormick distracted him from himself last week.

There's a beat of silence.

"Huh?" Tweek chances a glance over his shoulder, and sees the other boy scratching at his temple in confusion. It's obvious when the message sinks in though, because his eyes go as round as saucers. Tweek goes back to pouring out the drinks - one strong and black and the other weak, milky and sweet - and listens as Butters replies. "Oh geez, it's nothin' bad. Just that I made Eric angry for calling his mom a skank, and he started wailin' on me. Kenny saw and kinda went to town on him."

His face scrunches up into a scowl. "Awh, man, I can't believe I missed that." As far as he's concerned, any kind of pain Eric Cartman lands himself in is well deserved. Tweek's not a great lover of violence, but he's got a mean streak a mile wide and he's not afraid to harness it if he's pushed too far. Cartman's one of the few that have riled him up to the point of anger so many times that he rather enjoys seeing the other boy getting the shit kicked out of him every once in a while. Not that any of this explains Kenny's unwillingness to talk about it in class, though. Weird.

Butters chuckles, and out of context, the sound is all softness and innocence. "It *was* pretty dam
"Good," he says grimly. Picking up the drink he made for the deceptively sweet looking boy, Tweek thrusts it out towards him, failing to hold it steady thanks to his shakes. He grunts in acceptance of Butters' excited thanks ("Ooh, woow, this is for me? Awesome."), and goes back to nursing his own cup. He takes a large, scalding gulp and grimaces as it burns all the way down to his stomach.

A few noisy slurps and a loud exclamation of enjoyment later, they lapse into an easy silence. Tweek keeps his breathing in mind, and is relieved to realize that the stress he felt upstairs doesn't extend down into Token's kitchen. Well, up until Butters speaks up again.

"It still wasn't as good as that time you beat on him though. Golly, that was a good whooping you gave him. He didn't stop whining for weeks."

Not that Tweek would know of course, since he'd been away for half a month's suspension, and then another half for sick leave right after. Even if he had been around in the aftermath, he isn't sure that he would have been lucid to it. Derealization's a bitch.

Tweek's stomach clenches, and his grip tightens on the mug. He shoots around for something to say instead of continuing down this line of conversation, but he supposes that's easier said than done when his mind's going blank. (He should just think of this as inevitable, considering what Olive had told him only yesterday about opening up to people. It's just that this is kind of a whole lot sooner than he'd planned – he thought he'd at least have a little while longer to prepare for it.)

Still, he gives avoidance one last shot, opening his mouth to try diverting attention. "Y-you know, I don’t really wanna—"

When Butters keeps on speaking right over the top of him, he unwittingly vetoes Tweek’s decision to try and change the course of the conversation. "Hey, but, back then you were pretty weird all round, buddy. I think we were all a little scared of you. 'Specially after they had to drag you off the fatass."

He laughs that sweet, simple laugh again, completely unaware of the way that Tweek is cringing back against the counter. "Not like you'd have done nothing bad, o' course. You're a good guy."

"No," says Tweek, swallowing around the lump that's risen into his throat. "Eurgh. I- I wasn't a good guy, back then. I did b-bad stuff." And it wasn't just beating on the boy who'd teased him mercilessly about his sick mom, either.

You see, Craig's rejection and secrets had hurt him worse than Cartman's petty bullying ever could, and Tweek hadn't meant for things to turn out how they did in the end, but still... at the time, he hadn't been all that upset about accidentally breaking his best friend's heart.

After all, he was just returning the favour.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

**for a bit of context:**
the first section of this chapter is a flashback. Tweek is 14 years old and is struggling through an episode of something called dissociation/derealisation disorder - which is why it's written so differently than usual. (a very simplified way of describing it is that even when he's awake, he feels like he's in a dream.) that said, the flashback is of a real event. :))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

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**FLASHBACK**

The pale winter sun has only just begun to rise over the lowest dips in the mountains when the fourteen-year-old leaves the house, a huge rucksack hoisted up onto his shoulders and a too-large pair of walking boots on his feet.

His mom had been asleep on the couch, wiped out from her treatments the day before, and he'd pulled the throw that was slung over the back of the couch down on top of her before he left, so that she wouldn't catch a chill. These days she looks too pale, and thinner in the face – like all the stress has stripped her of her softness.

He has a long trip ahead of him, and he needs to head off early in the day so that no one he knows will spot him. He hadn't slept all night and he'd left a message taped to the door saying that he was headed out to meet up with some school friends for the first time since his breakdown. He has no idea if that excuse will hold, but he can't bring himself to care. It's difficult to feel or do anything anymore.

Setting off, he heads south through the town to the old railway track and, crossing, continues from there out over the snowy, rolling fields of the valley. The snow comes up to his knees in places, and his pants legs and sock are sticking to his skin halfway through the first field, but he keeps on walking, feeling as though he's in a dream. The wind that rushes past him blisters, the bites it takes at his exposed nose and bared fingers making him feel something.

An hour passes in a blur of trudging, bitter numbness; in brief wonderings if he should stop, if he should just put his things down here, forget the day ahead and curl into the snow. He's tired, so tired, and he isn't sure that he has it in him to care anymore. Has to keep repeating, in a mantra:

I'm here walking down this meadow, I'm awake, I'm going to be okay.

I'm here crossing this road, I'm awake, all of this is real.

I'm here wading through this snow bank, I'm alive, I'll get through this.

Every now and then clarity strikes him like a physical blow, sharp and hard, knocking the wind out of him. The whiteness of the fields, the sky, the mountains... it burns. He shields his eyes, bites back the breathless whimper in his chest. Presses forwards faster. Tweek covers more space in these short moments of lucidity, but he also spends the time straining over the pressure on his ragged nerves. His
heart thumps so loud it pounds like a drumbeat through his skull, and he shakes so hard that with every step he's worried his knees might give out.

And then the blankness, the numbness, wraps back around him like a comforting fog, and he slows his pace, struggles to remember his purpose, looks down at the words scrawled on the back of his hand in dark blue ink. '7am Richmans Point, South-South – 8am Churchman's Crossing, Fairplay'. He lifts his airy, empty head and he peers into the glaring snow and he goes, ah, okay, this way.

When he comes to the trailing extension of South Park town that surrounds his old middle school – known by the locals as South-South Park – he leaves the fields and returns to the beat up sidewalks.

Over the years of being a student here, he and his friends had played hooky so often after catching the bus in for classes, that they knew the few winding streets as well as they knew themselves.

But Tweek... he stumbles over heavy feet and forgets his way. Every building, every trailing path and driveway, blurs into one another until it's just stretches of grey and white and green.

Slowing to peer up at the signposts on street corners, he struggles to comprehend what they mean. The letters wriggle and writhe no matter how hard he rubs his eyes. It's only when he spots that the gas station on the corner of First is open that he stirs from his daze. He makes his way inside, the bell ringing overhead and the heavy door swinging shut again. Blinks in the sudden darkness that greets him, even though he can hear the flickering hum of overhead lights. His breathing escalates around the stink of petrol and bleach-based floor cleaner, and the low jingle of the radio behind the till phases in and out of reality.

Tweek raises his shaking hand in front of his face. Stares at the words he knows are there until the room lightens by increments and starts coming into focus. Jerks around violently when someone from behind the till calls out to him. The room swims, sharpening.

"Boy, what the hell're you doin'?"

He gasps at the warm air – hadn't even registered the change in temperature when he'd come in from the cold – and opens his mouth around words that won't come out. Digging his nails into his sore thighs, Tweek forces himself to stumble closer to the counter. The man behind it is difficult to place, but he thinks he's seen him in that posse from Skeeters that goes around waving the flag. The stink of booze and stale cigarette smoke rise up out of the murk, until Tweek's eyes sting.

The man scowls around his thick, mutton-chop sideburns and the toothpick he's chewing on. There's an American Spirit tucked behind on ear, and an open can of Budweiser beside the till, even though it's just gone dawn. This is a classic example of what white trash looks like – his tennis cap and stained white wife-beater add the perfect finishing touches to the cliché.

Tweek stares too long, and the man squints.

"Nnng, hahh. I'm - oh God, oh Jesus, see me through this - tr-tryin'a get-to- aurgh, righ-t-to Richmans Point Station." He jerks and he twitches and he hates himself for every second of it, because this was one of the reasons that Craig started hating him. He's useless. Pathetic. Unable to do anything but jitter and shriek.

The man keeps on giving him the side-eye, but Tweek barely notices around the tightening of his chest. "Right... well, that's jus' through the parking lot next door..." He points out the steamed up window, then just stops to stare at Tweek again.

"T-too much- th-thanks sir - nggg, too much pressure."
Tugging so hard at his hair that loose strands get stuck between his fingers, the blonde leaves. As soon as he's outside he covers his eyes – *bright, bright white sky* – and starts moving with purpose, repeating under his breath as he goes, *"Through the parking lot."*

It's not so much a parking lot as it is a poorly filled in yard.

There are hardly any cars in the tiny space, but there is a cement-block staircase at the far end leading up onto the one-way platform, and he somehow drags himself up to it. The platform is empty. It hasn't got any kind of seating or shelter and there aren't any boards displaying train times, but he's already got his pre-booked ticket through to Fairplay, and another from Fairplay to Denver. Everything's paid for, everything's been double and triple checked, and now all he has to do is keep an eye on the time (06:36, according to his cell) and wait.

He digs out his earphones and pops them in, amping up the volume until the pounding of his heart in his head is replaced with strumming guitar and high, floating vocals. The music draws him deeper into his daze and he embraces the apathy, his vision fading out around the edges.

Dreamlike, he stands when the train reaches the platform, climbing on board and finding a seat in the one small, empty carriage. A faceless, soundless conductor wanders down the isle and holds out a hand to see his ticket. Checks it. Passes it back. Drifts off.

Tweek spends the half-hour trip staring muzzily down at the piece of card, mind numb and entire body trembling. His music blares, and he rocks back into the seat in time with it, fingers scratching at his thighs.

When they pull up into the station, he stumbles off and changes platform, tickets grasped tightly in his hand. He thinks he ought to be hungry or tired or stressed or something – that he would normally feel terrified and jittery, taking this journey – but the bizarre feeling of unreality continues all the way through to the last ten minutes of his journey, as they're approaching the city.

His cell vibrates and pings from his pocket, and he jerks back to himself, blinking at the roads and trees rushing by the windows.

There are groups of people all around him: older ladies chatting amongst themselves, children shrieking, teenaged girls gossiping loudly. Senses reeling, Tweek grapples for his phone, fighting off the instinctive shock. (He doesn't even recall climbing on board.)

He turns his attention to the screen of his cell, and his lungs lurch against tight ribs.

**Contact: T**

09:04

*hey let me know when you get here. im in LoDo now.*

It takes a short while to compose himself enough to write back, by which point the train is passing through the suburbs.

09:07

*5 minuets man.*

Six minutes and thirty-two seconds later (he knows – he's been counting), the train comes to a stop. The platform beyond the window is crowded, and Tweek finally feels his anxiety clawing up from the pit of his stomach, dragging him out of apathy and straight into nauseating fear.

(God, what's he doing here? No one knows where he is. What if he's abducted? What if he's murdered? What if he blanks out and can't remember where he is or when his bus home leaves? 
What if he has a meltdown and he's left to bash his brains out on the curb?)

The fourteen-year-old whines and mutters, yanking at his hair and digging his fingernails into his jeans to stop from knocking his head against the back of his chair. He stays sitting until everyone else files off and then struggles to find his feet, hauling his rucksack onto his shoulders.

Stepping out into the floods of people is like being swept away by a river. He is helpless but to follow, tugged and turned and shoved all the way out past the barricades and the waiting areas, until he's pushing through a bunch of tourists at the huge, fancy entrance.

He's been to Denver hundreds of times in his life, but this is the first time he's made the trip alone. He stands beneath the overhang on one side of the doors, panting and swaying as his vision dips in and out of focus.

There are swarms of people spread out and buzzing in the frigid winter sunlight, and Tweek is someone that doesn't feel like anyone at all.

His phone goes off as he's pulling his earphones out and shoves them back into his pocket.

09:14
outside Union Station now. where are you.

When he starts typing, his hands shake so badly that his cell slips through his fingers and clatters onto the paving slabs. Tweek drops to his knees, scrambling after it.

Eventually, he gets there. Stands back up. He types so painstakingly slowly that his knuckles start to lock, but still it comes out barely legible.

09:18
By door. S blond hair. black coat.

Barely a second later, one final message comes through.

09:18
i see you.

He peers out into the crowd and steps backwards until his bulky rucksack is pressed flat against the wall. Faces upon faces swim by, features blended and muddled. Doesn't know what to look for.

Until, finally, he does.

His gaze locks onto brown eyes. Big, brown eyes set in a tired face and framed by honey-blonde bangs. The boy looks about his age - maybe a little older - and is wearing a tan colored coat and a checkered yellow scarf. Seeing that he's caught Tweek's attention, he raises one hand and waves.

Tweek doesn't wave back.

Just stands and stares as the other boy approaches him.

... PRESENT

"Bad... stuff?" Butters asks, smile slipping off his face as he finally catches sight of Tweek's grim expression. "Like... like what?"
Twitching, Tweek turns away, not wanting the other boy to see the flush of shame that rises up to his cheeks. "Nng. I drove someone away, by lashing out. I – agh – hurt them when I wasn't right in the head, because they stopped b-believing in me. Because no one did." He bends his head over the mug and blows, so that hot steam billows back up over his face. "I-I was alone and I wanted answers and I wasn't happy— I wasn't satisfied 'til I tore down everything between us, just to get them."

And yet Craig had no idea. It didn't matter that Tweek hadn't done it out of cruelty or some twisted form of revenge because at the end of the day, it had still ended up hurting Craig a lot.

A hand lands gently on his upper arm and, flinching, he looks up. Butters is smiling, but it's a wonky thing, and the corners of his eyes crease like he's fighting off a frown. His voice is gentle. "When people forget about us, or stop believin', we all get that way. We all end up causin' a little chaos." He chuckles. It's low, like an ache in his chest has been given a voice. "Doesn't make us bad people – it just means we're human. And bein' human means we mess up, but that's okay."

Stunned, all Tweek can do is stare. "H-how? How is it okay?"

"Well, you learned not to do that stuff again, didn't you?"

That, he doesn't know how to reply to. Just lets Butters drop his grip and reach instead for his shirt sleeve, tugging until Tweek follows him out of the room.

"C'mon now, buddy. Let's go learn some other stuff, too."

... 

The rest of the evening isn't so unbearable with the other boy around.

He shares his beanbag with Butters, shoulders bumping and papers spread out across their knees. (Tweek can't bring himself to mind.)

They don't end up doing much of their homework, but they do write notes to one another, and doodle dumb little cartoons. Butters stifles his giggles into the crook of his elbow and Tweek bites the inside of his cheek to keep himself from smiling too hard, and when the rest of the group decides to order pizza, they share one.

Tweek lets Butters choose ham and pineapple, even though he hates it. He figures it's the least he can do.

Chapter End Notes

okay so i got 3 great song suggestions for this fic today (and another from a friend irl a week or so ago), and i wanted to say that if you guys fancy suggesting any songs you think would fit, please do! i'd love to hear (all genres/singers are welcome) :)))

also, as i was asked to share my playlists for this fic, i figured it wouldn't hurt to post the links. (heads up that my taste in music is generally considered to be 'eclectic' //cough//awful//cough// so consider this your warning LOL)

SO
reader suggestion playlist: here
my crappy writing playlist: here
tweek's weirdass playlist: here
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

time-skip time!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It's with no small amount of trepidation that Tweek clambers up onto the school bus on Monday morning, half expecting Craig not to be there again.

They hadn't texted or spoken for the rest of the previous day, and the blonde somehow convinces himself that This Is Bad.

Whatever backbone he had managed to grow after their last make-out session and his meeting with Olive on Saturday had rapidly crumbled after his brief talk with Butters, and the memories it had stirred up in him. It's like someone has just flicked a switch in his head that he hadn't even realized had gone off, and all the lights have come back on for the first time in days. He's remembering his fear and his self-loathing, and that goes a long way in trying to tear down whatever progress he'd made with his hard-won confidence over the weekend.

All he can think is that he must have done something wrong. Had Tweek's teasing pushed Craig too far the previous day? Would the other boy resent him for it, now? Had speaking so openly about their preferences – however jokingly – left some kind of bad impression on his friend? They certainly didn't make a habit of discussing sexuality around one another; in fact, it had almost become a taboo after Tweek had come out to him those years ago.

All of his slightly manic worries are doused though, upon walking down the aisle of the bus.

There's Craig, slouching down in his seat with his long, gangly legs askew and his chullo hat – the one Tweek had returned to him the week prior – pulled down low on his head. Upon spotting Tweek, the boy's mouth hitches up in one corner, and he scoots up straight in his seat so the Tweek can squeeze past a little easier.

He doesn't.

Instead the blonde boy stands around so long that the driver, apparently sick of waiting for him to get his ass into gear, revs. The engine gives its trademark rattle as they lurch back out onto the road and Tweek stumbles a step, gripping the back of one of the seats. At the sardonic arch of Craig's brow, he finally closes the last of the distance between them.

Tic in his eyes and palms slightly clammy, the blonde presses past Craig, weirdly aware of their legs bumping as he shimmies into his spot. Maybe it's the way that Craig watches him, eyes unblinking and expression quietly amused.

Whatever the case, the moment that Tweek's butt lands on the chair, Craig leans over into his space and presses a warm, chaste kiss to his lips. He pulls back just as quickly as he leant over, and his face is a study in smugness. "Hey dude."

Tweek, however, is in the process of trying not to spontaneously combust. He's pretty sure his heart
just skipped a dozen beats, and he might pass out from the embarrassment. Making a garbled sound, he flails at Craig's stupid, handsome face when the smugness develops into a full blown smirk. "Gah, dude! Y-you can't just— just do that— right here—"

His words are cut off by another brief peck, and goddamn it, the other boy needs to stop shutting him up that way.

Craig stays decidedly close afterwards, right in Tweek's space. "But I just did. Twice." All Tweek can see is Craig – his blue eyes, his frustrating smirk. As the scent of the other boy's citrus shampoo and spearmint toothpaste washes over him, he worries that whatever this thing is between them, it's going to end in him having a fucking heart attack. He's never going to be able to get used to this, or keep his cool, or act like an even semi-functional human being again. Not if kisses are on the cards.

He's trying to keep a clear head, trying to work his way around some kind of reply (which is sort of made more difficult thanks to Craig smiling like a smarmy shit), when someone from the row behind them whistles, long and loud.

Tweek didn't think it was possible to blush any harder than he already was; he's proven desperately wrong when, upon shoving Craig away with two hands pressed flat against his boy's chest and his head snapping around, he spots Kenny.

Kenny, looking down at them over the top of their seats. Creepy, scabbed up grin huge and eyebrows doing a funny jig, he says, "Don't mind me – just here for the free show."

Butters, apparently tucked into the seat next to McCormick's, babbles out the loudest whisper Tweek thinks he's ever heard. "N-now Ken, stop that! Get your- your butt back down in your seat, mister. You leave them alone, or else I'm gonna get real sore with you."

Twitch in his eye escalating, Tweek looks from Kenny to Craig. Seeing the blank, dead-ass glare his best friend is aiming at Kenny, he takes mercy on the other blonde for his stupidity (and apparent death wish).

He reaches up to bat Kenny's face away with a resounding whap and a frustrated, "Argh." If his smack is perhaps a little hard, then that's just excess humiliation, and it's Kenny's own fault for being such a douchebag.

Bright red, he turns in his seat and stares resolutely out of the window, refusing to so much as look at anyone else, or engage in conversation for the rest of the drive. (He's not sure he'd be able to even if he wanted, thanks to most of his brain apparently having been scrambled.) That isn't to say that when Craig's fingers brushes over his knuckles in a hesitant, unspoken request, that he doesn't flip his palm over so they can intertwine their fingers together.

(He may or may not spend the whole trip smothering a smile and trying not to jitter giddily as Craig's thumb traces circles over the back of his hand.)

...

Embarrassingly, this seems to mark the beginning of a trend for the rest of the week.

If Craig doesn't sneak in a kiss on the bus ride through to school then he does it by their lockers during lunch break, when the halls are quiet and no one's around to look, or at the end of the day after most people have left and they're waiting for the next bus. Every single time, Tweek freezes up and blushes hot enough to set his own hair on fire.

Craig never makes to kiss him in busy or blatantly obvious locations and the kisses
are never anything more than light, fleeting pecks. They're just extensions of the hand holding, of arms around shoulders and hugs and whatever it is they've been faking for all these years. Mostly, the situation is manageable – as are his reactions to this new, barely noticeable level of intimacy.

Occasionally though, his reactions are really, really not. (Especially not as the week progresses.)

At lunch on Tuesday, he sits next to Craig like always.

There are no overt touches or suggestive looks, but their thighs are pressed together the entire twenty minutes they're sat down, and every ounce of Tweek's attention hone in on the warm press of contact. He's distracted to the point of not eating a bite, and can't engage in the conversation around the table at all, even though Kenny and Butters have somehow found their way close by, and Butters is showing Tweek some of the drawings he's been doing in class.

Every time his best friend shifts, every brush of their arms and shared glance derails him just a little more. His heart thunders and his breathing is weird and by the end, he's a hot mess. When he goes to swing one foot over the low bench, his legs refuse to cooperate with his wishes. They don't hold him up (he has, apparently, turned to jelly) and he goes crashing to the floor, untouched tray and all.

Phys Ed on Wednesday is an even more taxing ordeal.

He walks through the door to the locker room with his gym bag slung over his shoulder and, after taking one look at Craig – tall, topless, astoundingly attractive Craig with his subtle muscles from Basketball club – he's suddenly very aware of himself.

Aware of his every little imperfection, like the ugly, hidden scars on his thighs, and the way his bones sort of poke out a little too far because he's underweight and doesn't do much exercising. Like the spattering of small brown moles over his shoulders and back, and the fact that he isn't hairy or tall in the way that most of the other guys in their group are.

He's comparable maybe to Butters, who's only just a little taller than he is. Except that Butters is cute and soft around the edges – has more meat on his bones and doesn't just look like he's been locked in a dark cupboard and left to his own dubious devices for the last three years. Butters sleeps well and eats well and smiles easily, where Tweek's done neither of the former since he was a young child, and isn't sure he really knows how to smile and mean it.

He's watched Craig and the line of dark hair leading down into his pants, thinks of standing next to him and twitching unattractively as he struggles to get his t-shirt up over his stupid, scruffy blonde head, and goes straight back out through the door again.

Worse than that is when Craig asks him if he'd like to hang back and watch his basketball practice from the bleachers in the gymnasium after school on Thursday. Tweek sits up in the empty stands for two hours straight with nothing to do but watch Craig and think. He listens to the coach run them through the warm ups and through a series of drills into a fake match, and he thinks. He watches his best friend intercept throws, land a shot, dodge, duck, run, and he thinks. He sees him snatch the ball right out from under Broflovski's nose, passing off to Token and wiping his hand across his brow, and he thinks.

The longer he sits there the louder his thoughts get, until he's eaten up by the fact that he still hasn't had the chance to speak with Craig, and the unhappy knowledge that he's putting it off because he's too much of a coward.
Tweek is so shaken up by the end of practice, he has to go to the toilets and compose himself while the team are in the locker room, showering and changing back into clean clothes.

Unable to muster up much conversation or enthusiasm on the bus ride, he turns down Craig’s offer to go back to his and watch some Netflix. (Just the thought of being alone in the other boy’s bedroom after the events of the party makes him sick with nerves.)

All in all, he thinks he’s been dealing with his anxiety pretty well. He hasn’t been reduced to panic attacks or meltdowns since the previous week, and he’s been studiously following Olive’s advice about making more use of his coping methods.

But as he lies in bed Thursday night, the image of Craig's face falling a little at his refusal to hang out for longer, he knows that the issues between them aren’t going to just go away.

This needs to be resolved. Or at the very least, it needs to be acknowledged.

*(Take it slow, don't rush, just do one thing at a time.)*

... 

He spends almost the entirety of Thursday night tossing and turning until he's so restless that he has to get up and move.

It's four in the morning and the house is silent. A long, warm shower works wonders on his nerves, and three piping hot coffees ease the tension building in the muscles in his shoulders.

As always, his mom emerges just before the sunrise, walking down the stairs in her dressing gown and reaching for the apron that hangs from the kitchen door handle. Upon spotting Tweek, who's visibly tired and trembling, she smiles an unassuming smile, pats his shoulder lightly on the way past and says, "Pour me a cup, pumpkin, and I'll get straight on with making us some waffles."

Ever the good son where delicious breakfasts are concerned, he fetches a mug for Mrs Tweek, pours it out just the way she likes it first thing in the morning (with a splash of oat milk and a teaspoon of dark sugar), and shuffles it over to the counter next to the stovetop, where his mom is whisking together a batter in a huge white bowl.

Another half hour later and Richard Tweek emerges, rubbing his eyes and propping one hand on his hip. Over breakfast, he bemoans the difficulties of working with the new barista (which has become a favorite subject over the last few days), and waxes poetic about how he's going to work another long, fulfilling day at his shop, producing the finest coffee for miles around despite how sore his back is. Tweek's twitching amps up a few degrees during his dad's dramatic morning speech. By some small miracle he avoids being dragged into an even deeper discussion, like his father's continued disappointment at his "second son" being so absent over the last few weeks.

Scarving down his waffles, he bolts up the stairs.

With much haste and very little coordination, the boy dresses in a large black jumper, a pair of camo-colored pants, and an old pair of faded red sneakers. He avoids the mirror in the bathroom as he brushes his teeth, since there's nothing he can do about the dark bags under his eyes, or the haystack that he (begrudgingly) calls hair. At least, he tells himself, the hickeys are gone.

He tries to tell himself that he's trying too hard when he struggles to choose between two knitted scarves. That this is just another day.

Except that if he has his way, it won't be.
Even before he'd clambered out of bed that morning, Tweek had decided that he wasn't going to be attending any classes today. He's high strung and already struggling to keep a hold on his emotions, and going to school where he'll be stuck in noisy, stressful situations all day will just end up cracking him again.

But Tweek isn't going to give himself any chance to get out of this conversation and so, before he can rethink it, he snatches his cell off of his nightstand and sends a text to Craig.

06:36
Hey dude, I'm not goin gto class today. Skip with me? x

It's only ten minutes that Tweek has to wait for his reply, but it feels more like ten damn hours. He sits down on his bed. Stands up. Walks towards his door. Turns back. Sits down again. Stubs his toe against the carpet.

Finally, his phone pings.

06:47
k x

Tweek stares.

When he first wakes up, Craig is in general pretty unresponsive – is likely to communicate in nothing more than grunts until he's had a strong dose of caffeine and sugar. How this translates so well into his texts is baffling to the blonde.

Still, the easy reply is enough that he can focus on getting his shit together.

For a while longer Tweek distracts himself by getting ready, dumping out his satchel and hiding his textbooks, notes and folders under the rumpled covers of his bed. (Not that either of his parents would bother coming into his bedroom for any reason while he was out, or would care that he wasn't going to school. He knows all this logically, but he can't help being a paranoid fucker.)

Just as he's about to leave, he sends Craig one last message.

07:17
Leaving now. I'll meet you at yours. x

Chapter End Notes

okay so, here's the thing.. i've got at least one friend coming over to stay from saturday through to thursday, and from previous experience, i doubt i'll have any time at all to write during their stay. i'll try to update this as usual tomorrow though i'm going to be out most of the day, and/or maybe saturday, and i'll try answering any comments as fast as possible, but... i can't promise anything.

i'll miss you guys :'

//stares dramatically off into the sunset//

(honestly though, i think i'm already going into withdrawal over here.)
here's an early update, since it's Valentine's Day and i couldn't resist!

i've missed writing on this story and replying regularly so, so much the last few day :'O <33

(also, sorry for all mistakes - i'll come through and edit tomorrow after my friend's headed home!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Approaching Craig, who stands just to the left of his front yard, is about as terrifying as approaching a rampaging bull to Tweek. This isn't in any way to say that Craig is outwardly intimidating (or even inwardly intimidating, for that matter), but the upcoming confrontation is. Tweek has no way of predicting the outcome of any talk they might have, and he understands that this has the potential to go incredibly wrong for him.

He desperately tries not to overthink this, or reflect too much on his prior experiences with the other boy, but it's hard. It's so, so hard not to shut himself off and stay quiet for longer.

(Just a little longer...)

Craig looks up when Tweek, so caught up in his internal fretting, fails to notice a dark patch of ice that's escaped being cleared or salted and goes flying across the sidewalk, straight onto his face. He shrieks as he goes down.

Chin stinging, hands scraped and delicate ego bruised, Tweek pushes himself up onto his sore knees just as the other boy reaches his side, dropping to a crouch and clasping his shoulder. "Shit dude, you alright?"

"Sweet Jesus, fuck. Is my face bleeding?" He lifts up badly trembling hands and wipes the grit and blood off on his thighs, barely hiding the flinch as his palms scate over the sensitive scarring beneath his pants.

"A little." Frowning, Craig cups Tweek's face and swipes a thumb across his throbbing chin.

"Ach. Ow, man," says Tweek, more whine than words. "Easy on the— the rubbing."

The taller boy snorts. "Quit whining, you big baby." He lets go of the blonde and swings his rucksack off of his shoulders so he can rummage about inside. Tweek just sits, slumped over and staring down at his palms, which are bloody again only days after having finally healed up. Just his fucking luck.

Eventually Craig finds whatever it is he's looking for in the front pocket of his bag – he emerges with a quiet huff of victory and draws the object into his lap. Pouting forgotten, Tweek twitches, rolling his eyes at the red, oblong box his friend is currently unpacking. His miniature first aid kit. It's a little scary how ready Craig is for any emergency. (It's also incredibly attractive since Tweek is such a paranoid fuck, but he tries not to let himself go swooning.) "Eurgh, dude. Seriously, can we nng—
not do this here? What if our parents see? My dad could walk past any minute now, or your mom might head out for work."

"Fuck them," the other boy says, as if it's the easiest thing in the world. He proceeds to tear into a little white sachet with his teeth, tugging out a wet wipe and, shoving the empty packaging into his jacket pocket, goes back to cradling Tweek's face.

When he dabs the wipe against his chin, the blonde hisses but holds still. "Aurgh, man, I can do it," he says, even though his hands stay curled in his lap and he makes no move to grab for the wipe.

"Let me," Craig says.

So Tweek does.

There's something calming about Craig's gentle ministrations, and the way his brows draw together in concentration. He cares enough about Tweek to carry around a first aid kit and to wipe his bloody chin when he slips over like the goddamn klutz he is, and that... makes the tightness in Tweek's chest ease off. Just a little.

That said, by the time Craig's stuck a bandaid over the scrape and has moved on to his peeling palms, Tweek's pants are soaking through with icy snowmelt, and he sort of just wants to get up. It isn't until Craig stops, hands holding both of his and chin tucked down, that Tweek gets fidgety.

"Nng, dude—"

"We're not just skipping for nothing, are we." Craig cuts over him, voice low. "We're gonna talk."

The words aren't questions, yet Tweek can hear the uncertainty in the flat drawl.

His heart skips, fingers convulsing against Craig's. "Mmn yeah, man. I w-wanna chat a little." Tweek can't help the way his voice wavers.

"Okay," Craig says, looking up from his lap. There's something vulnerable in the wideness of his eyes and the tilt of his mouth that has Tweek's stomach twisting.

Without even thinking about it, for the first time this week he's the one moving in for a kiss.

Craig's breath stutters out against his lips, the other boy's shock temporarily freezing him in place. Tweek doesn't care. This isn't a kiss he's using to garner some kind of a reaction; he's doing it because it feels like his bones might crumble under the strength of his affection and fear. If he doesn't somehow express it, he thinks he might just collapse.

Eyelashes flutter against his cheek and, as he goes to pull away, Craig follows him. Not overbearing or hard, but there. Close. Warm and, God, it's the kind of slow, unassuming kiss that makes him giddy. Butterflies beat their wings in the hollow of his stomach.

(He'd happily go on living in this moment forever.)

But like all good things in life, it's fleeting.

The taller boy pulls back, blue eyes flickering across Tweek's face the way they seem to be doing so much these last few weeks. Tweek's starting to wonder if Craig will ever find whatever it is he's looking for, and whether or not it would be a good or bad thing if he did.

In the end, Craig just sighs and pushes up to his feet, still holding the blonde's hands. "Where're we gonna go, then?" He asks as he tugs Tweek up after him.
"The mall?"

"Sure," comes an unenthusiastic reply.

He doesn't take any offence to the sound - he hates the place just as much as Craig does. The thing is, it's got tucked away nooks for them to hide in and a shitty food court (if a MacDonalds and a Chipotle really count as a food court) so, provided this doesn't go absolutely fucking awfully, they have somewhere to eat afterwards too.

Before Craig can get the chance to turn and start walking down the street, their fingers linked together, Tweek pulls away. The other boy stops, arm suspended briefly in the air like he's struggling to comprehend not holding hands. Tweek doesn't give him long enough for his face to fall – just drags the arm around his shoulder, pressing in against Craig's side.

He can feel the other boy's stare boring into the top of his head, but he can't bring himself to return it. He just... he's missed this closeness sort of desperately over the last few weeks, and the fear that this might be the last time he gets to be like this with the other boy drives him on. Fuck his embarrassment. Fuck his anxiety.

Craig's arm tightens around him, pulling him in as close as possible.

They walk on together in silence, everything they've got to say hovering over them. Tweek just does his best to enjoy the warmth and the closeness.

...

In the end, they decide to settle down at a booth in the back of Macdonalds, a large cup of soda sat between them. (Neither drinks any.)

They're sat on either side of the booth and Craig's long legs stretch out under table, pressing the sides of their sneakers together. Another familiar comfort.

The problem is, now he's sat here struggling to think of how to word this, he isn't sure that anything's going to stave off the rushing of blood in his ears or the crushing pressure on his ribs.

He opens his mouth. Shuts it again. Clears his throats and runs his fingers over the edge of the table back and forth, back and forth, because he's got the urge to dig his nails into something, or to bang his head off the surface just for a break in the tension.

"Hrrng. I— I guess you could maybe... m-maybe just ask me the questions you want answered?"

Craig sits in silence for a long time after that statement, and Tweek gets so nervous by the way that time drags on that he glances up. Craig's hands are thrust into his pockets, and his head is dipped forwards. His eyes are intent on the soda.

When the other boy finally begins to talk, Tweek jumps so much that his butt literally leaves the seat. "Why did you react that way after the party?"

Great, Tweek thinks, gulping hard. Not like he's being thrown off into the deep end, then. "Be — argh— because I was scared. I d-didn't get why you would wanna... do that with someone like me. I'm not exactly a catch, dude. I was scared—"

"What? Why would you think that? Dude, that's just—"

Tweek cuts him off with a loud sound of distress. A couple sat a few booths along look in their
direction. "Man, please just— lemme answer. Please."

Craig leans back in his seat, eyebrows furrowed.

The blonde takes a deep breath to compose himself. He braces himself against the edge of the table, fingers gripping so hard that his knuckles go white. "Re-remember when I came – hhhnn – when I came out to you a couple years back? When I said there was a boy I lo— a boy I liked?"

He doesn't look up, but can see Craig nod in his periphery.

His heart is thumping so hard in his chest, he can't hear properly around it. "W-well... that boy was you. Y-you, Craig." His voice cracks and wobbles around the words. "I'd – eurgh – just found out I liked you. I was fucking p-petrified but I wanted to... to go tell you, 'cause I thought you'd know what to do." He can feel the heat flood his cheeks a dark pink as he speaks, and although his words started off stilted, they now begin to flow more naturally, until he's being washed away in the current. "I knew you'd never like me that way – I don't think that e-even crossed my mind as a possibility. But I did want your support as a friend and... I didn't get it, man. I didn't get shit from you but heartache. And that wasn't even a romantic sort of thing. It was because my best friend in the whole world shoved me away and told me to fuck off."

Somehow, somehow, he manages to stop himself there.

In the sudden onset of silence, he realizes that he's crying. Big, fat tears that roll down his cheeks and land on the tabletop. He reaches up to wipe dry, cracked knuckles over his cheeks, his movements jerky.

It takes an uncomfortable amount of time for him to notice that none of what he said actually explained why his reaction the morning after the party had been so bad. He sniffs loudly and starts again. "We never talked about that, dude. N-not once. You spent almost a whole year cringing away from me like I'd contaminate you, and for the longest damn time I thought it was because you were disgusted by me. Is it so – nnng – difficult to understand that I would expect the worst, after my best friend flung me away like I was dirt? Is it?" He shouldn't be angry. He knows, logically, that he shouldn't. It all happened years ago. They were just dumb kids. Craig didn't want Tweek to know about everything, and Tweek being gay ruined that. It complicated things.

Hurt and rage curdle together in his stomach. For the last three years, this has been festering inside of him.

God, Olive hasn't ever been wrong about him before, but she sure as hell wasn't right when she said he'd move past this. Tweek feels like he's still standing on the pavement outside of Craig's house, unable to breathe or see or think past the rib crushing heartache. Can still taste the bile on the back of his tongue, after he'd tripped in the snow, legs unable to hold him up and sobs shaking him so hard he'd started to heave.

Face grim, he looks up.

Craig's white as a sheet, and looking at Tweek like he's never really seen him before. There's a cruel, twisted part of the blonde that wants to go on, suddenly wants to plough through the rest of his reasons for wanting nothing to do with Craig romantically. Wants to list off every little thing he knows the other boy said and did behind Tweek's back that made that first, awful hurt pale in comparison.

But he doesn't. Doesn't, because the rest of him loves Craig regardless of anything that was said or done in the past. Because in the end, Craig came back to him. It was enough.
(He keeps telling himself that.)

His frown eases up.

Nudging his foot against Craig's under the table, he tries his best the offer a shaky smile. "Heurgh—hey man, stop staring at me like I'm gonna break down or leave or something. I'm sitting here with you, right?" He doesn't say he got over it because that would be lying, and outside of whatever relationship they're meant to have had for the last eight years, Tweek doesn't like to lie. He's clearly not over anything, otherwise why the fuck would he be blubbing about it like a preteen girl?

Despite Tweek's attempted reassurance, Craig doesn't look any better. He pulls his legs away from the blonde's and hunches over the table on his elbows, resting his face in his hands. He runs his fingers through his bangs. On top of his head, the chullo bunches up.

"Rgh. Did you wanna ask anything else, man?" Tweek speaks softly, as if that might somehow soothe the hurt Craig is feeling because of him.

"Why? Why did you let me be your friend again after that? You... you liked me, and I did that." His voice is hoarse.

I still do, Tweek thinks. More than ever. There's no way he'd tell Craig that, though. Too much is still between them, and they've come so far in spite of it all. Tweek refuses to fuck this up because he's in love with someone emotionally unattainable. It's one thing for Craig to want to mess around with him (though even that is fucking weird to Tweek); it's another thing altogether to expect any of his stupidly intense feelings to be returned.

Instead, he says, "Be— because you're my best friend, and you came through at the end there, even though you were clearly going through shit too, dude. You walked all the way to my house in the middle of the night so I would know straight away about S-Stripe dying."

"But I fucking hurt you. I wasn't there when your mom went through treatment, or when you were suspended, or when they told you that you might be held back a grade. Shit. Shit." His voice is thick—choked up like he might cry. "If I'm your best friend after all of that, then you have the worst taste. You should still hate me."

"Fuck you, man." Tweek's voice is so acidic that Craig actually looks up from his hands. His eyes are red. "You don't get to decide that. I—nngh— make the calls, and I decided I wanted you around. I'm glad I stuck by that, so get the fuck over it."

The other boy's lips wobble around a smile, but it's fleeting. "Is that why you wanted to stop with the dating thing?"

"Hnng... kind of." Tweek shrugs, not knowing how to put it in words. "In the beginning, I guess I panicked and thought you'd call the whole thing off, so I wa- wanted to get it out the way before you got the chance." And there he goes again, cutting off chunks of a more detailed explanation. Dick move, Tweek knows. "In the en— now, though... I dunno. I don't care if other people think we're dating still, as long as we can figure shit out properly man. Especially if you wanna keep fucking around to-together."

"Fucking around?" There's a furrow between Craig's eyebrows.

Tweek gives a jerky shrug. "Y'know, kissing and touching. All that."

"Oh."
They lapse back into quiet. This time, Craig's the first to crack.

"You want to? It's not just that you're doing it 'cause you think it's what I want, right?"

He looks at Craig like the other boy just spit on him. "Dude." The blonde splays his hands out across the table and leans forwards. "I-I may be fucking abnormal, but if I didn't like what it felt like, d'you seriously think I'd have let you— I'd have done stuff with you? I mean, I'm still a goddamn teenager, man."

"But you keep flinching away. I don't wanna do it if it makes you uncomfortable."

"Ugh..." It's Tweek's turn to bury his head in his hands. Seriously, why can't he stop blushing? "Everything makes me flinch, dude. What'd you expect from me?" He ignores fact his heart kind of wants to go into palpitations. "I didn't have any ex-experience at all before the party. You're working with a fucking virgin here. Maybe looking in the wrong place if you w-wanted anything easy."

This time, Craig's quiet huff of laughter is genuine. A long fingered hand settles against the side of his head, warm palm overlapping Tweek's chewed fingers and dry knuckles. "No. Easy's overrated."

A grin splits open the bottom half of Tweek's face, and he lets his hands drop away, until Craig's fingers are in his hair and their eyes are locked. "Sweet Jesus, you're lame."

Craig just smiles one of his rare, genuine smile – the kind that makes his stomach flutter and his chest warm – and leans across the table, catching Tweek's mouth with his own.

There's something about this, about having his face cradled by Craig as he's kissed, that makes Tweek want to cling to him. It's safe and calm and so fucking sweet it should make him feel sick.

It doesn't.

He leans in for more.

Chapter End Notes

happy Valentine's Day, everyone! ilu all <33
Eventually they get up and move from the booth. Tweek feels light headed, a little like he's walking through a daydream.

They're fine. Everything's okay. The other boy's still here, even after finding out that Tweek had liked him. He's here.

Craig's arm is tight around his waist as they walk.

When they spot one of Thomas Tucker's co-workers stuffing an overflowing burrito into his mouth in front of the broken water feature in the centre of the mall, they duck down the small stretch of corridor alongside Hot Topic. Craig peers out around the corner, the high points of his cheeks pink and his expression a little more open than usual as he watches the man spill rice and beans down his front.

Tweek can't help it.

He reaches his hands up around Craig's neck, and pulls him down to face level.

Wide blue eyes – bright with flecks of silver from the white overhead lighting – meet green. Tweek doesn't break the eye contact, just dips his head to one side and kisses the dark haired boy. Craig's arms tug him closer when he sinks his fingers into the hair at the back of his head.

The kiss is hot – a trail of tongue and teeth and impatient noises – in a way that none of their interactions have been since that night. The knowledge makes his heart thump and a flame light up in the pit of his stomach. He tugs Craig down a little further; lets the other boy back him up, step-by-step, until his back thumps lightly into the wall. Doesn't get the chance to startle away from the kiss, because his best friend is pressing closer, distracting him in the same split second of hesitation.

They stay there for God knows how long, until breathing's hard and separating is something that feels unnatural. The only reason they pull away is because someone clears their throat. Loudly.

It's a kid who'd been in a few years above them in school (Michael the goth kid, some muzzy, far-off part of his brain suggests), dressed in Hot Topic uniform and looking like he wants to blow his brains out.

"Hey, conformists," he drawls, hands in his pockets and face scrunched up in disgust. "One of my freaking customers is bitching me out in front of my manager because you're out here getting hot and heavy like you're main characters in some lame-ass, mainstream fanfiction. Can't you just, like, go and conform to gay stereotypes somewhere else and stop messing up my already shitty day?"

Craig flips him the bird and turns his face back towards Tweek like he means to keep on kissing him,
eyes half-mast and lips swollen, but Tweek's senses come back just enough that he's painfully aware of the compromising position they're in. They are, as was pointed out, fully exposed to anyone walking in and out the front of the store.

Humiliated and giddy and really turned on (oh, sweet fucking Jesus, can Craig feel?), all the blood in his body is stuck between rushing to his groin and flying up into his face.

He has one huge, seizure-like twitch and, grabbing onto the front of Craig's black jacket, drags the taller boy away.

"Ugh, thank freaking Cthulu," mutters the lanky, miserable looking goth as Tweek goes past – though his words transform into a yelp of surprise when Tweek stomps, hard, on his insole.

"M-mind your fucking business, man," he says through a flustered growl.

It's made worse when Craig laughs a low, throaty laugh and reels him in for one more appreciative peck before they continue, right in front of the main hall. Right in front of everyone.

(But Thomas Tucker's co-worker seems to have moved on at some point during their impromptu make out session, so all is good.)

They walk on, no more kissing, not much talking, but a palpable tension around them that has Tweek's feet tripping and his breath stuttering every time Craig's grip shifts against his side.

When they leave the mall, it's by unspoken agreement.

...  

Somehow they end up in the back of the movie theatre. It's dark and completely empty, since the only other people that came in at the beginning of the show were some older couple that left their seats right after the opening credits, screaming at each other and looking sort of murderous.

(Tweek had maybe ducked down in his chair and muttered about Jesus saving him for a little while – especially when the woman started slapping her partner around the head with her purse. Craig had just taken a long slurp of Tweek's thermos, and had watched them like it was just another part of the moviegoer experience.)

There's some shitty Adam Sandler movie playing on the big screen, but honestly Tweek has no idea what's going on or how long it's been running for. He's kind of distracted.

One of Craig's hands is in his hair and Tweek's braced against the armrest. He's out of breath but he doesn't want to break this off. His best friend tastes like sweet black coffee.

Almost the moment the couple were out the door, Craig had turned and reeled him in. The blonde hadn't objected – in fact, he'd reciprocated with equal enthusiasm. It's like the relief of speaking, the relief of everything not imploding on them after a short, honest conversation, has launched them straight into a fever pitch. They're live wires.

When the other boy sinks his teeth into Tweek's lip and gently tugs, the blonde makes an embarrassing, breathy sound that has him wanting to hide his face. Instead he leans further over the arm rest, digs his fingers into the black plastic so hard his knuckles ache, pushes up onto his knees so that he's over Craig, looking down into a shadowed face. Large, pale eyes peer back at him, reflections of the big screen obscuring him in flashes of pink and green and yellow.

"Th-this is really— uncomfortable," Tweek mutters, in reference to the seats, when Craig withdraws.
He's so hard he aches, his legs, however short, are just a little too long to be folded beneath him on the chair at this angle, and his arms are shaking from the effort of supporting his upper body.

The heat in Craig's expression shuts off as soon as his words are out of his mouth, and Tweek has to bite into his tongue just to stop himself from shrieking in frustration. "Dude, we can stop if—"

"Aurgh. I swear to God, Craig," he says, more snarl than anything else. "If you keep treating me like a fucking flower I'm gonna have to deck you, man." The blonde stumbles onto his feet, pins and needles bursting to life as he stands up and shuffles closer to the other boy. Clearly he's going to have to be obnoxiously straightforward about this.

(It's a good thing he's too horny to be shy right now.)

"Move over," he says, nudging the outside of Craig's knee so that the other boy pulls his legs together.

Made brazen by his frustration, Tweek flops straight down onto Craig's lap, half straddling him the second the other boy complies. His best friend's hands fly up to catch him, leading him to settle his weight down onto firm, jean-clad thighs.

"I'm just worried," Craig says, breath fanning over Tweek's face as he traces his lips, feather soft, over the line of Tweek's jaw. (He shivers.) "I don't wanna mess this up."

The blonde grunts and rolls his eyes, though his heart skips a beat. He's too worked up to find the sentiment cute. Instead, he grabs the taller boy by either side of his face and forces him back far enough to meet his eyes. Their noses touch. "Nng... You aren't gonna. Just kiss me and...and do whatever the fuck you want, man. I'll make it clear if you're going too far for me. Okay?"

He knows he's said the right thing, because just like the night of the party, some sort of delicate control seems to snap, and Craig's claiming his mouth again, long fingers digging into his hips. The force of the kiss is bruising, and the second Craig's tongue strokes over the seal of his lips, Tweek gladly parts them. Their teeth click and Tweek cants his head to the side, curling his fingers up around the other boy's neck until he's cradling his nape, like that might control the surge of warmth building at the seat of his spine.

(It doesn't.)

Their tongues slide together as Craig's fingers slip beneath Tweek's jumper, the digits skating over the hips of his low-hanging camo pants and up over his waist. Tweek's stomach muscles tense under the roaming touch and his back bends, pressing himself into Craig's palm. Still his best friend's hand roams, tracing every dip and curve like he's counting each one of the blonde's ribs. Tweek squirms and huffs a giggle into the kiss, shifting further forwards so that Craig's hips are pinned on either side by his knees.

It's only when his thumb brushes over Tweek's nipple that he stops. Electricity zaps straight from the point of contact right down to his crotch, like the touch is a direct connection.

He shudders, breath whooshing out of him when Craig makes a second, firmer pass over the stupidly sensitive nub. Seriously, what the fuck? Is it normal for dudes to be this way? Tweek doesn't know and he isn't sure he can work up the energy to care much right then, because he's so busy trying not to turn to jelly in Craig's arms.

Apparently the other boy doesn't mind though, since he seems to focus on the spot. He rests his head against the back of his chair and watches for a long while as Tweek writhes, mouth opening and
shutting around nonsensical, muddled words.

"A-ah, dude, n-not fair," the blonde finally manages as Craig tips his head forwards into the crick of Tweek's neck, lips mouthing at a patch of skin right above the collar of his jumper. Even as his head tilts to one side to give better access and his fingers thread through dark hair, he says, "n-no more fucking hickeys."

Craig pauses. He drops both hands back to the sharp juts of Tweek's hipbones and tightens his grip. Warm breath washes over his ear, derailing him just enough that it takes a second to register as a chuckle. "Spoilsport."

Before he can think of any way to reply to that, Craig's pulling him down tight against him, and fuck-
he can feel Craig, hardhotrightthereagainsthim-

Tweek's face flushes so hard he's half afraid he'll pass out. He makes a sound stuck somewhere between a "meep" and an "argh", and can't help but go stiff, muscles tensing up.

Despite knowing that they're completely alone in here, he has to fight the urge to peer around at the other seats in the dim lighting. It isn't that he doesn't want to dry hump Craig into oblivion, it's just that he's suddenly very... aware of where they are. Of the empty, broken seats and the dropped popcorn and Adam Sandler shouting something about boiled cabbage on the huge screen behind him.

The other boy, seemingly sensing his sudden hesitance, eases up his hold. Runs his hands up along the planes of his back in slow, soothing motions. He nuzzles at the tendon running down Tweek's throat, soft and open mouthed, and the blonde can't help but melt against him, returning the gentle touches with shaky motions of his own. Passing his fingers through his best friend's hair and dipping beneath the chullo hat, Tweek sinks into the softer sensations – the trailing of fingers along the bumps in his spine, over sharp, tense shoulder blades and all the way back down to his hips.

Even though his hands are steady as ever and his movements are sure, Tweek can feel Craig's heart thumping erratically where their chests are pressed together.

When the soft nuzzling moves from his neck to the underside of his jaw, Tweek turns to meet the kisses with his own.

Slow. They go slow.

His briefly rattled nerves are forgotten in favour of long, deep kisses, intertwined tongues and one hand splayed out over his back, keeping him anchored in the moment.

This time the build is steadier.

It's a thrum in his veins as Craig traces the roof of his mouth, follows his gums. He's whisked away by coffee and citrus, undertones of smoke and spearmint that push aside the buttered popcorn and dust of the movie theatre.

It's a buzz in his head as Craig sucks on Tweek's tongue, scrapes his incisors over swollen lips and strokes the thumb of one hand in a circular motion just below the hem of the blonde's pants. His stomach flutters and he returns lingering kisses with his own, nails light against the back of Craig's head and the heel of his palm flat against his best friend's pulse point.

Tweek doesn't know when he starts shifting against the darker haired boy, but what starts as a small, involuntary movement soon develops into a purposeful roll that has his nerves tingling. The first time
Craig reciprocates, Tweek makes a breathy moan that the other boy swallows away.

With each rock of their hips sending thrills up and down his spine, stoking the fire in the pit of his stomach, he thinks it isn’t unreasonable for him to be breathless.

He isn’t sure when Craig’s hand makes it beneath the loose fabric of his pants, but the press of fingers against the curve of his ass has his length straining against the front of his boxers. Craig’s hand guides him with each roll of their hips – as Tweek’s pulling away from the other boy, struggling to breathe.

He buries his head against Craig’s shoulder, unable to think of anything – unable to feel anything – beyond the rubbing, the friction, a second hand sliding from his back and into his pants too, heat emanating through the thin cotton of his boxer shorts as long fingers squeeze.

Tweek’s heart pounds in his ear, wild hair sticking to his temples and his nape, and Craig’s mouth on his cheek, on his ear, on his throat. He doesn’t have the strength of will to protest when the other boy works his way down to the junction where neck meets shoulders and begins to lave the sensitive skin with his tongue in time to each thrust, lips forming a seal around the point of contact. It makes him burn up.

An upbeat song plays in the background, accompanied by crashes and booms and the screeching of a cat; Tweek zones out, everything fading to white noise apart from their laboured breathing and the hammering of two pulses trying desperately to align.

It’s hard to know where his best friend ends and he begins – hard to differentiate the thrusting of their hips, or to tell apart the ache of arousal from the discomfort of their positions. All the blonde knows is that it’s Craig’s hands squeezing him, Craig rubbing up against him, hard, through the barrier of their pants, Craig’s body beneath him, Craig’s mouth on his throat giving him another Goddamn bruise—

like he’s marking Tweek as his—

And that’s it. His vision goes white, his back arching as the fire roars through him, setting everything in its path alight. Hips jerking, he groans loudly against the shoulder of Craig’s jacket, fingers convulsing in short, silky hair and toes curling in his shoes. There’s a long moment where his chest locks around his breathing—

"C-Craig," he says, only it’s more an incoherent stammer than anything else. "Craig – nn – Cra-ig, Craig."

The other boy guides him through it, hands firm enough he knows he’ll have bruises the shape of fingerprints there for a week to come. Tweek doesn’t care. All he does care about are the flames rushing through him and retreating in time to his best friend’s urgent thrusts, aftershocks that leave him twitchy and whining.

He’s barely coming down from it, the wetness in his pants going from thank fuck to oh, gross and limbs turning to cement, when the other boy’s rocking (too much, too forceful against Tweek now that he’s feeling oversensitive and maybe a little raw), goes erratic. A long, low groan hums through Tweek’s shoulder from where Craig’s pressing into the skin of his neck, making goosebumps rise over the backs of the blonde’s arms.

Following his instincts, he meets his best friend’s thrusts despite how lethargic he feels. He runs his fingers through the hair under the chullo until the hat, bunched up and flopping, falls off to one side and frees black hair to the dark theatre.
Before long the other boy stills, tensing beneath him. A loud exhale and a groan, and he slumps into the seat, pulling his hands out of Tweek's pants so they wrap around his back. The position is pretty damn uncomfortable now that the moment's passed, but Tweek is boneless. He continues petting Craig's hair and listening to the sounds of their slowing hearts.

Even though they just humped each other in the middle of the day in the back of a goddamn movie theatre, for fuck sake, Tweek doesn't feel nervous or scared the way he did last time. Especially not when Craig turns and presses a soft kiss to his too-warm neck, right on the ticklish spot he'd be sucking at.

"Remind me to get pissed off about that later," the blonde says, mumbling.

His best friend pauses, moves away. Clears his throat. "Sorry?" He sounds far too amused to be sincere, and maybe a little hoarse.

"Smug bastard," is all Tweek says in reply.

He hides his smile in the collar of Craig's jacket and listens to the main character of the movie complain loudly about how difficult it is to find a good dog sitter – tries not to compare whatever shit is playing to other movies, because otherwise he'll start thinking of Mercedes and how she apparently got fucked somewhere in here while watching Deadpool. (He really can't judge her for that, now. Not when they've reached an all-time low of getting each other off while Adam Sandler chats shit in the background.)

He can't cover his disgusted snort, but he refuses to comment on it when Craig gives him a questioning look.

No chance is he ruining the moment with that revelation.

Chapter End Notes

ah, sex scenes. making writers everywhere feel awkward since the beginning of time.

?:)
It's just gone twelve when they stumble out of the movie theatre to the sound of an uplifting pop song, shielding their eyes from the harsh winter sunlight and sharing awkward, goofy grins. Craig's a mess, his usually neat clothes creased, his jacket dragged down low over the front of his jeans, and his chullo pulled over his head at an odd angle. Dark tufts of hair stick out in disarray around his ears and forehead, and his lips are dark pink.

(Tweek doesn't need to be told he's in just as much of a state as the other boy. Probably worse, actually, considering what he's like.)

The ticket seller – the same guy that been working there since they were in elementary – mutters something through his lisp that sounds an awful lot like, "Oh, goodie, I hope you little fuckers left me a mess to clean up," as they pass his booth.

Craig, who's wrapped an arm around Tweek's side, grip a little lower than usual, flips the man off over his shoulder. The blonde might have joined in, if he wasn't busy getting flustered over the hand splayed out dangerously close to his ass.

He's still feeling sticky, too, since Craig kindly refused to waste his antiseptic wipes on the mess they'd made in their pants. ("What if I need them next time you go falling over 'cause you forget how to use your feet, and we've used them all up?" he'd asked, voice flat but eyes crinkling in the corners, like he was fighting the urge to smirk. Tweek had pinched his arm and grumbled bitterly, tugging at the part of his boxers that was clinging to him.)

They cross the road as soon as they're out in the open, cutting down the side street that leads them away from Tweek Bros. and towards Craig's house.

As soon as Tweek figures out that that's where they're going, he slows down, sneakers dragging through poorly cleared slush. His face pulls into a grimace. "Heurgh... Man, isn’t your mom still gonna be home, since it’s a Friday?"

His best friend shrugs, looking down at him with sleepy, hooded eyes. “She’s going out this afternoon ’til Sunday for a work trip. Tricia’s staying with Gran in Denver for the weekend, since mom doesn’t trust us to feed her properly."

"Oh," says Tweek.

Well, he guesses that means he really doesn't have any reason to turn the other boy down. He's missed Craig's family and he's been craving the familiarity of his best friend’s room – of the smell of
Craig's sheets and the comfort of a warm back pressed against his as he drifts in and out of sleep.

Despite the lurching of his stomach upon recalling their last night spent in the taller boy's room, Tweek gives in with a jerky nod of his head. "Y-yeah, fine, whatever then dude."

Another five-minute walk and they're there, stood under the small porch as Craig retrieves the spare key and lets them in. As the other boy's returning the key to its usual spot, Tweek's stepping over the threshold of the empty house, toeing off his sneakers and shoving them over to one side of the front hall. Craig pulls the door shut behind them and copies the blonde, though he crouches down and takes his time in undoing his laces.

Sinking onto the bottom step, Tweek waits, half-heartedly chewing at his nail as Craig disappears into the kitchen.

"Want a fresh coffee?" the his best friend says from the other room, voice raised so he can be heard.

"S-sur..e," the blonde replies, more a yelp than a shout.

By the time Craig comes back out into the front room, one of Tweek's legs is caught on a nerve, jumping erratically. His shaking is still almost non-existent and the tic in his eyes is laying dormant for the time being though, so it's not like he's wound tight.

(He has the thought that their activities must have really helped him… unwind, and then has to fight the instinctive blush.)

Apparently thinking that it's necessary for them to have a huge mug each rather than sharing, Craig presses one of the drinks into his palms and let's Tweek lead the way up to his room. After a brief struggle with the door handle (which is always just a little stiff), Tweek shuffles inside, overfull mug balanced precariously in one hand. He drops his satchel on the carpet and sets his drink down with a clunk on Craig's desk.

That's when he sees the polaroid.

Clear as day, Tweek stares out of the little white-framed film, face so pale he looks like a ghost. There are bags under his eyes and the lower half of his face is obscured by the ugly red hand he's brought up to his mouth to chew. His straw-blonde hair is a riot on top of his head, his other fist tugging at it hard enough that he's tilting to the side, and one of his sallow cheeks is caught in its unattractive, trademark tic. The lighting highlights the redness of his eyes, and the side of his neck where an ugly, yellowing hickey peeks out beneath his gaping scarf.

It's horrible.

Just like whenever he sees himself in the mirror, Tweek’s stomach rolls unhappily. He reaches out and flips the photo, only to flinch back like he's been burned when Craig appears at his shoulder.

"Don't," Tweek says when Craig's fingers pluck the picture off the table, spinning it around and holding it out in front of him. Tweek goes to go tug it out of the other boy's hands, only for Craig to lift it right up above his head. "Dude, stop it. why the— what the hell's the point of having that, huh? What's the big idea?"

"I like it." The taller boy says, so simply that there can't possibly be any deception. His face is upturned so he can stare at polaroid-Tweek, expression blank as always.

"Why?" The blonde says, pulling at a handful of his hair until his eyes skip back to the photograph of himself, where he's doing the exact same thing. He lets go so fast, his knuckles clunk against the
"Because it's you." Craig turns his attention back to Tweek, lowering the polaroid down so it brushes the side of his jeans. "And you don't let me take photos anymore. It's the only one I've got since we were fourteen—"

They both freeze up. The thing in Tweek's stomach uncurls, awakening at the mention of their past. He swallows hard, averts his gaze. Doesn't say, "I don't let you because I'm hideous. Because every time I look at myself, I want to throw up. I don't know why you'd ever want to look at me."

"I wanna shower," he says instead, voice flat.

Craig stays silent for a moment, before opening the desk drawer and dropping the disgusting damn thing inside, out of sight.

Good.

With a sigh, he brushes past Tweek, going to his cupboard and rifling through until he withdraws a fresh pair of blue plaid pyjama pants, a pair of short black boxers, and a faded Red Racers tee that Tweek's worn almost every sleepover since he was twelve. (It's still way too baggy.) At the face Tweek makes when he's handed the bundle, Craig says, "You can't just get back into your clothes right after. At least wear these until yours are washed."

Resigned, Tweek takes them and heads towards the door. Doesn't bother pointing out that it's really only his boxers and his pants that could do with a wash, or that he could just put them in his satchel, borrow some clothes and wait to clean them at home. "Hnng. I'll be back in a minute."

"Take your time," Craig calls after him.

He flees.

Locking the bathroom door and readying himself for his shower helps settle his rattled nerves. He tugs one of the spare towels from the rack by the door, fetches Craig's bottles of shower stuff from the cupboard over the sink and clambers clumsily out of his clothes, aiming a grimace of disgust at his soiled boxers as he goes.

Stepping into the shower and sliding the glass panel-door shut behind him, he cranks up the temperature dial a good three notches above the previous settings and ducks right under the pounding stream.

It's hard not to flinch back as he adjusts to the heat, but after a few moments of blistering pain, he begins to relax. Scalding water pours down onto his dipped head, long sections of his bangs falling around his face as the water cascades off of him. Over tight shoulders and down his back, his arms, his chest, his legs.

He stands under the spray and tries to think calming thoughts; failing rather miserably, he eventually moves on.

For the first ten minutes he scrubs at his skin with Craig's shower gel – lime and mint – and a borrowed flannel. There's something incredibly intimate about the act, and he struggles to keep in mind that he's in here alone, that these are his hands lathing the flannel over his shoulders, these are his hands washing his sore, scraped face and back and still-sensitive groin. Not Craig's.

When he moves onto his hair, he reaches for the Citrus Burst shampoo that his best friend always uses with a thrill of anticipation.
(He loves the scent so much that on more than one occasion he's contemplated buying the same brand himself, but he always worried it would be weird. It wouldn't take long for the other boy to figure out, would it? Not when Tweek's go-to soaps and shampoos tend to be cookie, chocolate or coffee scented, thanks to his mom buying in the toiletries. Besides, it's almost something special, at this point. Craig's smell.)

Clouds of steam fill the bathroom, fogging up the glass walls of the shower stall and making each breath heavy in his chest. It's like he's ensconced in a little world surrounded by Craig's presence, and he revels in that disconnect from reality.

He can still feel fingers digging into the soft flesh of his ass and the long, sucking kiss pressed against his throat.

Heat pools at the base of his spine when his fingers automatically slide up over his chest to the junction of his neck, which tingles at the touch. His fingers hover over the spot and his eyelashes flutter, his second hand coming to rest on the flat of his stomach. A shiver courses over him at the memory of Craig holding him tight, moving in time to his rolling hips, taking control of the situation even though he'd been pinned beneath Tweek—

There's a clatter and a thump from out in the hallway, and muffled swearing. Tweek flinches back from his wandering hands, heart thumping hard against his ribcage.

What—

What the ever-loving fuck was that? What was he doing? He hadn't seriously been considering jacking it, had he?

Humiliated by the perverted direction of his thoughts and his libido, he rubs punishingly hard at his scalp and arms until they sting, and then shuts the water off. Towelling himself dry is a job he does with the roughest, quickest motions he can, before scrambling through the clothes pile he'd been handed and—

Oh. Oh, yeah. Craig's underwear.

For a long moment he just stares at the small, black boxers that the other boy gave him, knowing straight away that they're going to be too short to cover his scars and too tight to do anything good to his nerves. The second thing that occurs to him is that right here, in his hands, is a pair of underwear he knows for a fact that the boy he's desperately enamoured with has worn on multiple occasions. (Has seen him in them while changing in the locker room, and has caught sight of the waist band riding up above the line of his pants on more than one sleepover.)

Arousal and panic perform a short, acrobatic face-off in the pit of his stomach, lurching butterflies and angry spikes of anxiety that leave him feeling sort of sick. He just steps into the underwear, one foot at a time, and pulls them up.

They're tight around his thighs in a way that banishes the lingering arousal once and for all. It's barely a heartbeat, but suddenly Tweek can feel his nails digging into his skin until it splits, until it wells up with blood, until his legs are angry red welts that rub, rub, rub against his bed sheets, his jeans, his palms—

Nope. Nope. He can't do it.

The blonde scrambles out of the underwear in record breaking time, stomach clenching so hard he wonders if he might actually hurl. Goes straight over to the basin and twists on the cold-water tap,
plunging his hands underneath the rushing water until they ache, they're so numb. He focuses on that sensation, and only withdraws when his breathing begins to slow.

Shutting off the faucet, Tweek lets himself sink down to the floor, clutching stinging hands to his chest and twitching as ice-cold water drips down onto his bare skin.

Fucking fine then, he thinks, frustrated with himself. Guess I'm going commando.

When he re-emerges from his shower, slipping into Craig's room, the other boy is slumped in his desk chair, tapping away at his cell. As soon as Tweek clicks the door shut behind him, Craig's looking up, eyes scanning over his baggy tee and the pants that Tweek had to roll up several times over, just so that the hem wouldn't drag along the floor. The other boy’s eyes linger on the gaping neckline, and the dark bruise that Tweek's certain is resting just above his jutting collarbone like some sort of a brand.

He scowls, slapping his hand over the mark even as he blushes a furious red.

"My turn." His best friend stands up and makes to sidle past, eyebrows arched in a way that says he's trying not to grin.

Tweek doesn't let him get far – drops the jumble of clothes in his arms and grasps at Craig's arm. He still doesn't feel right after the events of his shower, like his good mood from earlier has been churned up into something not quite right. He feels off balance.

So, he does the only thing he can think that might return him to some sort of normalcy. He steps over the pile of dirty clothing and wraps his arms around Craig's waist, pressing his cheek against the other boy's chest. A moment of stilted quiet passes before Craig's returning the gesture, hands settling slowly onto his lower back.

"What's up?" the dark haired boy asks, cheek against Tweek's damp hair.

Nothing's up. Nothing that he could explain, anyway - not without spilling his guts about the scarring on his thighs that he's had and hidden from his best friend for years. He knows that if they keep up this level of intimacy, Craig will find out sooner rather than later, but still. Now isn't the time.

Instead, he resigns himself to blurting out the first thing that comes to his mind. "I – eurgh – wanna maybe watch some Netflix together after you're done, man. Catch up on our shows. If that's c-cool."

The lie tastes bitter.

Craig hums. "Sure dude, whatever."

They stand that way for a few seconds longer, until Tweek starts feeling awkward and pulls away. Craig moves back too, spare the blonde a small smile and a quick glance before he turns and gathers up a neatly folded pile of clothing from the end of his bed.

He leaves the door open a fraction behind him and leaves Tweek standing in the middle of the room with one final comment thrown over his shoulder. "Feel free to do your laundry while I'm showering, dude. I already brought up the clothes rack."

In the ensuing silence, Tweek's eyes settle on an ugly, folded white contraption leant up against a free section of the wall that he'd been too distracted to notice during their brief interaction.

As soon as he hears the shower roar to life from the other room, he lifts up his bundle of laundry and
By the time that Craig comes back into the room, Tweek's folded himself down into the desk chair and has begun drawing on a scrap of notebook paper he filched from one of the other boys' nicely stacked school files.

"What're you doing?" Craig asks, walking towards the desk with his hands deep in the pockets of his light grey sweatpants. Tweek's eyes are drawn down to the bunching of the fabric and the low waistline of the pants, and he has to tear his attention away from the strip of pale skin that's peeking out.

Unfortunately, the rest of his best friend is equally distracting.

Somewhere around the age of fifteen, Craig forewent his previously favoured long-sleeve, button up night shirts and started wearing tight t-shirts to bed instead. The problem with this is that while Freshman year Craig was still lanky and awkward, Senior year Craig is not. He's by no means built, but he's got broad shoulders and definition to his arms and chest that his black, torso-hugging tee does very little to hide.

Worse than that is the smattering of pale freckles and the fine, dark hairs running down his forearms, usually hidden by his long sleeved jackets and jumpers. He's closer to a young man than a boy now, even in the confident, relaxed way that he carries himself. His easy slouch, his careless grace, the cool intensity of his stare as he stands at Tweek's side and looks right down into his eyes, unwavering.

Damp black bangs frame his long, sharp face, setting off the shocking blue-grey of his eyes and his clear, clean-shaven complexion. His cheeks are still slightly pink from the heat of the shower.

All this leads to one very simple conclusion:

Craig Tucker is fucking gorgeous.

(Tweek's mouth's gone dry.)

Gulping reflexively, he blinks out of his daze and offers one jerky wave in the direction of his scribbles. The usual, scruffy outlines of indistinct faces peer out from the lined paper, all different shapes and angles. Vague, uninspiring sketches. "J-just doodling, man."

His best friend grunts, tilting his face to study the messy drawings. "I like that one," he says, poking at a scrunched up, snarling boy based loosely on Clyde. It's the most ugly but, unquestionably, also the most detailed of them all. No doubt it's a sad indication of just how much hostility is between them these days, that all Tweek really pictures when he thinks of his ex-friend is this nasty, twisted scowl. (Tweek's long since gotten over that particular loss, though. The brunette is a tried and true douchebag.)

He rolls his eyes and pushes away from the desk. "Yeah, you would like him," he says, stretching his arms up over his head and shuffling towards the other boy's bed, where he assumes they'll be catching up on Netflix.

If Craig is confused by his statement, he doesn't comment. Just retrieves his laptop from its spot on the back shelf of the desk and follows Tweek over to his bed.

They slump down next to one another, backs against the headboard and feet stretched out in front of
them. Shoulders brushing, the boys share a look as Craig settles his MacBook down on his lap.

"What first, then?" the taller boy asks.

... 

One episode turns into two, two shows blur into three, and three documentaries warp into several movies.

Somewhere in a break between the first few shows, Tweek goes downstairs to fetch his damp laundry, returning shortly after to throw it haphazardly all over the clothes airer. (He hides Craig's boxers beneath his jumper, out of sight. Has no idea how he's gonna return them to the boy without Craig asking questions.)

Around eight at night, Thomas Tucker returns home slightly drunk, his arms laden with bags of City Wok and a six-pack of some fancy home brew he apparently got from Randy Marsh. Tweek calls his mom to let her know he won't be home until late, and the boys persevere through their movie with plates piled high with shitty takeout and mugs filled with fresh coffee.

After they finish eating, they recline further back in Craig's bed, the taller boy's arm settling around his shoulders and his fingers running through his wild hair.

It's gone eleven o'clock when Tweek finally contemplates moving, by which point Craig is nodding off, head lolling against the blonde's and arm heavy.

Tweek shuts off the movie they'd been watching mid-scene, leaning over slowly to set the laptop down on the nightstand. He's reaching up to lift Craig's hand off of his shoulder and wriggle free when Craig shifts, twisting onto his side as he withdraws the arm Tweek had been tucked under.

The blonde thinks for a moment that he might be able to slip off of the bed unnoticed, and pushes himself upright.

"Stay."

He stills. Looks back at Craig, who's eyes are at half-mast. His heart skips a beat at the other boy's rumpled hair and sleepy face.

For a short moment he considers getting up anyway, thinks about pulling away and dressing in still-damp clothes. He knows that Craig would make no move to stop him – not after the way he'd freaked out last time.

Prior to their conversation that morning, he would still have left. They're far from perfect right now and there's still a lot of shit buried between them, but... they're getting there.

So Tweek stands, ignoring the way that Craig’s face falls, and fetches his cell from his satchel to send his mom another text. He flicks out the light on the way past.

The second he sinks down onto the edge of the bed in the dark, Craig's pulling the covers down so they can clamber under together. He complies, wriggling beneath the blankets and rolling onto his side, back to the other boy, as is their standard sleeping position.

But then, his best friend breaks tradition.

Craig's arm winds around his waist and his chest presses in close. Tweek holds his breath as the other boy's face nuzzles into the crook of his neck, and ice-cold toes squirm their way up beneath the
hem of his pants.

His heart beats a mad staccato against his ribs as warm air ruffles the hair on the nape of his neck, but he doesn’t wriggle away from the hand that settles over his sternum, undoubtedly feeling the thundering of his pulse.

Tweek drops his phone on the sheets beside him, forgotten, and clasps onto Craig’s forearm, all the blood in his body rushing up to his cheeks.

He can feel Craig smile against his neck.

Chapter End Notes

poor Tweek done gone caught the horn bug. 'DD
Chapter Notes

here, have a chapter that took twice as long to post because it is literally twice as long as my regular chapters. this is the biggest hunk of text i’ve had to write and proof-read in such a short space of time since the end of uni, so i’m really sorry for what i suspect will be hundreds of spelling/grammatical error. normally i’d have cut it down into 2 chapters, but as you guys'll see... coooouuuldn't really do that here. LOL :)))

i'll be back to regular posting tomorrow, and as always i’ll proofread it then too, so please be kind to me, my dears ;)))

Tweek has no idea when he falls asleep during the night, only that it happens between one thought and the next, his best friend curled around his back. It's unusual for the blonde to drift off so easily, or even to sleep at all, but it isn't really that surprising, considering whom he's lying with. He always sleeps easier when Craig's nearby – rests the best when the other boy is within reaching distance, despite the fact that being around other people usually makes his paranoia flare up. It's kind of freaky to think about, really, but still utterly unsurprising.

(Show him a rule about himself that Craig Tucker isn't exempt from, and he'll eat the other boy's hat.)

So in the oddly shifting space of time after Craig tucks himself in around Tweek like they're two halves of one weirdass whole, and Tweek knocking his phone off the side of the bed when the screen lights up with a new message and almost blinds him (he'd maybe been staring at the wall long enough that his eyes had grown itchy), he falls asleep. Floats away on a cloud of cozy, fluffy feelings without even noticing it.

But he's very aware of the exact moment that he wakes up.

It's kind of hard not to, when he's got an obviously turned on Craig sleeping tight against his back, the line of an erection pressing into the cleft of his buttocks. The hand slung over Tweek's side presses into the dip of his stomach, somehow having clambered up underneath his tee at some time in the night.

The room is pitch black and the lack of any sound from the street outside says it's still a fair distance from dawn. Above the covers, the air is cold, but they're drawn up high around the boys' shoulders and Tweek is swelteringly hot.

For a moment he lies there, hazy brain struggling to compute Craig, hard, bed, cuddling.

Then memories of yesterday flood back over him, of tears sliding down over hot cheeks as they sat together in the back of MacDonalds; of their bodies pressed close in the back of the cinema, hands guiding the roll of his hips; of stretching out in bed, Craig's head flopping down onto his shoulder when the other boy couldn't keep his eyes open any longer.

He's drawn out of his thoughts when Craig shifts against him, releasing a huffing breath that tickles the back of Tweek's neck, and curling his fingers against his stomach in a way that makes him
squirm, breath catching in his throat and belly tensing.

Freezes as Craig groans a deep, low sound that reverberates right through Tweek's chest from where they're pressed together. It sends a shiver racing all the way down his spine and into the pit of his belly, adding kindling to the arousal that's already burning him up.

Okay, Tweek thinks. So squirming around when he's tucked in nice and intimately to his best friend is not, apparently, the right move. (Or maybe it's a little too right, all things considered.) He takes note, and holds as still as possible despite every nerve in his body being keyed into the hot, hard member pressed right into the dip of his ass. Ignores the urge to rock his hips against it. Breathing shaky, he lies stiff as a board, struggling to keep control of himself as Craig's hand slips further down his stomach. It comes to a stop just above the waistband of his pants, and Tweek has the revelation that Craig isn't the only one of them with a serious case of morning wood. The other boy's fingers are almost close enough to brush the tip of his erection through his pants, and they're pressed so tight together that rocking back into his best friend wouldn't be bad, right? It'd be understandable. Forgivable, even. He'd just be easing up some of his excess tension.

Turning his face into the pillow, his fingers clutch hard at the edge of the mattress. Holy shit, he thinks. Holy shit, how is he even considering taking advantage of the situation? And what the hell is he going to do when Craig wakes up and finds himself in this position? What if the other boy freaks out? He should get up. He should get up and move and he should stop—

"Mmn, fuck babe, how'd you always smell so good?" Craig says, voice rumbling from sleep, nose very purposefully dipping into his wild blonde mane. Thrills shoot across Tweek's hypersensitive skin, and his heart takes a rapid leap in his chest, like it's trying to jump straight out through his ribcage. He twitches as the point of the other boy's nose traces down through the hair directly behind his ear.

This is about the time that Tweek's brain boots up, and he figures out Craig isn't asleep at all – has probably been awake even longer than Tweek has.

(A secondary, but no less confusing realization is that hearing his childhood nickname growled against his throat makes him ridiculously horny.)

Tweek shudders, unable to stop from tilting his head when Craig presses a slow, open-mouthed kiss to the sensitive skin right beneath his ear. "Ngh... I-it's your... your shampoo, dude," he says, voice escaping in a shaky, breathy rush when one kiss turns into two.

"No... y'still smell like you. Taste the same, too," the other boy says between wet, warm kisses. His fingers splay out against Tweek's hip and trace through the barely-there trail of blonde hair peeking out from the top of his pants. "Like... like caramel. Fucking delicious. How is that fair?"

He has no way to reply to that question, but can think of another on-going topic that they apparently can't agree on, as Craig mouths at the chorded tendon in his neck, and Tweek fights back a whine.

The blonde reaches down to grasp onto Craig's wrist, stilling the hand before it can dip into his pants, even though he wants nothing more than pull it the rest of the way down. His thoughts are jumbled – thick as treacle – and he struggles to grasp at whatever reasoning he has to try and stop this neck-based obsession, instead of encouraging it. (Feels fucking amazing.) Eventually, he just blurts it out. "No more hickeys," he says. "Or I swear to— to God I'll break your nose, man. Got it?"

A huff of laughter stirs up his hair. "Got it," his best friend says, and then goes right back to laving his tongue over the side of his neck in a way that makes the muscles in his stomach quiver. Honestly,
Tweek's starting to wonder if the other boy is part vampire, or something. (Not that he'd mind, a very quiet part of Tweek admits to himself. He never would have figured he'd enjoy his neck being touched, considering how much he usually hates people getting anywhere near it. Apparently the 'vulnerable' thing is a turn on when it comes to Craig. Figures he'd be the exception to that rule, too.)

As soon as his grip on Craig's wrist slackens, the other boy's hand resumes its trailing journey, fingers hooking beneath the elastic waistband of Tweek's borrowed pajamas. The blonde is so caught up in the moment, in every minute sensation – chest rising and falling fast, eyes fluttering shut – that when Craig's roaming fingers freeze in their journeying towards the 'V' of Tweek's groin, he actually whimpers.

"Hnnng, Crai-aig," he says, ready to complain loudly about how unfair it is for the other boy to have stopped right before touching Tweek where he needs it most.

He's not given the chance, since barely a heartbeat later his best friend totally derails him.

"Are you... going commando?" There's a hoarseness to the words that Tweek isn't sure how to interpret, but he twitches for good measure, flushing an awful pink that he's glad is hidden in the darkness of the room.

"N-no?" It's more a squeak than a word, and so clearly a lie that Craig seems to take it as an affirmative anyway.

He groans, and the sound hums through Tweek's bones. "Jesus Christ, babe, you're gonna end up killing me."

There's no possible chance for Tweek to reply to that, considering the other boy's hand dips down past golden curls and straight around his straining length.

Long, smooth fingers wrap around him, and Tweek is helpless but to arch into the touch, backside unwittingly rubbing against Craig's erection. The other boy reciprocates in kind – rolls his hips forwards, his clothed member rubbing up against the cleft of his ass in such a purposeful manner that Tweek's mouth gapes open, hips caught between pistoning forwards and pushing back.

Both boys' breathing cuts through the darkness. The slow, agonising slide of soft, dry fingers over his already tender skin and the insistent roll of Craig's length between his cheeks is just about driving Tweek mad.

When Craig swipes his thumb over the head of Tweek's erection, drawing a pearl of pre down the underside of his shaft, he whimpers, oversensitive. "Fuck, Craig."

Arching back, he twists his upper body, blindly seeking out the other boy's mouth. Somehow understanding the unspoken request, his best friend props himself up on his elbow. The angle's awkward and the kiss taste of sleep, but it's what Tweek wants – what he feels like he needs. Warm and wet and lapping tongues, open-mouthed and panting breathes as Craig pumps him torturously slow, rocks his erection into the valley of Tweek's backside in measured thrusts.

Only when Tweek grows desperate for more contact does he break the messy kiss, pushing his hips desperately into Craig's fist, needing friction, needing—

The other boy pulls his hand away, just as the pressure begins to build up at the base of his spine.

Keening in frustration, he flops over onto the pillow as his best friend shuffles back across the bed and tugs at his shoulder. Flat on his back, he glowers up at the shadowed outline of the Craig’s face and threads his fingers through the other boy's short bangs as he leans over, bracing his arms on
either side of Tweek's head.

"Y-you ass," the blonde says, feeling particularly testy with his throbbing erection and his racing heart. "You did that on purpose."

Craig chuckles. "Dunno what you're talking about." What a fucking liar.

Snorting, Tweek tugs his friend's face down towards his a little rougher than is perhaps necessary. (Not that Craig complains.)

There's no shyness or hesitation in their kisses now, like there has been over the course of the last few days. It's all plunging tongues and tugging teeth and Tweek biting hard at Craig's lower lip by way of expressing his annoyance. He drops one palm down from Craig's hair to his chest, grabbing a handful of his tee and pulling him closer, closer until their torsos are flush the dark haired boy's weight bears down on him. So he can't move away again, he tells himself.

It turns out that the precaution isn't necessary anyway, because Craig seems content with freeing one arm and reaching between them to drag up the hem of Tweek's tee, so he can run the flat of his palm over the blonde's bare side.

They do nothing but kiss until Tweek's head starts to spin and he's aching with such an intensity he feels like he's maybe gone a little mad. Still Craig keeps his touch light, making no further moves towards Tweek's straining erection.

When he blonde's back bows under the ticklish brush of fingers against his ribs and his hips rise off of the bed, he's met with no resistance, no friction, nothing more substantial than the blanket. He groans into Craig's mouth and the sound is swallowed down. Writhes against the mattress without finding any kind of relief. Relinquishes his grip on Craig's t-shirt to rub his hands over broad shoulders, over the subtle muscles of his chest, across his back, through his hair. Grabs at his upper arms, cradles his face to try and control the force of the kiss – just generally tries to find some semblance of control over the situation at all.

Still Craig remains calm, immoveable no matter how much Tweek writhes and wriggles beneath him.

Eventually, whatever self-restraint he had crumbles beneath the maddening need for stimulating contact, for firm touches and a tight grip. Craig's not giving him any of that of his own accord, so Tweek figures that he doesn't have much of a choice but to ask for it. Either his friend is being purposefully obnoxious, or he's just incredibly thick when it comes to sex. (The latter of which can't be true, considering how goddamn perfect he's been at keeping control of the situations up to now. So, yeah, he's just being a douche and winding Tweek up.)

His head falls back against the pillow, breaking away from his friend as he draws in huge lungfuls of air. He stares up at the indistinct ceiling and shoves the vestiges of his dignity aside like so much scrap metal in a junkyard. "Haah. I... Craig, if you d-on't finish what you fucking started, I swear to God."

"What? Is that what you want?" Craig says, apparently thinking that now is the time for humour. He doesn't seem realize how close he's coming to getting himself kneed right in the groin. When Tweek growls and shoves him back in frustration, his best friend laughs a low, throaty laugh the blonde's sure would have added to his arousal, if he wasn't already so hard he feels like he'd blow his load at the slightest of touches.
Beneath the covers it's stifling, and Tweek's near breathless anyway, so when the other boy sits up and draws his top up over his head, he doesn't complain. It only takes minimal encouragement from his best friend for Tweek to do the same, pushing himself up just enough to yank his borrowed t-shirt off, and then slumping back down as Craig leans over him to reach the bedside drawer.

There's a brief interlude where the quiet around them is filled with clunks and rustles and finally a grunt of something close to, "Aha," and then the drawer is thumped shut and the other boy is repositioning himself to lie on his side. Following Craig's lead, Tweek rolls over too.

"Pants on?" Craig asks from somewhere in front of him.

A tension he hadn't realized he'd been holding onto eases off of his shoulders, and he releases a gusty breath. Tweek nods, for once grateful that the other boy takes nothing between them for granted in the heat of the moment. "P-pants on, dude."

"Push 'em down a little." There's the sound of a bottle cap flicking open, and then a quiet, wet noise as Craig squeezes what is undoubtedly lube into his palm.

Tweek hurries to comply, shimmying the fabric down over his backside, so that his hard-on juts up into the chilled air and the fabric bunches awkwardly at the top of his thighs, too high for anything to be exposed.

Almost as soon as he's done fidgeting, Craig's bracing him with one hand on his hip, trailing wet fingers over his stomach and down through the thatch of hair, straight to Tweek's burning, aching length.

His best friend wraps his fingers around him, no more teasing. (Oh, fuck.)

The touch is pure electricity, sparking through his entire body so hard that he jerks, making a long, loud sound that's only stifled by Craig sinking his free hand into the blonde's hair and tugging until Tweek's face is press against his neck. But that's worse, because bare skin on bare skin and he shudders, panting helplessly against the base of Craig's throat. His own hands clutch at the other boy, craving more contact, pulling him closer so that their legs are tangle, one of Craig's thighs caught between his.

Craig waits until he slows down before sliding his tight, wet grip up over his shaft a second time, and a third, and Tweek bucks, whimpering against hot, sticky skin.

"Should've known you'd be loud during sex too," the taller boy jokes, words a scorching mumble at Tweek's ear. For his bad timing, he receives a sharp bite to his collar and another hard thrust of hips into his slick fist. Tweek feels more than hears Craig's laughter, shaking through the boy's chest.

He's so caught up in the sensation – in the hot coil of arousal, the fact that he really, seriously has no idea how he's lasted longer than just a few quick thrusts - that he doesn't question Craig rolling onto his back and taking the blonde with him. The taller boy is supporting Tweek's weight against his chest, pinned to the bed but freeing one of his arms. He just keeps up the pace of his fist, in spite of the awkward angle and the fact that Tweek's digging his nails into his back hard enough to leave scratches.

When Craig's free hand comes around to cup his backside and urge him on, he tilts his head and presses a messy, open-mouthed kiss to the hollow of his best friend's throat between gasping breaths, desperately clinging to the last few moments of this—
And then the hold Craig has on his ass changes, and one long finger dips down between the cheeks, stroking right over Tweek's hole—

The blonde's body jolts, stiffening at the unexpected contact, the unexpected shock of yesyesyes. He rocks into the tight, corkscrewing fist once, twice, and falls apart.

Crying out the column of his best friend's throat, he screws his eyes shut and shakes so bad that it's impossible to breathe. His orgasm tears him to pieces, remorseless, until he isn't quite sure what's what and if he even wants to be. And still Craig keeps on bringing his palm up and down, up and down, wringing the every last trace of his aftershocks out of him.

It feels like forever until he sinks back into himself, head spinning and heart pounding like a drum. Hypersensitive, he pulls back from Craig's hands and rests the flat of his cheek against his best friend's shoulder, one hand splayed over his sternum. His hair is sweaty and he's trembling pretty hard, trying not to think about the fact that there's cooling come on his belly.

He's so busy enjoying the soft thrum of pleasure through relaxed muscles (God, he feels less tense than he has in weeks), he almost doesn't notice how fast Craig's breathing, or how rapidly the other boy's heart is beating beneath Tweek's palm.

Feeling stupidly content, he drags himself up onto one elbows and peers down at Craig, who's cast one arm over his eyes. Even in the low light, Tweek can tell the front of boy's pants are tented. (He spares himself a moment to pull his own pajamas back up over his softening length, while his friend is distracted by what looks like debilitating levels of arousal.)

"Hmmm. Y'know, babe, I'm half tempted to just leave you like this," Tweek says, once he's worked up the energy to speak. He wouldn't, of course – just knowing he's allowed to reach out and touch any part of Craig he wants is incentive enough for him – but that vindictive little bit of him feels it's only fair after the other boy spent so long teasing him.

The dark haired boy's arm drops away, and Tweek can't be sure, but he's pretty damn convinced that there's a glare aimed at him. The words that follow are low and hoarse. "Hot as it is... to hear you calling me that, I kind feel like I've created a monster."

A bubble of surprised laughter rises in Tweek's chest, and he lets it out. "Shouldn't be a dick then, huh?" He strokes his fingers over Craig's chest and up the side of his neck to cup a flushed cheek, actions bying his words. There's no way to disguise the tenderness of the touch, but the room is dark so he doesn't have to worry about guarding his expression like he usually does when he's alone with Craig. He can't help but lean in, brushing a feather light kiss over the other boy's lips.

Craig returns the peck, one hand sinking into blonde hair. When they draw back, Craig says (like it's the simplest thing in the world), "Y'don't have to do anything if you don't wanna. I'm fine as is."

Sweet Jesus, Tweek loves him. So much it's sometimes hard to think.

"Fuck off," he says instead, voice fond and quiet. "Obviously I want to. Even if you do deserve blue balls."

Now his head's cleared though, there's none of the rush or stress that there was previously. He takes his time running his palms over Craig's broad shoulder, ducking his head down and kissing the spot he bit at the other boy's collarbone before pulling away. His best friend's hand tightens minutely in his hair at the action, and Tweek takes that as a good sign.

As he has no idea where the lube's gone, there's a moment of shuffling about in the darkness to
locate it, off to Craig's left, by the wall.

He's just squirting a sizeable dollop onto his hand when Craig says quietly, "You said we could keep pretending we're together..."

Tweek hums, ignoring the little lurch in stomach. Sets aside the squeezy-bottle and peers through the gloom at Craig's face. "Y-yeah. If you wanna."

There's a short pause before the other boy speaks up, sounding almost shy. "Would you mind me... kissing you in front of the others, too? Not just holding your hand and hugging, or whatever, but actual kissing. Like we did today."

Stomach doing a weird little wriggle at the prospect – not entirely a pleasant sensation, but not an awful one either – Tweek exhales slowly. "As long as I can too, man."

"Yes," Craig says, and Tweek wonders if it's his imagination that the word is so rushed. Clears his throat and speaks a little slower. "Yeah, that'd be cool."

Another giggle worms its way up into his throat, and he just about manages to keep it in check. Lube's oozed out between his fingers during their brief exchange, beginning to drip down towards his wrist. Weirdly giddy, he says, "Look, man, if we're all done with this chat... you gonna take your pants off, or...?"

In the eight years they've been 'together', Tweek doesn't think he's ever seen Craig move so fast. He's laughing even as he's dragged back into for another hungry kiss.

...

What's left of the night is spent (by Tweek, at least), awake.

Not long after they'd finished messing about, the sun had started to rise beyond the curtains. They'd wiped themselves off with Craig's tight black tee (which was such a damn shame, 'cause it meant that he wouldn't be able to put it on again afterwards) and had slumped back onto the mattress, legs still tangled and limbs weighing a ton. Craig had pulled Tweek close enough for long, sleepy kisses, nose-to-nose and hands trailing lethargically over one another's bodies.

Within maybe ten minutes, the other boy had drifted off, dead to the world around him. The blonde hadn't minded, though - had just shared his best friend's pillow and had studied his sleep softened features as the room had lightened by increments, tracing the pale freckles across the bridge of Craig's long, straight nose with his fingertips and brushing his thumb across swollen lips.

The bite on Craig's collar is worse than he'd realized: a dark, angry pink that stands out against the alabaster of his skin. He knows that he should feel bad about hurting his friend like this, but there's an odd, smug sort of feeling that he's getting his own back for all the damn hickeys. Maybe the other boy'll figure out that it's not all just fun and games if he has to deal with covering it up all the time. (Hah.)

Eventually Tweek's neck starts to ache from staying in one position for too long, and he turns over onto his other side, so that his back is to the other boy again.

Unconscious-Craig takes no time to shuffle closer, cold toes honing in on his calf and nose snuffling against his hair. Although there were many times over the years when, sharing a bed, they'd ended up sprawled out over one another or unwittingly snuggling, this is different. There's nothing platonic about the way that Tweek links their fingers together, or the way goosebumps break out over the
back of his arms and nape whenever Craig makes an indistinct sound in his sleep.

As the morning draws on, Tweek listens to the occasional, half-frozen bird singing outside the window, the odd car engine as they go past on the street, and Thomas Tucker rising out of bed just long enough to stomp down the hallway to the bathroom.

It's only when a couple of the neighbors start having a stupidly loud conversation between shovelling snow on the sidewalk right below Craig's window that the other boy begins to stir.

With a stretch and a deep yawn, his best friend slowly seems to wake up. His thumb starts its usual pattern-tracing over the back of Tweek's palm, loops and circles and tight spirals. Aside from Tweek letting out a lengthy sigh and a lazy sort of twitch when Craig nuzzles against his shoulder, neither boy moves to break the peace for a long time.

Only when Craig, apparently cold (though when is he not?), separates their joined hands to tug the comforter up around their necks, does Tweek decide to speak. He's been doing a lot of thinking over the last few hours, and there's something that he really wants to ask while he's still got the nerve.

"How'd you—" He stops, reconsiders. "Why did you assume I wouldn't wanna take my pants off?" His voice is quiet and slightly throaty.

Behind him, Craig shrugs, tucking his arm back around Tweek's chest and weaving their fingers together again. "You hate your legs," comes the mumbled reply from where he's half buried himself beneath the blanket. "Dunno why though. Your legs have always been... good. I just think it's a shame, since they're so... y'know. They're fine."

'Fine'? What the heck does that mean?

Scrunching up his nose, Tweek turns his head a little. "Dude, you're n-not making much sense here."

A sigh. "I like legs. Your legs, I mean." He mumbles something more, but Tweek can't hear it through the blanket, (which he kinda suspects was the point).

"What?"

The blonde rolls over onto his back, seeking out hooded blue eyes. There's a brief staring contest, Tweek glowering in confusion and Craig looking back blankly, before the other boy finally caves, averting his gaze.

This time when he speaks, he does so a little more clearly. "You've always been weird about anyone touching your thighs, so I don't. But... I want to. Touch them, that is."

An awkward silence falls between them, and Tweek has no chance to reply, because his phone starts buzzing from its spot on the carpet.

Using this as an opportunity to put the conversation on pause, he reaches over the side of the bed and retrieves his cell. He frowns at the caller ID; swipes to answer.

"Mom? What's up?"

"Oh good, I wasn't sure you'd answer since you seemed to turn your phone off earlier than usual last night." There's something hurried about the way his mom speaks that makes his chest tighten, and noise in the background of the call – voices and echoes – that reminds Tweek an uncomfortable amount of the busy waiting rooms.
He drags himself up against the headboard, fingers tight around the cell. "W-what's wrong? Are you – nng – okay? Where— where are you?" A hundred possible disasters flit across his mind, making his head throb and his pulse race.

"Shh, pumpkin, we're fine. Your dad just had a nasty fall at the end of his shift yesterday evening, and we think he's managed to tear a muscle in his leg. We're at the hospital at the moment, because I had to drive him into the Emergency Room in the middle of the night. He's having an ultrasound right now."

Tweek's pounding heart settles a little at that explanation, and he lets go of his hair in favor of rubbing a hand over his face. "O-oh, sweet Jesus... Tha- thank fuck. Thank fuck you're alright. I thought maybe..." He takes a steadying breath, and glance down when Craig's hand settles over his, tugging it away from his face in order to link their fingers together again. The other boy is watching him from below the covers, eyes intense and short black hair a rumpled mess.

"We're fine, kiddo," she repeats, calm as ever.

"Then - huh - what did you phone for?" He draws one of his knees up towards his bare chest and tries to ignore the fact that his tic has started up beneath his eye. (He hadn't even noticed it had stopped until then.)

"Well, your father's meant to be opening up the shop in about an hour, but there's no way we'll get back in time, and it sounds like Doctor Staples will want him on bed rest for at least few days. I've had him try to contact his week-day workers to see if they can fill in for him, but the only one who's confirmed he can come in is that new barrister, who hasn't finished up his training and doesn't have any keys."

"Oh, God..." mutters Tweek, already knowing where this is going.

"He was wondering if you'd go in this weekend to cover for him, and keep an eye on this... this odd new fellow. Something about how you'll get on like a house on fire."

All the relief he'd been feeling only moments ago has shrivelled up and died. Jesus Christ, running the coffee shop is way too much pressure on a good day. But then he thinks of how much his dad'll be bitching to his mom all day, and how if either of them has got the short end of the stick, it's clearly her.

"Aurgh. Fine, fine, I'll do it. D-did he say what this... this new guy's called? 'Cause I can hardly go 'round looking for someone that replies to 'spazz', can I?"

Mrs Tweak tuts, but she doesn't bother scolding him, so he thinks she must be amused. "Actually, yes, he did. If I recall correctly, his name is Thomas."

Thomas.

Large, brown eyes and honey blonde hair flash across his mind. A loud, awkward boy a little older than him – straight out of high school.

Thomas.

A 'spazz', just like Tweek.

Thomas.

Tweek's heart drops.
//grumbles// this was meant to be a nice, short, easy chapter to write, but.... they kept going. and going... and going... they wouldn't get on with it already, and they certainly didn't care about whether or not *I* wanted to write all that porn. horny goshdarn teenagers. >:'|

...oh yeah. and plot. :O
OKAY SO,
i have a pretty good reason for not posting this yesterday. let's just say that i've been
catched up planning/writing a few one-shots for this AU, and i may or may not be
planning to release them as 'thank you's to everyone who's shown interest in this story,
if/when we reach certain benchmarks.

(holy crap, not long now 'til i'm gonna have to start posting theeeem guys. how are my
stats going this mad? what has happened?? i seriously love you all so much <33)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There's a long moment of silence after Tweek's cut off the call, where his hand falls, limp, into his
lap. He stares ahead, eyes unseeing, the thing inhabiting his stomach twisting itself into painful knots.

He's wrong. He got to be wrong. This is just another classic example of Tweek overthinking things.
Really, what are the odds that this barista-Thomas is the Thomas?

But then, just how many people would fit that description so well?

(Please, God, please let it be that he's overthinking this.)

"Tweek? Honey?" Craig's voice is like a sharp, cold smack, no matter how gently spoken – Tweek
flinches so bad that he cracks the back of his skull against the headboard.

With a muffled curse, he drops his phone and Craig's hand in a heartbeat, gripping at his head and
hunching forward over his leg. Damn it.

"Aurgh, fucking— shit. Just my – nng – luck. Just my goddamn—" He cuts himself off, forcing
himself the release a deep, slow breath. Think, Tweek, think. Don't make this any more fucking
obvious or awkward than it has to be. Teeth grit, he looks up.

Freezes.

Craig has at some point pulled himself upright, so he's pressed shoulder-to-shoulder with the blonde.
And Tweek had been so lost in himself that he hadn't even noticed.

"Eurgh— sorry, dude. Sorry." He forces his body to relax, bunched muscles easing out by slow
increments – leans into the other boy's side and presses his forehead down against one broad (yet
surprisingly bony) shoulder.

His best friend raises his hand and nudges Tweek's balled up fists aside so he can card his fingers
through the blonde's hair and press gently at the sore part of his head, checking for lumps. "It's fine.
You gotta leave?"

A jerky nod against Craig's shoulder. "Dad fucked himself up. So I g-gotta open up the – hrrng –
coffee shop today. Working with this— this new guy. Augh. Apparently he's shit."
This garners a quiet snort of laughter, and then the calming feeling of Craig's fingers running through the tangles in his hair stops. "You shouldn't be so stressed about it, babe. You'll be fine."

Sometimes, Tweek envies Craig for his simple belief that everything in life will turn out okay. That optimism doesn't come naturally to Tweek on a good day, let alone in light of whatever steaming shitheap of a day he's about to go wading through.

Taking Craig's withdrawal as a sign that their almost-hug is over, the blonde pulls himself away and shoves the covers back from the edge of the bed, so he can swing his legs off over the side. The morning air is so cold beyond the cocoon of blankets Craig's tucked in around them that his toes curl as they touch the carpet.

Goosebumps break out over every last inch of exposed skin, and he hurries to the clothes airer. All bar his thick, faded jumper seem to be dry. "Dude, you got anything I can borrow? I'm not gonna get time to— to go home and change."

"Help yourself," Craig says, making a sweeping gesture towards his closet, seemingly content to sit back and watch Tweek stumble around half naked in the cold.

As the blonde yanks open the sliding door and begins to rifle through the clothes hangers (all Craig's jumpers, jackets and coats are of course ordered by colour – which, for Craig, means various shades of blacks, blues and greys), his best friend speaks up again. "You're helping out tomorrow too then, right?"

"Hurgh. U-unfortunately." He mutters under his breath as he pulls an ash coloured sweatshirt out just far enough to know it'll be ten times too big. He'd look like a toddler if he tried it on. Returns it to the rack and goes on looking. "Why?"

"Clyde messaged yesterday asking if I wanted to hang out with him tonight. Figured I'd say yes if you weren't gonna be around." Tweek takes a small amount of satisfaction in the fact that Craig sounds put out about this idea, even though a huge part of him aches at the prospect of not seeing Craig for the entirety of the weekend. It's making his chest tighten up – especially with the day ahead of him set to pan out like something from a horror movie, and...

"You guys gonna be – hurgh – drinking again?" Considering the fact that it's Clyde, he thinks it's likely. A better question is, when doesn't Clyde get debilitatingly drunk on a weekend? He's not quite as bad as Stan Marsh, to Tweek's knowledge, but then not many people are.

"Dunno," Craig says around another large yawn.

Getting sick of looking through his best friend's wardrobe (and just feeling like crap anyway), he grabs hold of the next thing his hand lands on and yanks it out, almost dragging several other tops out with it. He takes one glance at the damn thing – a hooded, navy jumper he thinks Craig got after South Park High's winning basketball match last season – and shrugs. It'll look ridiculous on him, what with the school mascot, Billy the Bull, emblazoned across the back in white, and the dumb nickname 'Motherfucking Tucker' above it in huge, block capitals, but he doesn't have it in him to care. (And that's without taking into consideration the fact it's going to way too big, just like everything else Craig seems to wear outside of his house.)

Tugging the coat hanger free and shoving it blindly back into the rack, he's about to pull the hoodie over his head when he has the brief thought of how purposefully cruel this might seem. If this really is the boy he thinks it is, then the last thing he'd deserve is to have Tweek and Craig's continued 'relationship' rubbed in his face.
(Recalls a low, sardonic laugh, the boy shaking his head at what Tweek had stammered out like it was funny. "Ah, shit. You're wrong. That's not love, man. Not for – a-asshole – most people. Not for me." Thinks of how he'd wanted to cry, wanted to scream. Thomas didn't get it. He didn't understand.)

Then again, says the nasty voice in the back of Tweek's head, as the memory flashes across his mind, why should he care? They hadn't seen eye-to-eye then, no matter what Tweek had said. Thomas had had his chance and he'd fucked it up. Had sabotaged something he should have considered precious for no good reason. There's only so much tip-toeing Tweek is willing to do – especially now that unattainable Craig seems finally, finally within reach. Even if only physically. Even if only as friends with benefits, or whatever the fuck it is they're doing now.

(Tweek is determined to take whatever he can get. His fear and guilt will only hold him back for so long.)

Resolve hardened, he pulls on the hoodie, ignoring the way that it gapes around the collar and trails a good inch past his fingertips. After bundling the rest of his clothes into his arms (he ends up throwing Craig's black boxers right at the other boy's face in a fit of pique when Craig drawls that he's, "More than welcome to change in here where I can help, babe."). Tweek storms down the hallway to the bathroom. Stops the second he's got the door locked behind him. Focuses on his breathing, running his hands under the cold tap when his nerves start getting the better of him.

When he returns, he slings his satchel up onto his shoulder.

"You want me to walk 'round with you?" He's pretty sure that the darker haired boy is only asking out of good will, because he's sure as hell not making much of an effort to get up and dressed, but still, Tweek's glad for it. Just the thought of Craig finding out about Thomas being right here in South Park after so many years makes Tweek want to hurl.

Shooting him the best glower he can muster, Tweek says, "O-oh yeah, man, 'cause I've got all the time in— in the world to wait for you to pull your ass out of bed." That's good, he thinks. Stay there. Just stay there.

"Hmm. I'd argue, but..." The other boy has the gall to stretch his arms over his head and sink a little deeper into his nest of bedding, groaning like it's the best thing since sex. (Tweek can quite safely say, as someone in the throes of discovering just what sex actually is, that Craig is being overdramatic. He's pretty convinced that no napping could ever reach that sort of standard.) "We both know it'd be a lie."

All he can do is roll his eyes at the playful gesture, suspecting it's more for show than for anything else. If he didn't know any better, he'd guess that Craig's acting like an idiot to try and calm him down. He's loath to admit to himself that in any other situation, it'd probably work. Not today, though. "Rrr— r-right. Well, whatever man," He settles his fingers on the door handle. "Guess I'll see you—"

"Come here a minute," Craig says, cutting right over him.

"Dude, I've – mnn – gotta go." Still, he pulls hand away and looks over his shoulder.

The other boy's emerged once again, slumping against the headboard, sleepy and topless. "Hurry up, then."

He makes a garbled sound of frustration and drops his bag to the floor, storming across the room and —
And the second he's within reach, Craig tugs him down into a hug.

Just... a hug.

Face tucked into soft, lemon-scented hair, Tweek has to screw his eyes shut tight in order to stave off the sting of tears. Craig's arms are looped around his shoulders, firm and warm and relaxed, bare skin and so much easy trust he might as well be blind to what an utter piece of shit the blonde is.

Tweek wraps his arms around his best friend and squeezes tight enough he hears his beast friend's breathing hitch – feels like the worst kind of human being to ever walk the planet.

...

Leaving, it turns out, comprises of pulling away, spinning on his heel and snatching up his satchel as he dashes out of the room, half falling down the stairs in his haste to get to his sneakers.

It's pathetic, but he doesn't think he has it in him to stare right down into Craig's face and keep holding onto his secrets. He's scared that if he stops for too long – stops and stares into soft, sky colored eyes and remembers what they've both been through because of his selfishness – it'll all come tumbling out.

There's no way in hell he'll risk that right now, so he's resigned to running away like the fucking coward he is.

Only, he realizes half way down the street that by leaving one problem behind him, he's waltzing straight towards another.

The blonde stops at the side of the road and weaves his fingers through his bangs, counting himself down from an anxiety attack. Heart an aggressive tattoo and world tilting off of its axis, he forces himself to stand straight, eyes tracking over his surroundings, counting out each breath and drawing in the scenery around him.

He only continues once he's fully aware of the prickling chill on his skin from his inadequate clothing, and the brightness of the winter sun, bleaching everything white.

When he panics, everything fogs over like he's in a dream, and it's hard to pick out real life from make believe. It doesn't happen as much these days, but Olive once told him that when it does, it's because his brain is struggling to compute the stress of reality, and it shuts huge parts of his mind down in order to protect itself. Tweek's always thought that was a damn freaky explanation, but it's definitely something his brain would do to him.

(He's always been of the opinion that his body hates him.)

Over time he's gotten better at spotting the signs before he falls into a full on dissociative state, and he hasn't had any 'episodes' for about a year now. Certain symptoms do tend to reappear more often than others, which is fine. Understandable, even.

What isn't fine is wanting it to happen; craving for that weird, apathetic fog to sink down around his head and block out the rest of his senses. That doesn't help him deal with anything. It never has and it never will.

(It's the same reason he hates the sensation of being drunk, and being mellowed out by the ADD meds he used to take. Even some of the stronger antidepressants bring him back to the catatonic despondency of when he's dissociating, and he hates it.)
So he accepts his panic, recognizes it as the thing constricting his chest in a vice grip. He lets his cheek tic and his eyes sting and he doesn't stop himself from screeching out a yelp when a car goes speeding past, churning up the snow that's gathered along the edges of the sidewalk and spitting out grey slush.

When he turns the corner and Tweek Bros. comes into view, he doesn't stop his face from falling, or his damp sneakers from stumbling to a halt.

Below the garish, badly painted sign for the coffeehouse is an unmistakable head of short, dark blonde hair.

Even from this distance, Tweek can see how the other boy's shot up in height, lanky and longer legged than Tweek can ever hope to be. He's leaning up against one of the shop windows, suede jacket buttoned up to his collar and nice black boots catching the sunlight as it peeks through thick white clouds. His hand held up to his face, and it's only once Tweek's feet have started responding again and he gets closer, that he realizes the other boy is smoking.

For some reason, this makes him want to laugh. (It's not a good feeling.)

After stopping to check the road for speeding cars, he crosses over at a diagonal angle, approaching the older boy head on. It's around the halfway point that Thomas seems to notice him approaching, and glances up.

Large, gorgeous brown eyes in a tired face. Sharp cheekbones, pale skin. A nose that looks like it might have been broken in the last year or so. Full lips around the filter of his cigarette. A defined jawline, highlighted by the shadow of stubble. Funny how Tweek barely recalls anything about this boy besides his hair and his eyes and his attitude – has never been able to remember the finer details of his appearance – and yet... here he is. A face that Tweek would recognize anywhere in a heartbeat. The sort of person he'd never lose track of in a crowd.

Thomas is by far one of the best looking boys that Tweek thinks he's ever seen face-to-face. In a rugged, weary sort of way.

And then he's pulling the cigarette away from his mouth, exhaling a plume of smoke, and smiling. A wide, wonky smile full of slightly crooked white teeth that makes him transform from handsome into devastating.

Stomach churning like he really might chuck up all down his own front, the shorter boy trips up onto the curb, face frozen in shock. What—

Why—?

"Hey," says Thomas, voice soft around his tic. "Long time no – fuck – no see." He drops the remaining half of his cigarette onto the sidewalk and crushes it under the heel of one shiny black boot.

The most that Tweek can do is shake so hard he nearly drops his bag, and let his head bend in time to the occasional neck straining twitch. He doesn't say a word.

Apparently he doesn't have to. Thomas just keeps on looking at him, smile shrinking down until it's a small hitch at one corner of his mouth. "You look better than last time I saw you."

"Y— nnrg. Yeah, I guess," he says in reply, averting his gaze and scrambling for the front pocket of his bag, tucked awkwardly beneath the flap of the cover. "Not hard, c-considering I was having a – eurgh – a mental breakdown, man." Yeah, all 'better' really means in this context is that he's not
half starved himself, has actually slept at least a few hours every other night, isn't having seizures and hasn't been going around bashing his head off of walls. No matter how Tweek looks at this, it isn't a hard step up. Not that most people actually knew what was going on at the time – they all probably just assumed it was an ugly patch. (Clyde certainly had.)

Finally he finds his damn ring of emergency keys, tangled together with his headphones. There's a brief tugging war before they come loose, jangling obnoxiously in the quiet that's fallen between them.

Correct key selected, he moves towards the door like he's brandishing it at an enemy.

Getting the correct key into the lock is made pretty difficult what with Thomas looking down over his shoulder, the fine tremors in his fingers instantly upgrading to savage jittering. He grunts in frustration, hunching his shoulders and stabbing blindly at the keyhole – tugs at his hair and tries to ignore the way all the hair on the nape of his neck stands up on end from the older boy being right there behind him, muttering swearwords ("ff-fuck, cockhead, fucking-shiiiiit") into the small space.

"Let me help you," he says, apparently getting sick of watching. He leans over Tweek slow enough that he has plenty of time to jerk away if he'd like.

The shorter boy stays still.

(Except Tweek does want to move. Desperately wants to. But he's apparently turned to stone.)

Smooth, strong fingers wrap around his, guiding the goddamn fucking key into the lock in one smooth motion before withdrawing. Barely restraining a wail of frustration, he yanks the key around until the lock gives with a loud click, and then shoves himself inside so fast he almost stumbles to the floor.

Catching himself on the nearest table, he straightens, glowering down at his useless hands and breathing through the palpitations. Twitches when Thomas walks in behind him, sets the keys (which he'd left in the lock) down beside him and heads over towards the cluttered, dirty staff room around the back of the counter. "A-asshole, ass - l-loving the hoodie by the way," he says as he goes, and he sounds... happy? Amused?

In usual Tweek fashion, when he doesn't understand something, he faces it head on.

Scrambling to return the key ring to his bag, he follows after the other boy, short, quick footsteps where Thomas' are long and loping. As soon as the staff room door swings shut behind them, plunging the room into temporary darkness, until the yellow overhead light flickers on (Tweek punches at the light switch before the other boy can beat him to that, too), and illuminates the shit hole that is the 'break-area-cum-storage-room'. Crates of coffee, suspicious white baggies, lopsided shelves, machinery straight out of one of Tweek's childhood nightmares... it's delightful. A couple of rickety camp chairs and what could at a push be described as refrigerator stand off in one corner, beside a basin that has the tendency to leak (so, really, the best spot in the whole room for electrical equipment to be rigged up).

"The hoodie? W-what's that s-supposed to mean?" he says, voice a little on the shrill side.

Thomas just grins his stupid, gorgeous grin. "I'm glad you guys are st— stupid fuck— still together. Properly together, by the looks of things." His eyes travel down to the gaping neck of Tweek's shirt, where his hickey is on full display.

He ferociously fights back the urge to cover it, though he can feel all the blood rushing right up into
his face. If Thomas wants to play this game with him, then fine. Tweek's not about to make it easy
this time. "Y-yeah, well, it's taking— taken us long enough, dude. We've got a lot of shit to—"

"Shit, motherfucking cocklegs—"

"—work through. Nngh." Tweek ducks his way past the other boy and grabs gingerly at one of the
staff aprons.

There's a moment of quiet as Thomas follows his lead.

"Does your dad spike all the coffee blends?" Thomas asks, seemingly out of nowhere, just as
Tweek's tying the strings of his aprons in a neat triple knot.

(Then again, maybe it's not out of nowhere, seeing as how there are enough clear baggies of crystal
meth and cocaine lying around that Richard Tweak could be some kind of drug lord.)

Still, Tweek turns to give the taller boy the side eye. His dad may be a whiny, idiotic asshole at least
ninety percent of the time, but he isn't serving this shit to just anyone who walks through the door.
"Are you crazy? N-no, dude. Just the Moroccan Spice and the Death Wish his 'regulars' like. Why'd
you think we have so m-many different grinders?" He pauses, imagining Thomas just going ahead
and using whichever one he's closest to when serving customers. Feels a little faint. "Oh sweet Jesus,
he hasn't taught you this stuff?"

that."

Oh God, no wonder his dad was so eager for him to come in and meet this new guy. Somehow,
he always ends up clearing the man's messes up for him – which says something, considering how
undeniably awful Tweek is at tidying. "Aurgh. Dude, this is way too much pressure!"

... Half an hour left until opening, they grab their nametags from a bowl on the shelf closest to the door
and make it back out into the main section of the shop. There's a ton of work to do before they even
open the doors, and Tweek is in such a fluster to try and cover everything he can so there are no fatal
mishaps on the shop floor today, (like accidentally getting some elementary school kid high) that he's
totally distracted from his earlier worries.

Turns out that while Thomas has been taught next to nothing useful about the shop yet (Tweek
suspects his dad's just been forcing him to stand around while he waxes lyrical about the wonders of
the coffee bean), he isn't half bad at getting things done. He explains that he's been working as a
waiter in Lakewood since his mom remarried when he was sixteen, and says that he's got at least
basic knowledge of how to work his way around all the shop machinery.

They empty the dishwasher of last nights cups and cutlery, set up the machines, fill
the regular grinders (after Tweek spends almost five minutes straight explaining the very
important differences between all of them, as well as the different roasts) and run through the basics
so fast he feels like he's hopped up on speed.

Tweek finally moves to open the door for their first washed out, sour-faced customer at exactly nine
o'clock.

As is probably anticipated, there's a lot of swearing involved.
aaaand to, so the interaction begins. ;)))
"My tics aren't usually this bad," Thomas says, just shortly after the morning rush comes to an end.

There are a few college students in the back booths with their laptops, (likely home for the weekend visiting parents and needing a few hours privacy to get on with assignments), and an old couple sat scrolling through their cell phones in the front window, totally ignoring one another. Aside from that, the shop is empty. It's a rare respite from the madness of rushing parents with push chairs and squalling brats, grumpy mall employees all looking like they want to shoot someone, and the occasional lost celebrity.

(Every other day, Richard Tweek comes home regaling them with new tales of an angry Nicki Minaj storming through the door, or a terrified Harry Styles running away from potentially homicidal 'fans' and wanting to hide in the restroom. Tweek's witnessed that sort of shit often enough around the town to know that it's highly possible these stories are true.)

Glancing over at the older boy, who's currently wiping down the tables, Tweek can't help but make out the slump in his shoulders and the droop of his head. He isn't good at offering comfort or advice to people, considering his rather morbid outlook on life in general, but he can sense that this is the moment that a kinder person would usually step in. Voice unintentionally blunt, he says, "Y-you're not used to Saturday – hrrng – shifts. It's u-understandable, man." Even if today has been pretty tame so far.

Thomas shakes his head and opens his mouth like he's going to reply, but is cut off before he can even make a sound by a particularly violent spasm. "Ass, fuck— asshole, cunnin— cocknose motherfuck—" Somehow he manages to cut himself off, dropping the cloth on the table and covering his face with his hands.

Looking away and giving the other boy some privacy, Tweek goes back to rinsing the milk-steaming jugs and tries to ignore the small twinge of empathy in his chest. What Thomas seems to be going through is a particular form of frustration that Tweek thinks he understands, at least on some level. He doesn't have Tourette's, but he's always been prone to outbursts and seemingly inexplicable behaviour. He's loud and he's twitchy, and he's been on the receiving end of many judgemental stares and cruel comments. It's not something that he has much control over - especially not when he's stressed out or emotional.

(Like today, for example. In the two hours that the shop's been open, he's been flinching and shaking so hard that he's knocked over two takeaway cups, has smashed three white mugs and has burnt the back of one wrist with a hot jet from the steamer. He's also been doing a lot of unintentional shrieking.)

He's almost done loading up the dishwasher by the time that Thomas is comfortable talking again, and he slows down to listen, even though he doesn't look back up. "No, it's not that. I used to work weekends all the time in my last job."
Something occurs to Tweek then – something that makes him want to giggle nervously. "Aurgh— d-dude. D'you think being 'round me is tr-triggering it? Like, making it worse?" He's no expert in Tourette's by any means, but he knows at least a little, like how when people with different tics are exposed to each other, it sometimes makes those tics more pronounced. Tweek's a pretty fucking twitchy person himself, so maybe that's doing it. (Then again, it could just as easily be the stress from working with him. That's an even more likely possibility.)

Out of his peripheral vision, he catches Thomas straightening and looking over; still he refuses to glance up from his work. "I hadn't thought about that," he says.

Yeah, well, not everyone can overthink things the way that Tweek can. It's sort of an art form. (He snorts at this.)

The only reason he'd considered this a possibility at all is because for a little while he'd thought that he might have Tourette's himself, and had spent about month solid studying it. That'd been after a friend had suggested that he might have it back at the end of elementary school. Funny how that friend had been Craig, and he only knew anything about the disorder at all because of his secret friendship with Thomas. Funny how even then, Tweek's life had been unseeingly influenced by this boy in front of him, and he hadn't even had any idea until he was putting the pieces together several years later, lying in an ambulance, the blood dripping into his eyes staining his vision a murky red.

That realization had been a particularly bitter one.

They lapse back into quietness, broken up only by the clatter of mugs that Tweek struggles to hold on to, and the occasional quiet, prolific outburst from the older boy. Tweek finishes up, sliding the rack into place, lifting the door and pressing the button on the front of the machine to start it up. The small space is filled with the thrumming rumble of the dishwasher. It's warm and muggy behind the counter and even though he usually overheats very quickly, he luxuriates in it today, since the heating in the shop is acting up and his work outfit is far from appropriate for winter weather.

After finishing with the tables, Thomas walks back around to join him, cheeks flushed and the tip of his nose pink from the chill. He brushes past Tweek and makes a beeline for the sink, taking extra time and care to rinse out his dirty cloth under the hot tap.

Without even asking about preference, Tweek starts setting up for two cups of coffee - one black americano with a triple shot of coffee he knows will taste like rusty metal and pig swill, (but will stop the caffeine headache that's starting to bite him right behind his eyes), and one cappuccino for his workmate. A safe, standard bet. Still shitty, but that's pretty much the theme of the shop, at this point. 'Fancy a cup of coffee, but can't find anywhere decent to make one for you out here in butt fuck nowhere? How about Tweek Bros., where the service is god awful and the coffee is, at best, marketably shit.'

Part way through foaming the milk, his cell pings from the back pocket of his pants. He yelps at the vibration, almost throwing the metal jug over his shoulder.

Only after finishing up – setting the drink down in front of Thomas with a noisy, sloshing clunk – does he allow himself to pull it out. He's had all his notifications turned to silent for the last few days since the group chat has, once again, exploded into a riot of out-dated memes and discussions about which of their classmates the other boys would like to bang. (Which, really, gross.) The only person he's set to receive messages from like usual is Craig, because... well, because it's him.

Unlocking the home screen, he ignores his other texts (of which there are apparently a shit ton) and slides right into his conversation with Craig.
For a moment, he does nothing but stare at the screen. Feels his pulse race.

11:38
hey, u want me to come over n meet u for ur lunch break? x

He types out a response so quickly, he has to go back and correct himself right after.

11:42
Hey man, cN'T.
*can't
Im not gonn a be able to leave the new guy unsuperviised. x

Tapping at the back of his cell with one hand, he takes a nervous gulp of too-hot coffee as he waits for a reply, withdrawing from it with a grimace. Now his tongue feels like it's been dipped in grit.

That's forgotten, though, the moment his screen lights up.

11:43
aw thats lame
well whatever babe, more time in bed for me.
tho idt be more fun if u were here too x ;)

Wait...

A furious blush rises to his face as he realizes that Craig... Craig's flirting with him. Holy shit. Something caught between a giggle of embarrassment and a groan of humiliation bubbles up in his throat, and he covers his mouth with one palm.

It takes an agonising five minutes to think up a coherent reply, and he sends it off with a feeling that he's failing this completely.

11:49
Craig STOP ! Stop being a perv man! I dpn't neeed to think abou tthat at work. x

The next message he gets through is too much. He's surprised he doesn't spontaneously combust right after reading it.

11:49
ah but that doesnt mean u dont want to. just that im distracting you with the mental image.
but hey, since ur so busy ill go distract myself, instead. x

Aghast and blushing so hard he wants the floor to rise up and swallow him whole, he stabs violently at the screen.

11:50
OH MU GID CRAIG WRF MAN?

Craig's response is instantaneous.

11:50
no wait
i didnt mean like that
i just meant sleping
sleepig
Oh God, the mortification. He is so done with this. So, totally done.

Knowing it would be fucking stupid to try and continue this conversation any further, he sends back the first reply he can think of.

11:51
Dude. i gotta go. it's gettign busy. x

He never thought he'd say it, but thank sweet baby Jesus he can use 'work' as an excuse to drop out of a conversation.

Shoving his phone back into his pocket, he looks up for the first time since the short chat began, to catch Thomas watching him again. He's been doing a lot of that.

"Hrrng. Wh-what?" he says, trying to play it cool even though he's red in the face and about ten times twitchier than he was just a little while ago. (An impressive feat, some would say.)

"Nothing," says the other boy. "FfFuck, cock. You're just... different from what I expected." He takes a slow sip at his coffee, brown eyes warm. "Craig didn't do you justice when he talked about you, y'know."

"Aurgh. Wow. How surprising." Yeah, considering the fact that Craig spent most of their younger years loathing him half the time, this isn't news.

Apparently, Thomas catches onto the sarcasm. He lowers the drink onto the side, eyebrows furrowing. "Asshole— it wasn't ever anything bad. He just used to talk a lot about... everything." Thomas fidgets, running his fingers through his hair and muttering a string of pretty creative expletives. Tweek cocks his hip against the counter and takes another large, scalding mouthful of his drink, expression disbelieving. Waits until the older boy is ready to continue. "He told me about all your adventures over the years. All the games you guys would play together, and all of your trips. He even sang me some of the songs you wrote for him. They were great. You're really talented."

That soft, handsome grin forces open the badly healed scar over Tweek's heart.

Those memories, they were supposed to be private. Those memories were theirs. They weren't supposed to be shared around with Thomas just because Craig hadn't thought of them in the same light. Tweek had always considered the soft, secret moments between them sacred – especially the ones from the time before everything went wrong.

And here is Thomas, openly admitting that what had been so precious to him had been carelessly shared about, like there was nothing wrong with that. Perhaps there wasn't, in other people's eyes – in Craig's eyes. Tweek knows he's an incredibly closed off person - he's batshit paranoid and cynical as fuck, and it's so, so hard for him to open himself up to anyone.

He'd given that privilege to Craig Tucker without a second thought. Several times over the years, because he knows that the other boy's always been closed off, too.

Sometimes he wonders if he'll ever get that same honesty back. Sometimes, like the last few days, he thinks that he might be getting close.

Then something new like this comes to light, and he forgets why he ever thought he might.
Hypocritical, when he's forgotten how to be open with Craig now, too.

(He doesn't understand why hearing that Craig sang Thomas their songs, or told him about their adventures would hurt him so much he wants to cry, when it's hardly the worst thing Tweek's found out.)

Good mood thoroughly smothered, he says, "Why are you here, dude? Wh-why'd you have to— why'd you start working here? You had to know it was my family that – urgh – owned this place.'

"I knew," Thomas agrees, face dropping into a frown. "I – c-cocklord, assmaster – I came here because my mom and stepdad are worried I won't do well living on my own in a big city, and I made a deal with them that if I could live alone close by for six months without any problems, then I could apply for college in whichever state I want. South Park's cheap, and has a lot of pretty good housing opportunities just outside the centre of town. Plus, it's pretty close to home.'

They have to stop the conversation there, because the door swings open at precisely that minute, admitting a gaggle of middle-aged woman, loaded down with shopping bags from the January sales in the mall. They're so caught up in loud gossiping about one of the other ladies from their church group that they don't seem to notice Tweek slipping over on a patch of spilt coffee with a shriek and wildly flailing limbs, or Thomas swearing loud enough to burst eardrums as he dives down to catch him, only to slip over too.

After a moment of excruciating embarrassment and much awkward fumbling, they manage to pull themselves upright. Thomas looks rattled, and blurts out apologies for not being able to catch him in between mouthfuls of curses. His chin is red where he clunked it against the top of Tweek's forehead, and the sight makes Tweek want to laugh bitterly, since his chin's all scuffed up too. (Only his is worse, is uglier, has been like this for longer.)

Discretely rubbing at his sore ass – which was already bruised before he'd gone flying – the younger boy takes over dealing with the women. Thomas goes to fetch the mop, and gets to cleaning up the puddle. Tweek considers this a fairly useless endeavour, since it'll take less than five minutes for him to spill more and his pants and jumper have soaked most of it up anyway, but he doesn't tell his co-worker this. Thomas looks so flustered by the whole ordeal, Tweek actually feels a little bad for him. Jesus Christ, if this is too much for the older boy to deal with, then how he's going to survive in this shithole of a town for another five months is a mystery. South Park is, as a general rule, a pretty abhorrent place. Slipping in a puddle of coffee is just about the tamest thing that could have gone wrong today.

Between the two of them, they have all six customers served and seated fairly quickly, and return to the counter in twitchy, jumpy silence.

Part of Tweek is hoping that Thomas was sidetracked by the events of the last ten minutes, he's so nervous about hearing the answer. The rest of him is just frustrated at the interruption. Thankfully, the older boy doesn't need any prompting to start speaking again.

"There aren't exactly many places hiring out here, so when I found this place, I thought it was perfect. Fucking dickwad. I've got experience working in this sort of job, and yeah... I recognized your name. I only know a few people around here, so I was really happy when I saw this place. Your dad was so accepting of me being... different." He shrugs. Tweek ignores the suggestion that his dad's been good with Thomas, because it still doesn't excuse what an ass the man is when talking about him at home.
"Y-you... just came to South Park 'cause it was convenient?" he asks, wanting to be sure.

"Well," Thomas shuffles. Coughs to cover another slur. "That and because... I don't have many friends left, back home. All the kids I grew up with in Denver are away for college, or have sort of... outran me. Asshole—ass." When he meets Tweek's eyes, he looks so hopeful, it hurt. "I knew a few of you guys here, and aside from that fat kid, everyone I've met or heard of sounds nice. Plus... I haven't spoken to Craig in a long time. I guess I missed him, after I moved. I kind of wanted to... I don't know. Be friends with you guys, or something. Put the past behind us."

Great. Now Tweek just feels like an ass.

(It's made worse by the surge of fear clawing at the insides of his stomach. Thomas wants friends. Thomas wants Craig. And he's handsome, he's charming and honest. He's got a gorgeous smile and a quirkiness that Tweek couldn't ever hope to pull off. If Thomas wants those things, he'll get them. Tweek knows he will. But he can't hold that against this boy, who's only ever been kind and honest with him. Tweek may be a vindictive little shit at times, but he isn't cruel. He isn't heartless.)

Lump in his throat, the shorter blonde nods. Ducks his head and goes to take the mop and bucket back into the staff room.

In the low yellow lighting, he leans against the door and covers his face with his hands.

It's easy to dehumanize someone – to see them as an enemy – when they're far away, and you can't see the things that make them exactly the same as everyone else. But the world isn't black and white, and Tweek's only just beginning to make out the other shades, too.

...  

**FLASHBACK**

The other boy guides him through the sea of people, slow and patient, stopping every time Tweek nearly tumbles.

Through the ringing of his ears and the pressure of months and months worth of tears building inside of his head, Tweek listens to him cursing. The words rush in and out of focus, like they're being whispered one moment, and screamed right into his ear the next. The roar of the crowds follows suit, crashing down upon him and withdrawing, waves that leave him breathless.

Eventually, they find a quieter spot, where the light seems to drop away into darkness. He makes a sound in the back of his throat – a high, rasping thing of blind panic – and then there's a hand in his, holding firm even when he tries to tug away. The hand is warm and soft. The hand is strong.

His eyes adjust slowly, after he's been pushed down into a seat and left with a rush of quiet words that don't make sense at first.

"I'll be back in a minute, once I've gotten us some coffee, okay? You'll be alright? God, you're so —*fuck*— so pale..."

They're in a small, independent coffeeshop, and the other patrons are quiet, bending over laptop screens and propped up books that swallow their faces whole.

Everything wobbles, and Tweek curls into himself, sliding his rucksack off his back and hauling it around into his lap. His thighs scream at the weight, but it's... a relief. It helps draw him back to reality.
As Thomas returns, hands full with a tray, Tweek looks up at him. Struggles to pick out any defining features aside from large brown eyes and a tiredness he finds oddly familiar, despite all of their differences. This boy... he's handsome. He doesn't twitch or jerk around like Tweek does, and his vocal tics are... quirky. Difficult to live with, Tweek's sure, but still.

Thomas is the sort of weird that's endearing. He isn't attention seeking or demanding or... or a freak.

He hugs his bag as the tray is set down, grasps at it with fingers that lock up and don't want to let go. Only notices he's crying when big, fat tears roll off the end of his nose and his chin onto cracked, red knuckles.

"I l-love hi— urgh— him. I love him," he says, as the other boy sits down. "Nurgh, Jesus h-help me, I love him s-so much."

"I know," comes that soft, low voice that barely reaches his ears. "I'm sorry."

"A-and I wan— wanted to hate you, wh-when I heard. Wanted so – aurgh – so bad to get back at you both. Wanted so bad—" He's cut off by an ugly, loud sob, and it feels like his ribs are splintering under the pressure. "But I couldn't."

A tissue is pressed to his cheeks, wipes his eyes, and a hand steadies his dipping chin. "Shh, it's okay, it's okay."

Pushing the other boy away is hard when his arms are made of brittle, dried out clay, but he tries. "N-no. No, it's n-not. He – urgh – hates that I'm gay. He hates it. Every time we're pr-pretending to be together he— he flinches away from me. Doesn't wanna hold hands or, or hug me." Gasping in huge breaths, he finally manages to get Thomas and his stupid, useless tissues away from him. "H-he gets angry, too, whe-never we're alone. Always leaves m-me. Eurnn. Doesn't— doesn't hang out, or talk anym-more. Like... like I'm diseased."

Through the blur of tears, he thinks he can make out Thomas's face. Large, brown eyes. Large, wide brown eyes and silence.

So Tweek keeps speaking. "But – nnn – not you. Y-you're okay. He let's you touch him, huh? He – heurgh – he's fine with you." And that's the worst part. Craig likes touching other boys. He isn't a homophobe, he isn't disgusted because of what Tweek's got between his legs. He's just disgusted because it's Tweek.

And so here they are, Craig Tucker's fake boyfriend sat across from the real deal.

Two boys in love with the same guy, and for only one of them is that love reciprocated.

Squeezing his eyes shut against the overwhelming urge to wail and scream, to dig his fingers into his thighs and bring his head down against the edge of the table, Tweek wishes for the hundredth time that this was easier. That he could set his feelings aside and deal with the rest of his life as it crumbles away beneath his feet.

Somehow, he stays on track. Somehow he brings himself back to the present.

"That stuff's not – nng – not the reason I went— not the reason I came here though, man." His fingers convulse around the rucksack, unwilling to let go of what's inside. If he hands these things over, that's it. That's his claim on Craig gone forever.

(As simple as handing his heart over in a bag.)
He does it anyway.

"I c-came be— because I've got some... some stuff I wanna give you.

"After that, he's – hrrn – all yours."

Chapter End Notes

okay so i'm anticipating more confusion LOL. if anyone needs any help understanding what's happening, please feel free to ask, and i'll do my best to explain what i can :))
my cat has been meowing at me for almost an hour straight and climbing all over my
damn laptop, and i still have no idea what he wants?? :'|

Dry eyed and composed by the time he leaves the staff room, Tweek returns to the counter just in
time to deal with the next customers – a bunch of junior and senior year girls who’re standing around
giggling coyly at Thomas and asking for his number. They're all in low-cut tops and precarious heels
despite the snowy fucking weather, dolled up to the point of looking cheap.

The older boy looks mind blown and a little disturbed by the way they're pressing themselves up
against the counter, his eyes wide and face set in a pale grimace. Tweek, with none of the social
pleasantries that the rest of humanity seem to luxuriate in, steps in front of Thomas and, plain as
day, says, "L-leave him alone, you – hng – vultures. He's gay."

That puts a damper on their moods. To their credit, despite looking a little crestfallen at the news
and pouty at the insult, they each order a soy mocha and trail off to a free table close by. The last
one, a blonde girl Tweek vaguely recognizes as 'Emily' from his History classes, glowers at Tweek
and mutters, "Yeah, sure, he might like the D, but that doesn't mean we can't sit over here and
appreciate his natural beauty, you know. You can't go hogging all the hotties just because they
wanna bang you. That's like, super selfish."

Aghast at the thought of anyone wanting to 'bang' him – including Craig, who very
possibly does want that, all recent activity considered – Tweek says through a growl, "Shut the fuck
up. If I have to stand here and keep you harpies' claws out of one more innocent guy, I will. I'm s-
saving fucking lives over here, far as I'm concerned."

"Oh my God, you're such a dick," she says, flicking her hair over her shoulder and flouncing
towards the booth her friends have chosen. He flips her the bird as she goes, no matter that she
doesn't see it.

Tweek turns around with a scowl, pushing up the long sleeves in preparation for the drinks, and
catches Thomas staring.

"Uhm," says the taller boy, looking a little bit flustered. (Tweek doesn't blame him. It is getting kind
of warm behind here now that the dishwasher's been on for a while. And add to that the mortification
of being singled out by a group like them... it's understandable.)

"Heugh. Don't worry about it," he says. Stomps over to the coffee machine. "Almost all the girls in
this town are l-leeches, dude. Gotta watch ’em or they'll latch right on— onto your balls. Suck the life
force right outta you."

... It would seem that Tweek spoke too soon earlier, when he'd said it was a quiet day; all afternoon,
they're rushed right off their feet.
Every table is full, and the small shop is so noisy Tweek's got the mother of all headaches brewing behind his eyes. The place is full of squawking brats and shouting parents, teens jeering and shrieking with laughter, and elderly couples yelling at one another just to be heard over the din.

They're under so much pressure for mugs, since the dishwasher is running about three loads behind and they can't put more in fast enough to keep up with the demand, that they're serving in takeout cups.

(On the plus side though, this means less dishwashing.)

Almost all of their customers are total shitbags, which seems to blitz the remainder of the calm, cool reserve Thomas had first thing that morning, and means that Tweek's left to deal with the majority of them himself.

Mood growing darker as time goes on, it doesn't take long for Tweek to start kicking the more tricky customers out. For all the rudeness his worst clientele dish out, he gives it back tenfold; flips the bird, screeches, swears so much he puts Thomas' Tourettes to shame, and just generally gives the brilliant customer service that the people of South Park have come to rely upon over the years.

More teenaged girls gather around the counter in between orders, fluttering their hands about and cooing like particularly stupid pigeons. Every time a new one appears, the twitchy blonde is there in a heartbeat, threatening to brain them with the milk jug.

By three o'clock in the afternoon, with the rush in full swing though, Thomas is starting to hold his own, against them. He throws ruffled, red-faced glares and quiet, "Asslicker, butt-pirate. No. I don't want your numbers. Shitfuckers. I likes dudes," their ways.

These small shows of temper actually endear Tweek to the other boy more than anything else has. With a little more training under his supervision, he thinks he might just have Thomas working at an acceptable level of batshit crazy – which is always good when dealing with their particular brand of clientele.

It should be universally acknowledged that in order to work as a barista in South Park, you need a backbone of steel.

As is usual when his dad is away, Tweek turns down the odd customer looking for their 'signature blends', telling them that they're currently, "Waiting for more to arrive in."

When that doesn't work, and the customers get wild eyed and start frothing a little at the mouth, he knocks together a cup of the strongest un-spiked blend he can find, and serves it up to them with a triple the usual amount of shots and a teaspoon of salt for good measure. They're apparently so off their heads anyway that they don't ever seem to notice the difference – just leave jittering hard enough to put Tweek's tics to shame.

(Thomas looks on with wide eyes.)

Speaking of which, both boys are nervous wrecks by the time that the day is drawing to a close. They've got extra work to do and, even though Tweek tried to insist on Thomas having a lunch break earlier in the day, the other boy had firmly refused to take it. So they've been running around the place hour after hour on empty stomachs, frazzled and more than a little bit frustrated.

At one point Tweek looks down at himself and realizes that Craig's hoodie is now more brown than blue, and he knows that he's got smudges of all sorts of grime spread over his face, but he finds it difficult to hold back slightly hysterical laughter when he looks over at Thomas, and sees that the
other boy is in a similar state.

His short hair sticks up in every direction, the collar of his light grey shirt is twisted at the back, and he's almost definitely ruined his expensive looking jeans. There's also a trail of what's most likely cocoa powder from his temple to his jawline, and another on his opposite cheek, which makes him look like he's attempted to give himself some warpaint.

Once it seems that they're past the worst of the insanity, Tweek fetches the store phone and dials a number he's learned off by heart. As it dials through, he hurries over to Thomas' side. "Y-you're not – eurgh – vegan or— or anything are you, man?" Thomas shakes his head. (Tweek realizes that he should have probably thought to ask this question earlier, before he kept making Thomas milky coffees. Oops) "Got any allergies? Or like... a-anything against pizza?"

Another two no's, even though he's looking at Tweek like he's a little bit crazy again.

Good. That makes this easier.

Some kid answers from the other end of the phone, sounding bored out of his mind. "Whistlin' Willies, what d'you want?"

"T-two large mar— marguerites with extra garlic dip, soon as you can get your ass up here, man. For Tweek Bros. Coffeehouse, just along f-from – eurgh – Main Street."

"I know where you are, douchebag. I wasn't born yesterday."

Jesus Christ, what an asshole. And Tweek thought he was a bad worker. "Nrrg. Fuck you, kid."

"Preferred payment method?" the little shit asks through a drawling sigh.

"Cash. And hurry the hell up."

"Whatever."

The line goes dead.

... 

It's exactly seven minutes to six when the pizza arrives. (Not like Tweek is counting.)

The second the sweaty looking delivery guy's been paid – Tweek helps himself to the money out of the till – the shorter boy flips the closed sign and shouts over the voices of their remaining customers, "We're locking up in ten minutes." One of their regulars stands up like she's got the intention of asking for a refill, and Tweek almost snarls. "No more Goddamn drinks."

Mouth watering and eyes glued to the greasy looking boxes, he turns to the other boy, but is beaten to speaking.

"Get as much done ff— fuck-me-sideways— first?"

For his work ethic, even in the face of his pizza growing cold, Thomas receives his first ever Tweek-grin. It contains a lot cheek-ticking.

"Last one t-to clear their section and get the – argh – the fuckers out the door has to empty the trash." This is pretty much as close to making a deal with the devil as Tweek is willing to get, since the idea of touching something as dodgy as the trash normally has him screaming bloody murder and running in the opposite direction.
He doesn't like germs. Especially not the kinds that come from hundreds of different peoples mouths and hands, which is just another reason he fucking hates this place. It's like a special level of hell reserved for venereal diseases and microbial colonization.

Right now though, anything that means they can eat their pizza in peace is enough to make him suggest this dumb competition. Thomas is apparently in agreement with him there.

"Deal."

And so, the race begins.

They get through another two loads of dishwashing, scrub down the benches and wipe over their respective booths with the fierce kind of intensity that other people normally save for competitive sports.

In the process they lose another handful of cups and saucers, and are faced with more put out customers (literally put out, since they're half shoved through the front door), but Tweek considers it an overall success.

It's just after six by the time they've got the lock clicking into place behind the very last customer, and both boys are collapsing into their chairs, out of breath and sweaty. Adrenaline pumps through Tweek's veins from the rush – because holy shit, Thomas is surprisingly quick when there's a goal in sight and he's been given a day of intense training – and all of his limbs are left wobbly.

Still, he wins. By about seven customers.

Slumping down over the table, he tilts his head to one side and watches Thomas leaning back, long pale throat arched as his head flops over the back of his chair. He tries to work up the envy and the frustration he was feeling towards the guy earlier, but successfully running a coffeehouse together through the busiest day of the week is a pretty powerful bonding experience. (It's kind of a make-or-break deal, he likes to think. And it was certainly a 'make' sort of day, since they're both still sat here breathing.)

"Damn," Thomas says, quiet voice rising over the sudden silence. And then, again, "Damn."

"Uh-huh," he replies.

After a while longer of regaining themselves, Tweek's rumbling stomach finally gets the better of him. He scrapes his chair back across the floor and stumbles to the counter to fetch his first meal of the day. His arms are so heavy from doing actual work that the boxes of warm pizza feel like they weigh a ton, but he bravely prevails, carrying them back and dropping them on the table they ended up at.

Thomas eyes the boxes like they're the greatest prizes he could have ever been given, and when Tweek nudges the top one towards him, he tears right in. Tweek follows the older boy's example, stuffing almost an entire slice into his mouth in one go.

Sweet, tart tomato sauce and salty, stringy cheese burst across his tongue and, Jesus Christ—

Heaven.

Opposite, him, Thomas makes the sort of moan that he'd normally associate with cheap porn. It just so happens that Tweek understands the sentiment, though, because he's barely holding back from groaning himself.
They devour the first halves of their pizza in amiable silence, cheeks bulging and fingers slick with grease. It's glorious.

Soon enough though, Tweek slows. He's not used to putting away so much food at such a fast pace, and he knows that if he eats much more too soon, he'll end up chucking it all straight back up. Instead, he sinks against his backrest and pulls his sneakers up onto the seat in front of him. Wipes his mouth on the back of his arm, and his hands on his pants.

Unlike him, Thomas keeps on going, eating a few more slices at a slightly more sensible pace. Even with a mouth full of pizza and cocoa powder warpaint smudged all over his face, Tweek admits to himself that Thomas is an attractive guy.

If he weren't hopelessly enamoured with Craig, he's pretty sure that the older boy would be his type. Tall, broad but not muscly, shorthaired and handsome faced. It helps that he seems like a quiet sort of person – Tweek always found that he got on better with the calm, introverted kids like Craig and Token – and even Clyde, when they were younger.

(Which raises the question, why is he getting along so well with Butters and Kenny, when neither of them fit that sort of description? The answer is a pretty straightforward one: they've been around and non-judgemental through a lot of his worst patches over the last few weeks. A guy can't help but appreciate that. But that does bring another important point to mind...)

"You've been here, what... three w-weeks now, dude?"

A large swallow. "A month."

"Hrrng... How come you haven't contacted either of us before now?" He can only assume Craig hasn't heard, since he sort of suspects that his best friend would flip his shit if he found out that his childhood sweetheart was here in town.

The other boy drops his gaze. His current slice of pizza, which had been hovering right in front of his mouth, is set back down in the box, half eaten. Hands retreating to his lap, he seems to spend a lot of time studying the slice, before he speaks up.

"I... guess I wigged out. The day I got my first shift here I started – fucking cockhead – second-guessing myself. I haven't spoken to you since after that time we met up – you never answered my texts. And Craig..." A low, deep sort of laugh that draws up a sympathetic ache in Tweek's throat. "He stopped talking to me a little while after I ended it with him."

There are no words to describe the misery on Thomas' face, as he says that. Tweek is overcome with the urge to reach across the table and squeeze the other boy's shoulder; he just barely stays still.

"I – nng – changed my cell, like, straight after we met up, dude. I got into a p-pretty serious fight with this guy that I used to be friends with. Hurrgh. Ended up smashing my phone to bits when I got home." Along with most of his room.

He doesn't mention the fact that the fight had been about how he'd met up with Thomas, or that that was the last straw for his strained friendship with Clyde.

As far as the brunette saw, Tweek was being a selfish jackass who wanted nothing more than to ruin Craig's happiness by sabotaging his real relationship with Thomas. It hadn't mattered how much Tweek had tried to explain; in Clyde's eyes, he was just a bitter, burned out fake-boyfriend with a vendetta. (Tweek had stopped trying to tell him how he'd never meant to hurt Craig and Thomas' relationship somewhere in between the first slur and the final punch; there hadn't seemed a point. The
damage was already done.)

But none of that makes up for the fact that Tweek's actions, however well meaning, did ruin things between Craig and Thomas. "For—for what little it's worth, I'm sorry, man. I never meant..."

Waving him off, Thomas offers a small smile. "I know. I didn't hold it against you. I think that whatever way things ended, it would've been weird afterwards. Messing around with friends never ends well – doesn't matter whether you've got feelings for each other or not. Aw, shit—shit. Besides, we were stupid young when we were doing all of that – we barely had any idea what we were doing."

Even though those words make him feel sick, Tweek can't seem to stop himself from saying, "I — urgh — I dunno, man. I think you trained him pretty well. He's so good at all o-of that stuff, it kinda makes me angry."

This solicits a genuine laugh from the older boy. The sound is infectious. Tweek can't help but grin, though it hurts his face and makes his stomach ache.

He always knew that Craig had lost his virginity to Thomas – that they'd done enough together that he was by no means inexperienced – but knowing that on a subconscious level and hearing it spoken out loud are two completely different things.

It makes every kiss, every time they've done anything together over the last few weeks feel...not sullied. That's not the right word. Just, maybe a little less precious.

"Even a-after all the dumb shit he did, I never— never once stopped loving him," he says with a sigh, propping his scuffed up chin on his knees and wrapping his arms around his legs. "When you broke up with him, it was... awful. He w-was a mess, man. He di-didn't have anyone to talk to about it except this one friend who knew." And Tweek really had hated Thomas after that – had hated him for letting Craig go, even after Tweek had handed him over on a silver fucking platter.

Frowning, Thomas asks, "Aw, shit—dickbag. What about you? Didn't you guys talk about it?"

Tweek snorts. "Me?" He shakes his head. "Dude, he doesn't – nn – know I ever even found out about you. He still has no goddamn idea. I kept... kept thinking one day he might say something, might tell me himself, but..." Never. Not once had the other boy opened up to him.

Under the rug, Craig's first love had gone. Unspoken, unacknowledged. Unresolved, just like the rest of that year was.

"But then..." Thomas cards a hand through his hair. Tweek watches as his throat bobs. When he speaks again, he's trying to smile. "Well, whatever. as long as you guys are —aw shit, asshole — together now, right? You still figured stuff out. That's what matters."

Silence stretches out around them after those words.

The younger blonde stares down at the tabletop, expression falling into something ugly – a smirk gone horribly wrong.

It takes a while for him to work up the energy to talk. "We never spoke about any of it, man. This," he waves one hand at his neck, and the mark on display there, "This is all new. Jesus, it all started be-because of a mistake. I have no fucking idea what we're doing."

After a moment, Thomas exhales roughly and Tweek looks up to see him rubbing his hands over his
face. "Shit," he says. It's the first time Tweek's heard him cursing of his own volition.

"Yep. Th-that about sums it up, man."

Somehow, they both end up laughing.

(Laughing, because this whole thing isn't funny at all.)

Chapter End Notes

bro time between not-really-bros :))
Chapter 27

Despite his original worries, Tweek finds that he's warmed up to Thomas by the end of the night.

Yes, he's still insanely insecure and nervous about all the variables of what might happen with the other boy being here in town, where things could so easily all apart, but... he won't hold it against him. It wouldn't be his fault, and it wouldn't be fair.

They walk through the town together in the dark, to one of the bus stops along Main Street. It's cold enough that both boys are trembling, teeth chattering and bodies hunched over in a futile attempt to stay warm. Thomas explains how he's got a grubby little apartment out in South-South that his parents are helping him pay for.

Tweek finds himself waiting at the stop, leaning against the pole with his arms wrapped around himself, as he listens to the boy talk about his morning walks into town. He lights up a cigarette after checking Tweek's okay with it (of course he is), and even offers him a puff.

Almost of its own volition his hand reaches forwards and plucks it out of Thomas' fingers, taking a long, slow breath. It's not the first time he's smoked - he has a habit of sharing Craig's cigarettes at times, most notably when he's a little tipsy - but it's weird that he's stood here doing it with this boy.

He sucks in a second mouthful; a long, warm breath that tastes of ash and bitterness, and smells soft like Craig's jumpers. It's the sort of flavour he knows will linger on the back of his tongue long after he's gone home and brushed his teeth, but he doesn't care. Even the brief upsurge of light-headedness isn't so bad.

(Those first few puffs on a cigarette always make him spin.)

Handing it back, he watches Thomas in the low lighting, with his smudged up face and his messy appearance, and snorts. Feels his eye tic when the older boy catches him looking and scrubs self-consciously at his face.

"Hah. Wouldn't bother, man," he says, shutting his eyes to the night sky, and feeling the sharp, still air press down against his cheeks like razors. "We're both a mess."

Thomas chuckles at that. "Fuck. You're not wrong there."

In the low light, he brings the cigarette back up to his mouth, and Tweek opens his eyes to watch the tip glow amber. The reflection of it lights up briefly in brown eyes.

Standing together in the bitter cold, they exchange small complaints about their workday until Thomas' bus pulls up, and the other boy stubs out his smoke on the side of the pole before tossing it down into the gutter.

Just as he's stepping up through the doorway, Tweek calls after him, "Dude, Thomas, should I
– nng – let Craig know you're here? He'd w-want to..." Trails off, because despite his best intentions, a huge part of Tweek is terrified of this. It's a loud, self-serving voice in the back of his head that's screaming about how he should shut the fuck up; keep it secret just a while longer, just until he knows that Craig won't leave him.

But there's no way of getting that sort of guarantee. Not in reality. And as likely as it seems that Craig could drop him for Thomas, there's an even higher possibility that Tweek will be dropped for something else, eventually – for anything else.

He's tugged out of that destructive spiral when the older boy calls back to him, voice soft and warm brown eyes lit up by the fluorescent overhead lighting to a dazzling gold. "Not yet. Not until you're ready. I'm... happy, waiting." He gives a closed-mouth smile and a tired sigh. "See you tomorrow. Aw, shit. Hopefully it'll be quieter."

"Hrng. Yeah, okay. See you."

And with that Thomas is clambering up the last few steps and pulling a handful of loose change out of his jacket pocket to get a ticket from the driver. Once he's done, he heads down into the brightly lit aisle, and takes an empty window seat. Tweek watches, stomach twisting up at the same time his mouth does, offering a skewed smile to this boy he's only met twice, that somehow seems to know him better than maybe anyone else right now.

(It's scary, being so transparent.)

With one final wave, the bus pulls out and Thomas is gone, driven away into the night.

... 

Trudging back home, numb hands stuffed in pockets and satchel swinging from his shoulder, Tweek has a lot to think about. In the space of a day his life's been turned on its head once again, and he's left floundering.

The anger that had risen to life in his stomach yesterday at MacDonalds (when telling Craig about how coming out had hurt him), is still there, burning low in the pit of his belly. If anything, the news that for years his best friend shared their most private, personal memories with another person is stoking that anger even higher.

It hurts – feels like acid in the back of his throat – to know that everything he has with Craig, he's been unwittingly been sharing with Thomas.

Craig's love? It's not his; it never was. What he has now are the dregs of emotions that the other boy had left after Thomas dumped him.

If there's any love between them at all, it's that of an old friendship on Craig's part, and poorly smothered, one-sided adoration on Tweek's. He wonders if his best friend came back to him after being ditched by Thomas because Tweek's like a pale, twitchy imitation of the boy he loved – if he was used to fill in that hole.

(The rarely heard voice of reason in his head tells him that's not the case, but... it's hard to hear it over the hurt.)

And then there's the sex.

Plain and simple, Craig gave his virginity to Thomas. He kissed him first, he touched him first, he had him first. And once again Tweek gets what Thomas pushed aside.
That's not to say that sex with Craig hasn't been amazing so far, but it's only amazing because Craig is experienced. Tweek's under no illusions that first times are normally messy and awkward and generally uncomfortable, but... he would have taken that. He would have taken all the negative and the cringeworthy and he would have embraced it, because it would mean that Craig might have wanted something more for both of them. That to Craig, sex with Tweek was special.

(He wasn't lying this time three weeks ago, when he'd said that sex is important to him. It's why he hadn't wanted to waste it on someone that didn't love him, as cheesy as that sounds. But it's a little too far down that road to worry now, when he's had a taste of what he's missing out on and he's left wanting more.)

As for his childhood, and all that time he'd spent with his best friend? All of his memories? Turns out that they were all given to Thomas without a second thought. Talked about and passed around between another set of hands that, for the longest time, Tweek hadn't even known existed.

He thinks of them lying in the grass by Stark's pond after ditching class in sixth grade, snow melting into their clothes and the first proper sunshine of the new year reflecting off the water. He'd sang Craig a silly little ditty about how lucky he was to have him as a best friend, and how he hoped they'd be best friends forever, no fucking matter what happened. The thought that that wasn't something private, that maybe the next time Craig had gone up to Denver to visit his Grandma, he'd sung those words for Thomas...

It feels like a betrayal.

More than the sex and the romantic feelings, those moments are the things that Tweek would have never wanted to share. His childhood as Craig Tucker's best friend was the only thing that he had a real claim over when it came to the other boy. It was the one thing that no one else could take from him without his permission.

Except for Craig; he was able to give those moments away, too. Had been doing so for years.

When Tweek steps into the stuffy hallway, he doesn't bother to call out to his parents, just slams the door behind him and slumps up the stairs, face grim.

"Tweek, dear?" his mom calls from the kitchen.

And then from the couch, his dad's voice rises in a laboured tone, like a man in, oh, the greatest of agony. "Tweek... is that you? How..." Groan. "How was it today, son?"

"Busy," the blonde says, loud and blunt. Keeps on walking.

Soon as he's shut in his room, he throws his satchel down on the floor and stands still.

Closes his eyes. Inhales.

So, he thinks. So he's angry about the past, so what? What could he possibly do about it?

Olive was right. Thomas was right. They should have talked back then, right after everything had happened. If Tweek had been honest about the things that went wrong that year, after they'd become friends again, then maybe now...

But mistakes are always easier to spot in hindsight.

What isn't so easy is correcting those mistakes once they're made.
Baby steps. Don't go in over your head, Tweek, he thinks.

Exhales.

Okay. He needs some sort of plan.

Toeing off his ratty sneakers and picking his way across the mess on his floor, he heads towards his desk. After a brief rifle through the papers piling up on the top, he finds some blank sheets that must have been torn out of a drawing pad. He snatches up a handful of different colored pens and sweeps everything off of the desktop with one arm, too busy muttering to do much more than flinch as a few heavier items crash and thump onto the floor.

(Sends up a brief prayer that there weren't any coffee mugs in the mix because really, at this point he ought to at least pretend he's trying not to break any more of them.)

The blonde sinks down into his desk chair, dumping his pens and paper down on the top and crossing his legs beneath him. With stiff, thawing fingers, he selects the first pen.

Dark blue.

‘Craig’, he writes on one side of the sheet.

Beneath it, he begins listing what the other boy knows about that year – or at least, everything Tweek's fairly certain he knows.

First off, Tweek came out to him mid September. Craig knows now that Tweek liked him back then, and went to him for support and help – neither of which were offered. Straight after that, things get tricky, because going by his reaction in MacDonalds, he hadn't known that Tweek liked him prior to yesterday.

(Tweek doesn't let himself fall into a spiral of "Why'd he reject me, then? Why'd my only real friend turn his back on me?" He's not going to get any answers unless he asks for them directly, and even then he suspects that Craig might lie.)

For a long time, he stares down at the paper and thinks, huh. One thing. That's really not that much.

No matter how hard he tries, though, he can't think of anything else from that early on.

The second thing he writes is about his mom's diagnosis somehow getting out after Christmas break, just around the time of her Mastectomy. That was one of the only times Craig had come to talk with him that early on in the year, seeming genuinely concerned. But Tweek had refused to talk, because by then he was scared of dumping more emotional baggage on Craig than he already had, having just recently overheard Craig and Clyde's conversation about him.

And then there were the fights Tweek started getting into around mid January. Verbal at first, and mostly with that son of a bitch, Cartman. (He doesn't count the bullying, because he knows that Craig would have gone crazy if he'd found out, whether Tweek annoyed him or not. Craig's never been cool with that shit.)

It was school wide knowledge that Twitchy Tweek was acting even weirder that usual, and by February he'd started getting caught up in other arguments too. Tensions between him and Clyde were already rising, and because of that, he was being pulled into disagreements with other students too – like several of the dumber girls in his classes, who didn't like seeing him bite back at the popular, brand new quarterback-in-training.
Another thing he thinks Craig must have noticed was that he was having issues with focusing in classes and snapping at his teachers. Detentions and trips to the Principles office or to the school counsellor were almost a part of his daily routine. On top of that, he'd started isolating himself from his friends.

So Craig would have heard about him fighting, getting in trouble with almost every member of staff that he came into contact with, and probably would have noticed his absence from their group. Probably. (But then, it might have been such a relief to have some downtime from Tweek that he hadn't noticed anything at all.)

It got interesting (he thinks this rather sardonically) around the time he'd beaten the shit out of Cartman.

Even if Craig had somehow magically missed the rest of the things Tweek was going through, there was no chance of missing that. It had been a huge point of contention, especially since Cartman proceeded to raise all hell about the incident with Principal Powers.

Considering about three people had had to drag Tweek off of the brunette even after the other boy had passed out, it was a miracle that he hadn't gotten more than a two week suspension. (He'd always suspected it was because Principal Powers despised Cartman, like most sane people did, and somehow let the issue slide.)

A little while later, he heard that he'd cracked at least two of Cartman's ribs with hard-booted kicks to his chest, as well as breaking his nose, dislocating his jaw and giving him a concussion. There might have been something about minor internal bleeding in there too, but Tweek refuses to think too hard on that. Even though the fatass had deserved it, he doesn't like thinking of himself as a violent person.

Things went from bad to worse for Tweek during that time. His mom's post-op tests had come back as positive, and she'd been informed that if they still read positive after radiotherapy, then she'd have to go in for chemo. His dad had also noticed that Craig wasn't coming to visit with nearly as much frequency as he had in the past, and almost the entirety of Tweek's suspension from school was spent listening to how much this hurt his father, how disappointed Richard Tweak was to have a son like him, how, "with your recent behaviour, is it really a wonder that you're scaring a good boy like Craig away?"

Tweek's hand grows so tight around the pen that he hears it snap. Blinks out of his thoughts.

Whoa. Okay. Calm down. Get back on track. He rubs one hand over his eyes and refocuses, easing up his grip on the poor, misshapen thing.

Back to what Craig knew.

He racks his brain, and comes up short.

Tweek knows from Craig's comments that he'd later found out about how he'd almost gotten held back a year, and he obviously knows about Tweek starting to see Olive some time in their sophomore year, but he's never given much of an indication as to knowing the extent of Tweek's problems. The blonde's almost certain Craig has no idea about the self harm, since he'd always been very careful to keep it secret, and he's positive that Craig wouldn't have any idea what Dissociation or Derealization are.

But his best friend isn't thick. Craig knows that he had a breakdown, and that he was admitted to hospital after an 'episode'.
Going by his reaction to Tweek blacking out a few weeks ago, he'd seen him collapsing at least once or twice that year, too. He's sure Craig never heard about the seizures, though.

(Thank Jesus. It had been bad enough seeing his mom's reaction to the doctors. What had been worse was having to sit down at a long table with a good chunk of the school faculty to discuss his mental stability and risk of 'repeat incidences'. To this day, a few members of staff act like he's going to fall apart if they so much as look at him wrong and, without fail, he feels nauseous every time he notices it.)

There's only one other event that he knows Craig heard about: that final, bloody fight he'd had with Clyde after school one day. They'd beaten each other senseless in the middle of the street and then Tweek had stumbled home, smashed his phone when he'd gotten several rapid-fire texts through from Craig, trashed his room and collapsed from what was probably his first full on seizure.

(It had only been a few days after he'd met up with Thomas in Denver, and about two months before his hospitalisation.)

Following the incident (which he kept secret), Tweek had been terrified, and determined to avoid Craig at all costs – even when his friend started trying to win him back over, knocking more frequently at his door despite Tweek getting his parents to say he wasn't in, and waiting at the bus stop for him in the mornings. He'd trailed around after Tweek between classes and had even tried to find him during lunch break, though Tweek spent most of them tucked away in a corner of the Nurses Office.

To his credit, Craig had actually started to make an effort to talk with him much earlier – right after it had gotten out that he'd beaten on Cartman – but by then Tweek had wanted nothing to do with him, because feeling rejected and ugly, unwanted and bothersome... that had been too much. He'd let the apathy rise up to swallow him whole.

At this point, Tweek stops. Pushes the messy, scribbled-on paper away from him and sinks trembling fingers into his hair. He makes a point of not thinking about any of the events of that year outside of his sessions with Olive (and even then, he tries not to focus on them solely), so this is... bizarre. Especially seeing it all written out, plain as day, in front of him.

Almost as if knowing that he needs a distraction, his cell pings from the back pocket of his pants, and he shifts around so he can pull it out.

Craig's sent him an image of Clyde and Bebe making out heavily on the couch in the Donovan front room, with Cartman, Heidi, Kyle, Stan, Wendy, Nichole and Token in the background, frozen mid-conversation, mouths gaping and arms gesticulating wildly.

Just as the Tweek's peering down at it and thinking, *well, thank fuck I'm not there*, his best friend sends through a message.

20:48
*its turned into straight couples night. dude save me from this hell
i wish u were here so i wouldnt have 2 suffer alone x*

He scans the message over and over again, like it might answer all of the questions he's got, or maybe ease the riot of resentment and affection churning up together in his stomach.

Eventually he types back.

20:55
I'm glad Im not. That looks shit man. SUcks to be you x

After waiting a while for another response, he shrugs and slides out of the chat, gaze tracking over the other things he's missed.

Gets a short way down the list when pauses. Does a double take.

His eyes lock on a conversation he doesn't remember ever seeing before, entitled, 'Blonde Squad (ˊ͈́ ˋ͈̀)〜〜'.

Face pulling into a frown, he gingerly opens the new chat, and stares down at the screen.

Huh.

It's Kenny and Butters.

13:02
toodles, sweetpeas ¯\_(ツ)_\_¯

13:22
Ooh Ken! This is a real good idea.

13:28
pshh. i know, i know. i'm amazing. (´・工作岗位・`)」
so anyway, i was thinking that you two nerds should get off the straight and narrow and ditch that lame ass study club tomorrow to come chill with me.
you'll never be cool kids if you keep hanging with that bunch of squares

13:46
Aw geez bud. You're just jealous you weren't invited last week.
It's not your fault you don't make the grade. :|

13:49
∑(´ DTOU ` n )
how harsh!
how cruel!
your words injure my delicate sensibilities!

13:51
Boy oh boy, you sure are a wiener sometimes, mister.

The chat goes on in a similar strain for another sixty messages or so, apparently having spanned the entire course of the day. After that first baffling suggestion that they hang out, though, the conversation seems to trail off into jokes and friendly teasing. Tweek finds himself briefly distracted by the two boys and their easy, stress free tone, and actually feels a little displaced when he reaches the end.

Chest not quite as tight as it was before, and the confusion over his feelings for Craig set aside, he types back a quick message to them.

21:20
Can't do anything tomorrow cause I've gotta wor kat the shop all day.
Its shit.

On impulse he adds the second bit, before swiping out of the conversation and setting his cell down
next to him.

Back to work, then.

After reviewing what he's already written on the sheet, he changes pens and adds a second column on the other half of the page, under the green header 'Tweek'. Here, he writes down the facts that he knows about what Craig did from that year. Just the facts – not the speculations.

The very first thing that he writes down is that at some time prior to Tweek coming out to him, Craig had begun dating – no, he thinks, and scratches that out. He doesn't know that.

Begins writing again.

Some time prior to Tweek coming out to him in September of that year, Craig had started being 'physically involved' with Thomas, and this had continued until around May of the following year.

Craig had rejected him for coming out because—

Crosses that off the list too.

Adds on the confrontation he'd overheard between Clyde and Craig, where Craig had confirmed that he had no romantic feelings for Tweek, and was 'seeing' someone else. Clyde had been confused and a little defensive on Tweek's behalf, right up until he'd spotted Tweek lurking by the door, and the blonde had run. (If he'd hidden better, maybe he'd know more. If he'd hidden better...)

It takes about five minutes of staring at the sheet to realise that actually, Tweek has close to no idea about what happened that year, for Craig. The only thing he knows is that from around the beginning of March to the end of June, Craig's attempts to properly reconnect with him grew more and more determined, right up to the night of July twelfth, when Craig had hammered on the door in the middle of the night for almost an hour straight before Tweek had cracked and opened it for him.

That was the night that Stripe had died. It was also the night that they'd put their issues aside and had curled up together on the couch, crying like babies and holding onto one another so tight, they'd both had bruises to show for it in the morning.

Waking up the next day to find Craig right there in front of him, eyes puffy and face smushed into the couch cushions, was the moment that Tweek decided that he didn't care what he'd overheard Craig tell Clyde, he didn't care that he'd promised Thomas he'd back off. All he cared about was his dumb, occasionally thoughtless best friend, and the fact that even after everything Tweek had been through, he loved him. Desperately.

As he'd counted the new freckles dusting over Craig's cheeks, and traced the heavy bags bruising his eyes, he'd come to the decision that he didn't care. Everything was in the past. He didn't need to be loved back – in fact, he hadn't ever wanted that in the first place – but he did need Craig. He could live with the rest.

Looking down at his side of the paper, with its pathetic three bullet points and its scratched through assumptions, Tweek realizes that he's not the only one with some serious talking to do.

Now, how to get to it...

... Just as he returns from a well-deserved shower, dressed in a thick fleece jumper, winter socks and plaid pajama pants, his phone chimes twice in rapid succession.
Scrubbing his damp hair with a towel, he moves over to his desk.

Unsurprisingly it's Craig; surprisingly, there are a whole bunch of new photographs and messages.

The first photo is of Cartman sat on a dining chair and pouting like a little bitch, with Heidi stood over him, hands on hips and expression mutinous. There's no context given for this picture aside from a very short caption.

22:49
definition of mommy issues

Image number two is of a table set up for beer pong, Token one side with only a single cup left in front of him while he's chugging away at another, and Nichole on the other side, grinning, all but one plastic cup still in place.

Holy shit.

23:01
fuck dude Nicholes a monster x

Yeah, no kidding, Tweek thinks. Token's really not doing too well, considering the fact that he's reigning champion at beer pong in their group. Clearly he needs some coaching from his girlfriend.

Following the previous message is a photograph that has Tweek's jaw coming unhinged.

Stan Marsh and Kyle Broflovski making out, hard and heavy, against one of the kitchen counters.

Now to be perfectly frank this development isn't all that surprising after Kyle's admission to jerking off to thoughts of one of the boys in the group, but the other thing about the image is. Because Wendy, Stan's on-and-off girlfriend since elementary, is sat cross legged on the counter directly behind them – only a matter of inches away – smiling and chatting on her phone. Totally unfazed.

What. The fuck.

Craig's accompanying message sums it up almost perfectly.

23:17
i dont
what?
actually nope
don't wanna know
thats it. im out.

The blonde snorts a shocked laugh, head still reeling. (And he thought that his relationship with Craig was weird; they have nothing on these guys.)

He's just spinning the desk chair around so that he can sit on it when he scrolls down to Craig's most recent texts, right as the third comes through.

23:36
hey u home?
can i come see u?
exterior now. dont worry if ur busy tho dude x

Even though he's just spent a good portion of the day feeling hurt and angry, the second that he reads
those messages, his heart picks up speed in his chest.

Tweek doesn't stop to think, just drops the phone on top of his desk, and the towel on the back of his chair and leaves the room. Pulling his sleeves down over his hands in anticipation of the cold, he stumbles along the dark hallway and almost trips headfirst down the stairs in his haste.

At the front door, he stuffs his feet into a pair of old shoes and takes the chain off the latch, tugging it open the second it's unlocked.

Right at the end of the path is Craig, dressed in a thick black jacket and a pair of tight, dark jeans. He's typing something out on his phone, cheeks flushed and face highlighted by the glow of the street lamps.

"Craig," Tweek says, and his voice seems loud in the night.

His best friend's head snaps up, and the second he sees Tweek he smiles a large, genuine smile that has his belly flip-flopping. Crinkling blue-grey eyes, and one dimple on the left side of his face that no one ever gets to see, because he almost never grins this widely.

(Wow, okay. He'd been wrong. Thomas' smile is handsome; Craig's the devastating one.)

Leaning back against the half-closed door, both hands pressed flat against it, he watches as Craig approaches with long, easy steps and a very light sway.

Barely a foot between them, he stops. Peers down at Tweek, grin still in place.

"Hey babe," he says.

"Y-you're drunk. Again," says Tweek, craning his head back to keep their gazes locked.

With a roll of his eyes, Craig stuffs his cell in his pocket and reaches up to cradle the side of Tweek's face, even though at first, the blonde flinches away. (God damn, his hands are cold.) "I'm just a little tipsy." His breath is warm on Tweek's face, and smells faintly of beer and cigarettes. It's not a bad smell.

"Uh-huh, and that's why you're swaying, huh?" He already knows that Craig's not drunk – at least, not to the extent that he has been the last few times he's been to parties – since the other boy seems almost entirely in control of himself. (Well... apart from the smiling. That isn't so much a sober-Craig thing.)

Apparently Craig's distracted by some kind of profound thought, because his smile slips away into a frown and he fails to reply to the question, instead just peering down into Tweek's face like he's trying to memorize every last imperfection. The blonde averts his eyes but stays as still as he ever can, like a butterfly pinned to a corkboard.

After just long enough that Tweek's starting to shake from the cold and heat up from embarrassment, Craig says, "Y'know, you're really thick sometimes, honey."

Said 'honey' bristles under the unexpected insult, shyness instantly forgotten. He glowers. "What? What the hell is that—"

"I wasn't calling you an 'emu' that time, you know," he continues, cutting right through Tweek's affront. Strokes his thumb over the blonde's cheekbone. "I was saying..." He stops. Sighs. Reaches up with a second hand to cradle his face. "I was telling you that I lo—"
He doesn't get to finish whatever it is he's saying, thanks to the accidental brush of ice-cold fingertips along the side of Tweek's neck. He yelps at the touch and jerks back so hard, the door swings wide open behind him.

He almost goes flying for the second time today.

A few intense moments of flailing follow.

"S-sweet baby Jesus," he says (shrieks), only remaining upright thanks to Craig scrambling after him, hauling him onto his feet with an arm thrown around his waist. "Fucking hell dude, why are you so damn cold?" Because really, every bit of him that's touching Tweek is like frost.

"Eurgh. What's wrong with you?"

"It's winter," he says fondly, like Tweek's some kind of an idiot. He squirms against Craig's chest when the other boy's arm tightens.

"And you're a dick," replies Tweek, squealing as Craig bends and buries his icy nose right against his neck. "A huge, goddamn schlong. Augh, get off!"

"But you're warm." Is he actually whining? Tweek can't tell, because he's trying not to giggle hysterically or scream as Craig's frozen fingers worm their way up beneath his jumper and press against his sides.

"If you keep pissing me off, then—then you can stay out here to freeze."

This has Craig pausing, and pulling away just enough that their eyes can meet. "You were gonna invite me in."

"No," says Tweek, shoving the other boy away and readjusting his jumper. "I was gonna come out here and—and tell you to fuck off, man." Scoffs. "Yes, I was gonna invite you inside."

"To... sleep?"

Tweek gives the other boy a flat glare. "Hrrn. Duh."

"... In your room?"

"Where the fuck else, man? I'm not setting up the spare room for you this late."

"But your parents—"

"What about them?" says Tweek, a little sharper than is perhaps necessary. "We're fucking eighteen, man. Th-There's worse we could do than share a— a goddamn bed at night." He knows he's said the wrong thing when one of Craig's eyebrows arches up slowly, eyes casually flicking down Tweek's front. His face burns. "Not like that, you pervert. Now are you gonna come in or not? Before I—nnn—catch frostbite out here, dude."

Nothing more needs to be said. Craig just grabs up one of Tweek's hands in his, grip unforgivably cold, and steps past him into the dark hallway.

It's fine. He doesn't have to think about sorting this out right now.

Maybe for once in his life, things will fall into place.

(Right now, all he cares about is getting a tipsy Craig up the stairs and into his bedroom without one of his parents catching them.)
i meant to upload this yesterday after i got home but
i uh
fell asleep after like half an hour of being inside (it was only 9pm, and i've only just
woken up, 12 hours later. what is wrong with me???)

:' D
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

it's cold over here. (which roughly translates into 'not really very cold' for lots of other places.) we might even get some snow :O

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Gneurf," says Tweek around a mouthful of Craig's jacket, just barely getting the door shut behind them before he's pulled into a bone-crushing hug.

What the—?

Is his best friend trying to impersonate a koala bear or something? Because he's doing a damn fine job at it, Tweek thinks, grappling blindly with the taller boys arms to try and prize them off. Kind of hard to do that when his face is squashed into a firm chest and he is, as a result, temporarily blind and suffocated. He's surrounded by the smell of Craig – citrus and smoke; spearmint and beer – and it's hard to remember why being smothered to death is, in fact, a bad thing. (And then his brain conjures up a rather gruesome mental image of his eyes bulging out of his head and popping all over Craig's jacket, and he renews his attempts to break free.)

"Get— hfurr. Get off."

It takes a good few minutes of flailing and wriggling to get loose, (all done as quietly as possible, since he really doesn't want his parents to wake up), which eventually ends with him shoving his hand up Craig's jacket and pinching his side. Hard.

There's something awfully satisfying in how quickly Craig detaches himself, leaping away with a grunt of surprise and a wide-eyed, brow-furrowing frown.

"Ow," Craig says intelligently, in the ensuing silence.

Serves you fucking right, he thinks. Doesn't say it aloud, in case it comes out as a shriek. (Bursting. Eyeballs.) Glowers fiercely instead.

Breathing hard and balling his hands into fists, Tweek elbows his way past the other boy and stomps over to the dresser, yanking the third drawer open and digging through for a night top that'll fit the taller boy. He knows for a fact that he's got a pair of Craig's pajama pants in the cupboard in the spare room, so he'll have to go get them in a minute...

He's so caught up in trying to think about what he's doing that he isn't aware of Craig walking up behind him until there's a forehead pressed to his shoulder and arms looping back around his chest.

"You're angry at me." The words are quiet, but Tweek freezes up, muscles locking in place and hands stilling where they're submerged in the drawer.

Scoffing, he forces himself to start digging through the tangle of tops again, but his movements are jerky. "No I'm not, dude."
"Yes, you are," says Craig on a sigh. "Your voice sounds the same when you lie, but you go all tense."

Tweek hunches his shoulders, a sharp jolt waking up the thing that lives in his stomach. "Craig."

The other boy huffs a laugh. "See?" He says it like he's made the most profound discovery in the world.

All Tweek feels is the sudden, overwhelming urge to cry rise up right out of nowhere. (How is it that Craig knows him so well, without really knowing him at all?)

"Stop it," he says, reaching up to tug at his best friend's arms. His voice catches a little on the words.

This time Craig lets go in a heartbeat, stepping back.

"I'm g-gonna go get something. You – nng – find yourself a top to wear from in here, alright?" He doesn't hang around to wait for a reply, just turns around and leaves so quickly, he almost trips over himself.

Somehow he makes it down the hallway and into the guest room without making a huge racket. But by this time Tweek's shaking so hard, he has to sit himself down on the edge of the unmade bed, bracing his elbows on his knees so he can bury his face in his palms. He exhales a long breath and presses the heels of his hands harder against his eyes when the stinging doesn't subside straight away.

Stop it, he thinks. You're not gonna cry over this. Don't act like a fucking baby when it's all in the past – when Craig hasn't done anything even slightly wrong today aside from being obnoxious and tipsy.

Telling himself this actually helps, even if he has to repeat it as a mantra at least a dozen times over before it starts to sink in.

As soon as it does, he's back up on his feet and opening up the cupboard, which his mom has filled with spare towels and toiletries, and a whole shelf of things that Craig has left here over the years, and has never taken home again. He remembers how that year, he used to come in here and drag everything of Craig's out onto the floor, used to curl up surrounded by familiar jumpers and scarves and worn out childhood t-shirts until he'd fallen into a fitful sleep, or else made himself so sick he'd spent hours afterwards bent over the toilet.

Rummaging through the stack of neatly folded clothing now, he grabs hold of the pants the second he spots the familiar pattern – a navy blue fabric, dotted with white stars and bright planets, and the occasional rocket ship. Mrs Tweak had bought them for Craig's last birthday, much to Tweek's embarrassment since they seem so awfully childish to him, and had insisted that they keep them, "Here for whenever you'd like to stay, sweetie."

He leaves the spare room at a slower pace than he entered, very aware of his dad's rattling snores and the fact that his mom's bedside lamp is off, since no light is peeking out from the gap beneath the door. It's an unusually early time for them to have both gone to bed, but Tweek figures that since his dad was up all of last night and they'd had to go to ER at some stupidly early hour, there's no way they would have been able to stay up until their normal time.

Stepping through his doorway and slowly easing the door shut behind him, the sound of rustling catches his attention. He looks up, across the room.

Craig's sat on the bed, staring down at a slightly crumpled piece of paper.
Tweek's stomach plummets. His fingers go lax and the pants thump quietly to the floor at his feet.

The list. He must have found the list.

Oh. Oh, God.

No.

Heart lurching, Tweek makes a sound like a cat being hit by a car as he throws himself across the room, hands outstretched to tear the list from the other boy's grasp.

But Craig stands, holding the paper over his head, out of reach. "You did this?" He says, and the words are so quiet that they carry no inflection at all.

"N-nnn-no, don't look," Tweek says, voice choked. "Don't— eurgh, don't. Please, Craig, g-give it back." He reaches up into the air on the tips of his toes, grabbing onto Craig's arm and trying desperately to yank it back down towards him.

When all Craig does is pull his arm away and tilt his head back to get a better view of the page instead of listening to him, the tears that Tweek only just managed to fight off hit him with the strength of a sledgehammer, blurring his eyes and rolling down over his cheeks, a river bursting it's banks. He can't see properly, he can't breathe, but that doesn't matter because Craig is looking at the sheet, reading all the terrible things that Tweek wrote down and he'll leave him, he'll hate him again, he'll—

"This is amazing," the other boy says. "Babe, this is..."

"This is me."

That's when Tweek stops. Blinks away tears that just keep coming, and looks at the paper—really looks at it.

Spread out there in dark, scribbled lines is Craig Tucker's sleeping face, mouth just a little open and head at an awkward angle.

Silence rings, deafening as a gong, through Tweek's head. He stares blankly up at the drawing, eyes wide and heart beating a riot in his chest.

The drawings. Craig found the drawings he left on top of the dresser.

His legs give out.

Falling so hard his knees throb, Tweek can't hold back the huge, rib aching sob of relief that tears through him.

It's apparently enough for Craig to finally pull his eyes away from his likeness, and notice the blonde's acute level of distress.

"Shit," he says, and drops down to the floor. The picture is cast aside with a roughness that would probably irritate Tweek at any other time, and then there are arms around him, pulling him against a broad chest.

All the strength goes out of Tweek. He leans into Craig and clings to the jumper the other boy's changed into, body racked with sobs so strong, he's not sure how he hasn't blacked out.

"I'm sorry, babe, I'm sorry," Craig says, voice soft and crooning, right into his ear. "I didn't think. I'm
sorry, shh, I'm such a fucking dick. Sorry, I won't keep looking. Sorry."

It had been so close, though. He could have found out, he could have seen the sheet on the desk instead and they could have been fighting right now, everything falling apart around him before he even had a chance to piece it all together properly.

He cries and he cries and Craig sits there, probably thinking he's fucking crazy, but he just keeps rocking him back and forth, running one hand up and down Tweek's back and pressing the other against the curve of his head to hold him still.

What feels like a small eternity passes, Tweek's wails muffled in the front of Craig's borrowed top, before he runs out of panic and relief and anger and frustration and everything else that's been running rampant through his system for the last few weeks. And still his best friend stays there, crouched awkwardly on the floor and bearing most of Tweek's weight where the blonde has slumped into him.

Once the sound of his breathing has evened out into nothing more than the occasional soft sniffle, Craig shifts, unfolding his legs from under him and stretching them out on either side of Tweek, before half dragging the blonde further into his arms. Feeling like all his limbs have turned into clay, Tweek just lets it happen, every part of him heavy.

The other boy goes from stroking his back to running fingers through his hair, and Tweek shuts his eyes, thinking it a particularly cruel irony that Craig can make him more angry and uptight than anyone else ever has, and then turn him into so much putty and goo within the space of an hour.

When an indeterminable amount of time has passed, Craig hums against the crown of Tweek's head, and says in a voice so low he almost misses it, "I mean, I didn't think it was that bad, babe." A pause. "Could've drawn me looking a little more handsome, though. You know, save my pride a beating."

A weak chuckle works its way out of the blonde's throat, and though he feels like he's just gone ten rounds in an emotional boxing match, he finds it impossible not to reply. The words force their way out of his throat in a croak. "You're too handsome already, man. Don't need the help."

Craig snorts lightly. "Yeah, well, you're saying that because you've just cried yourself blind. Cartman would probably look passably human to you, at the moment."

"Ugh." Somehow, he works up the energy to smack his best friend's shoulder. Goes back to clinging on. "I've always thought you were hot, dude. Give me some credit." He swallows around the soreness of his throat. "Why – nng – why'd you think I fell for you in the first place? Wasn't for your brain..."

It's only when Craig's hands stop combing through his hair that Tweek's own words register inside his head, and heartbeat picking up, he turns from soft clay to granite.

(Perfect time to make a joke, man, he thinks. Right after pointing out that you love him. Well fucking done.)

There's a long, shaky breath from somewhere above him, which stirs up his hair. "Shit," Craig says for the second time tonight. "Wish I was sober right now, dude. All I wanna do is—"

Despite the pounding of his heart in his chest and the nervous flip-flopping of his stomach, Tweek manages to says, "Wh-what?" And when the silence drags on around his question, he pulls himself back a small distance, so he can look up into Craig's face, even though he's gotta be a mess of blotchy pink cheeks, puffed up eyes and a gross, wet face. "What d'you wanna do?"
Blue eyes skip over his features, brows furrowed. Craig parts his lips like he's going to answer, but all that comes out is another sigh. The hand that twisted itself into Tweek's hair pulls away to pass over the taller boy's face, briefly covering his eyes.

"You don't want to hear the answer," he says quietly, before letting his arm drop, fist loosely clenched where it rests on his thigh. "Not while I'm drunk."

"Oh," says Tweek, like he gets it. (He really doesn't.) All he understands is that he pretty much just told Craig he still loves him, and what he got back was a wobbly frown and a stilted reply. He doesn't mind. It's still progress, since the last time he tried to confess. Maybe in another three or four years, he'll actually get a smile.

"Ask me tomorrow," Craig says, probably seeing the dip of Tweek's head and the droop of his eyelids. "Okay?"

"Okay."

(He won't.)

"I think we should go to bed," Craig says when Tweek's head lowers back down against his shoulder. "You've gotta get up early again."

"I know," says Tweek, though he stays where he is, his fingers still curled into the back of Craig's jumper. He wants to just be here, like this, forever. Just... sitting. Being held up. Being held together.

With a sigh, he eventually pulls himself away, pushing up onto his knees to retrieve the dropped picture. It's only when he stands that he spots the others, strewn across the blanket. He must have missed them in his blind panic but there they are, spread out plain as day, dozens of sketches of Craig from every angle, all with eyes closed or looking away. All drawn with more care and attention to detail than any of Tweek's other drawings.

You're such a fucking creep, he things to himself. It's a goddamn miracle he didn't run.

Face growing hot as embarrassment wriggles to life in his stomach, he leans over to start gathering them up, even as Craig turns to watch him.

"Don't," he says, shooting Craig a soggy glare when the other boy pulls himself onto his feet with a wobble, and looks like he's going to start helping.

His best friend's hand stills, and from the small smile on his face, he's still feeling a little dumb from the drink. "Okay, man. It's just... kinda flattering. I like them."

Jesus Christ.

If he hadn't been pink before, then he definitely is now.

"Oh, God. Go br-brush your teeth and change, dude. Your pajamas are by the door," Tweek says, voice a little strangled. "Al— alright?"

"Sure." And just like that, the taller boy turns and lopes away, grabbing up the crumpled pair of pants from the floor and, after sliding the door open carefully so as not to make a sound, squeezing out into the hallway.

The second he hears the bathroom lock click shut, Tweek scrambles to life, raking the pictures off of the bed covers and into a messy stack in his arms. He trips over a pile of clothing and books on the
floor, and pulls himself back up again, not caring about the fact he scrapes his elbow in the process.

Getting to the desk, he snatches up the list and shoves it somewhere in the middle of the bundle, before yanking open his bottom desk drawer. It's full of about ten years worth of receipts and vouchers that Tweek's hoarded – but not for long. Within about five seconds flat, hundreds of short, thin strips of paper are fluttering through the air and billowing across the floor. Blanketing his cluttered carpet in white like ugly, rectangular flurries of snow.

He shoves his armful of paper into the draw, stuffing in the edges so they don't get caught as he closes it, and then slams it shut.

Stands in the silence that follows, breathless and frazzled. Looks down to find a receipt clinging with static energy to his arm. Thinks, I'm tired. *My eyes hurt.*

Without really considering what he's doing, Tweek brushes the clinging slip of paper off of him, crosses over back to his bed and, drawing the covers down, clammers in. He lies with his back to the room and shuts his eyes, focussing on the sounds of wind whistling quietly through the vents in the walls, and the rustle of branches outside the window. He can just about make out the sound of the water shutting off in the bathroom, and beyond that, his dad's heavy breathing.

When Craig returns, Tweek can feel eyes on his back and on the new, inexplicable levels of mess in the room, but he hasn't even got the energy to twitch like he usually does. (He's drained it all away in his spontaneous fit of bawling.)

Eventually the light switches off with a *click* and the room is plunged into darkness. Despite all of Craig's natural grace, trying to cross Tweek's bedroom floor in the dark is like trying to navigate a minefield with only the aid of Google Maps and a pair of stilts. (Which is to say, it's almost impossible.)

There's some petty satisfaction in hearing Craig stub his toes on every slight bump in his path.

Soon enough, though, his best friend reaches his side and slips in behind him, the bed dipping around his weight. After a moment of held breath, the other boy whispers into the space between them. "Can I... hold you?"

The darkness must make Tweek brave and Craig soft, because while his friend is floundering on the very edge of the mattress like he's afraid he'll be kicked for touching him (not an unreasonable assumption, Tweek realizes, considering he's pushed him away so many times tonight), Tweek's rolling over and reaching out blindly. Fingers closing on the front of the other boy's jumper, he draws him closer 'til they lie together in the center. Craig's arms come around him slowly, and he rolls onto his back so that Tweek can tuck his head down against the hollow of one bony shoulder.

Feet sliding over ankles and legs tangling like it's the most natural thing on earth, the boys lie in quiet, their world taken up by the sound of their breathing and the skipping beats of their hearts.

"I'm sorry I keep making you unhappy recently," says Craig, face turned up to the ceiling. "I don't... know what to do or say to make it better."

Tweek rubs his cheek against the soft grain of the jumper that the other boy's wearing. It smells of the floral laundry detergent that Mrs Tweak always buys in, and the blonde misses Craig's normal smell. "Just... t-tell me the truth?" He says eventually, because it's easier to say things now, when everything feels half a step away from surreal.

"What about?" Craig asks, running his fingers up and down the length of Tweek's spine like he's
checking everything's in place.

"I told— told you yesterday how you hurt me when I came out to you, right?" He feels Craig nod, fingers twitching against the back of his neck. "Well, why'd you do it? Kick me out." The fingers on his back pause, and he can feel Craig hold his breath for a long beat.

After a moment, he lets that breath out in one great whoosh that ends in a strained huff of laughter. "Wow. Okay."

Oh. He's not going to answer, is he? Sweet Jesus, Tweek was a fucking fool to think that it was a good idea to just ask. All that crying must have made him delusional.

"D-don't worry about it," he says, pulling back the arm he's thrown over Craig's chest and trying to roll away. "It was wrong of me to— hrrng— to ask when you've been drinking."

'Trying' being the key word, since Craig's grip tightens, pinning the blonde to his chest.

"Hey, hang on a second," he says, chin ducked down so his lips brush over Tweek's temple. "I'm just thinking a minute. Let me get my bearings, dude."

He stops struggling, but he doesn't relax again. Not until Craig resumes tracing his fingertips up and down his back and clears his throat.

"This is... not gonna sound good, no matter how I put it," says Craig, in a voice that Tweek doesn't like. Both stilted and drawn out all at once. Tweek tilts his head so the his ear is flat against Craig's sternum, and listens to the fast drumming of his heart – feels his own trying to match it. "I thought you liked someone else, and it made me scared. Like I'd have to give you over to this guy, since you seemed so intense about it. You'd never liked anyone before. I thought I'd lose my best friend." A rough exhale. "I was fucking stupid." He hears Craig swallow hard, and knows that isn't all. (Wishes it was, because he's almost certain he knows what's coming, and he doesn't want to hear it. Doesn't want to; needs to, all the same.)

Waits, until the other boy starts speaking again. "And I'd done something I'd regretted just a couple days before you told me. I was mad at myself, and... ashamed. The last thing I wanted was for anyone to find out, but at the same time, I was alone." A small, one shouldered shrug jogs Tweek just slightly, but he doesn't notice, because his stomach's tying itself in knots.

This is it, he thinks.

"What'd you do?" Tweek asks, when the quiet stretches out too long. His voice is barely a breath.

This is when Craig will lie, or change the subject, or do something to keep from letting Tweek find out. It isn't as straight forward as this. It doesn't get to be. Not after so long.

(But he's wrong.)

"Remember I went to visit my Gran in Denver at the end of that summer, right before first semester started?" Tweek nods, just once. "Well, I... wasn't happy. Things weren't great in my head. I met up with a friend and we broke into his mom's wine stash while she was out on a date night, or something. We got pretty wasted. After a while, we got talking about sex and about both liking guys. Y'know, all that sort of stuff kids do. But we got carried away and things went too far..."

Tweek turns his face into Craig's chest. Tries to focus on the way Craig's fingers feel sliding over his shoulders and threading through the hair just above his nape, rather than the way his heart is breaking.
"It was bad. We had no idea what we were doing and I hurt him - a lot, I think. I just remember him lying down on the bed and crying after, and having no idea what to do, or say. I went home hating myself." Craig's voice is thick, and low like he still hurts. "When you came in crying a couple days later and lay down on the bed, and you started talking about that boy you liked, you reminded me so much of my friend after I fucked up, I felt sick. And the guy you were talking about... I wanted to hurt him." He laughs, but it's the least happy sound Tweek thinks he's ever heard Craig make. "I wanted to hurt myself."

And... that's it. Craig goes silent, apparently having used up his quota of words for the night. Tweek has no idea what he could possibly say to get rid of the tension hanging in the air around them, so instead he just does the simplest thing he can think of.

He pulls himself up to rest on one elbow and runs his other hand up to Craig's jaw, which is rough with the shadow of stubble. Traces his thumb over his chin to the corner of his mouth. Using that as a guide, he stretches forwards, leaning down until his lips brush over Craig's. It isn't a show of gratitude for his honesty or of apology for making him talk; it just is.

Tilting his head, his best friend kisses him back, slow and chaste.

"We should sleep," Craig says against his mouth, and Tweek makes a noise of agreement.

But before he lies back down, he kisses Craig just one more time.

Chapter End Notes

//starts putting together a new playlist//

;;))
Waking from a nightmare that's left him in a cold, clammy sweat but hasn't stuck around for him to recall it, Tweek twists onto his back and listens to the sound of muffled birdsong filtering through from the world outside. Upon opening his eyes, he sees light beginning to seep through the gap in the curtains. Craig's arm is thrown over his chest and the other boy's face is buried in the pillow, breathing deep and even, even though he looks like he's trying to smother himself in his sleep.

With a groan, Tweek pushes the other boy's arm off and pulls himself upright in bed. His eyes itch and his head throbs – likely both symptoms of last night's humiliating meltdown. But... there's a bizarre feeling of disconnect between crying himself out and waking up in bed with Craig. He stares down at the back of his best friend's head and, through the fog of waking up, tries to recall the missing segments of his memory.

It doesn't take long.

"...We got talking about sex and about both liking guys. Y'know, all that sort of stuff kids do. But we got carried away and things went too far..."

Tweek swallows around the lump in his throat, and decides to get up. He can think about what he was told in more detail later, once he's on his own. (Once he's a little more lucid.)

Jumper clinging to his back and hair plastered to his head, he walks out the room and down the stairs, feeling like he's still caught in the entrails of whatever dream he'd been having. He doesn't hear his mom's quiet greeting and he doesn't return her smile. Doesn't register the icy tiles on his bare feet, or the low sound of some radio news station playing from his mom's iPad, which is propped up charging on one of the kitchen counters.

He goes to the cupboard on autopilot, grabbing down the monster-sized mug and trailing back to the full, steaming pot of coffee waiting on the table – glances at the digital display on the oven, which flashes in neon blue lights '08:06'. Has to read it several times over, before the time registers.

Even then he just stands for a long moment after pouring his drink out, looking blankly into the space above his mom's nightgown-clad shoulder.

"I slept with Craig."

The words come out of nowhere, filling the quiet of the kitchen like the slamming of the door. It takes a long time for Tweek to realize it was him who said them – out loud, no less – and he blushes furiously as he looks up to meet his mom's eyes.
(Oh, God, the *horror.*)

Unruffled as ever, Mrs Tweak inclines her head and takes another dainty sip from her cup. "I thought you might have, pumpkin."

He stares at her.

She glances down at the crossword she's doing, and starts humming a soft little tune.

Cheek ticking and mind slamming up against a mental block of, *What the actual fuck?* the blonde says rather faintly, "Okay. Well. G-good talk."

It's only as he reaches the doorway that she speaks again.

"Would you boys prefer pancakes or waffles, before you go to work?"

"A-agh. Sweet Jesus." He almost trips over himself, and turns around so fast that hot coffee sloshes down over his fingers. "H-how did you— how'd you know he's—" Waves his free hand around at the ceiling in order to nonverbally communicate what he's trying to say, since he's so flustered his vocabulary seems to have taken a temporary leave of absence.

Mrs Tweak levels him a look that cuts through all of his floundering. "Sweetie, neither of you are subtle. I could hear you kids before you'd even come on through the front door last night."

Tweek just gapes.

"I'll make pancakes," she says, when it becomes apparent that all her son can do is blush and twitch. "So you make sure you're both up and ready in half an hour. I don't want you to be late out of the door today, kiddo."

With that said, she stands and moves over to the refrigerator, starting to pull out ingredients. Tweek, clearly dismissed, leaves the kitchen, stumbling through the empty living room and climbing the stairs on legs that wobble like jello. He enters his room feeling more displaced than he was when he first left it, only now his brain isn't removed from the situation so much as it is *fried* by it.

As soon as he's crossed to the bed, he sets the mug down on the nightstand and lowers himself slowly onto the edge of the mattress. Loses track of the time as he watches his best friend sleeping.

Stupidly late, it occurs to him that Craig might be upset about telling Tweek everything, last night. It hadn't crossed his mind as anything other than a quick flash of concern when they'd been having the conversation at the time, but now he can't help but think that Craig could be pissed about Tweek letting him – hell, outright *encouraging* him to – say all that while under the influence of alcohol.

Now, he thinks back to the morning after the party and sees everything differently – sees the way Craig had begged him to stay, to just *talk*. Tweek had given him nothing, and had probably reminded him of that first time everything had gone wrong with Thomas, too. He'd thought that he was the only person suffering all this time, and he hadn't even thought properly about what Craig might have been going through. Never would have guessed...

("*We've been through everything together; I might as well be your boyfriend. Isn't that enough for you?*"")

Suddenly it isn't just a matter of Tweek getting his answers – it isn't just a matter of Tweek having the chance to heal after what he went through that year. It's about Craig getting those things, too. They can do it together.
Together.

Despite knowing his mom's making him breakfast downstairs and that he ought to wake Craig up and get ready, he lifts his legs onto the bed, scoots down and wriggles his way under the rumpled covers until he's lying on his side, facing the other boy. He's filled with a chest aching sense of something so much more potent than affection that it's a wonder his heart keeps on beating under the strain.

Shifting closer to his best friend, he runs his fingers through the short, silky hair on the side of his head – pauses when the other boy stirs, and pulls his face out of the pillow, so they're nose-to-nose. His cheek has a pink indent left from a crease in the fabric, and his bangs are splayed out, flat across his forehead. Tweek traces the mark and then pushes a few loose hairs out of his eyes.

Moving without having to think about it (and doesn't that just say a lot, when he's gotten so used to the privilege of being able to reach out and touch however and whenever he wants to), he tilts his head and presses a soft kiss to Craig's lips. Closes his eyes and runs his fingers over the rough shadow of stubble on the other boy's jaw.

When he pulls back, it's slow. He settles his head down on the pillow, eyes still shut, and lets his hand slip down to Craig's neck, resting right over his pulse. He has a few blissful moments to luxuriate in the warmth and the comfort of the moment, when—

"You got coffee," comes a sleepy rumble from right in front of his face.

Tweek startles.

Eyes flying open and jerking away from Craig hard enough that he almost tumbles off the end of the bed, he squawks like he's just been burnt.

Clutching at his pounding heart, the blonde peers across the bed at heavily lidded eyes and a very slightly upturned mouth.

"I-I was just— I went to get it and then I— got back— and have to get ready for work, but you—" Slaps a hand over his mouth.

"But you distracted me so much, I had to climb back in bed with you, is what he definitely doesn't say out loud.

(It's bad enough he was so drained last night he told Craig he was hot, and then referenced his 'old' feelings. He doesn't need to keep stroking this guy's ego. Just hopes kind of desperately that Craig was too tipsy to remember that particular stretch of their conversation.)

One dark eyebrow arches, but Craig doesn't tease. Thank fuck.

"I'm not complaining. S'not a bad way to wake up," his friend says with a yawn, covering his mouth with one hand and rolling over onto his back. Tweek can't keep his eyes from slipping down to the low neckline of the jumper Craig's borrowed, which is just low enough for Tweek to make out a bruising bite mark. The heat in his cheeks flares hotter. "Though it sucks you've gotta go to work. I don't wanna move."

Then don't, he thinks. Stay here all day so that when I get home, you're still in my bed. (Twitches at the images that conjures up.)

Instead he says, "My mom's m-making us pancakes."
That catches Craig's attention. He lolls his head to one side, eyes wide. "Wait. She knows I'm here. As in, in your bed? Having slept in here, with you, all night."

A nod.

"When I'm not meant to be."

Another nod.

"Because we might do something together."

"Mm-hm."

Craig shoots upright, looking like someone just told him it's the apocalypse outside. "Shit. Fuck."

The ensuing scrambling as he tries to clamber off the bed and just gets more tangled in the sheets is so out of character that Tweek is caught of guard.

Hysterical giggles—oh, God, giggles, like he's some twelve year old girl—burst out of him, even as Craig shakes one trapped foot with great gusto, face flushed and jumper riding up to show a nice sliver of pale hipbone.

His best friend seizes up at the sound. Frozen mid leg-shake on his arms and one leg, the other extended behind him, he looks ridiculous. Tweek ought to be pissed with himself that even though that's the case, he's still stupidly attracted to him. Instead he smiles a wide, slightly crazy smile between the gaps in his fingers, and watches as Craig's panic eases away.

Watches as he lowers his foot back to the mattress and pushes himself back down onto his butt, eyes narrowed in concentration.

"She's making pancakes," Craig repeats.

"Uh-huh."

"So... she doesn't care."

Shrugging, Tweek drops his hands into his lap and shares a look of face-scrunching bafflement with his best friend. "A-apparently not, man."

They stare at each other for a while longer, Craig's eyes tracking over the exposed hickey on Tweek's neck and his rumpled pajamas, then up to his wild mane. "You went downstairs, looking like you've just had a wild round of sex, and she didn't come up here to castrate me."

Now it's Tweek's turn to be thrown off balance. Heat fills his head like boiling water poured into a bucket. "Sweet Jesus, n-no. And I—urk—I don't look like that."

"Dude," says Craig, voice and expression both flat. "You do. It's hot."

With a sound close to, "NnGARGH," the blonde lurches forward to smack his best friend's shoulder. "God y-you're such a— a dick." He shoves the blankets back and rises to his feet, finding a spiteful sort of glee in the fact that for once, he's managed to do something with more grace than Craig. "I'm—I'm getting dressed, man."

"Can I watch?" Craig asks, voice lilting with amusement.

"And I'm taking the fucking coffee," Tweek says, so shrill it hurts his own ears. He snatches up the first patterned shirt and jeans he can find, buried as they are in the snowfall of old receipts. Both
items of clothing are crumpled, and the shirt has clearly seen better days, going by the myriad of old coffee stains around the cuffs. He's not sure he's ever worn the jeans.

Even this takes too long though, because in the time it takes Tweek to lean over, snatch up the clothes and spin around to go to the dresser for some boxers, Craig's freed himself from the blanket and, sat neatly on the edge of the bed, has Tweek's coffee in his clasp.

He cradles the damn mug in both hands as he takes a long, deliberate sip; Tweek's sure he can feel one of the veins in the side of his head trying to burst.

"Jesus Christ, I hate you sometimes." He screeches, storms over to the drawers, tears out the first pair of boxers his hand lands on, and leaves the room to the encore of Craig's quiet chuckling.

Fumes all the way through dressing – especially upon realizing that the jeans he's brought in with him are Craig's from the previous night. No shit he doesn't remember wearing them.

Irritated beyond belief, he does some more shrieking for good measure, and eventually just stomps back to the room in his long, ugly grey boxers and the shirt – the hideous, stained turquoise thing that he's failed to button properly in his fit of frustration. (The pattern, on closer inspection, is made up of hundreds of silhouetted flamingos, which, no.)

"Stupid fucking— NNN. Damn it," he says, muttering and twitching and ignoring the wide-eyed look he gets from the other boy upon re-entering the room half dressed. Pulling back his arm, he hurls the jeans at Craig's head. (They miss. By... about a meter. Ugh.) "Take a fucking picture, man," he says, all snark and bluster as he bends over and begins rooting through the clothes on the floor for something that actually belongs to him.

"Believe me, I would if I had my cell on me right now."

Trying desperately to ignore the way his heart picks up at the seriousness of Craig's voice, he balks when he looks up to find he's being watched intently. Craig knows Tweek knows he's watching, but all the damn boy does is drag his gaze up Tweek's body very slowly, until blue eyes meet green. One corner of Craig's mouth tilts up, like he's daring him to freak out, like he's expecting some kind of big reaction.

The bastard's doing this to make Tweek scuttle away all flustered and twitchy.

Chin jutting out, Tweek fights to ignore the goosebumps popping up over every inch of exposed skin, and narrows his eyes. Slows down in his searching, even though his hands shake so hard it's difficult to pick anything up off the floor.

When he finally grabs something suitable – a pair of light blue jeans with permanent grass stains and tears around the knees – he does the unthinkable, emboldened by his ire.

He turns around so he's fully facing his best friend and, still glaring, starts dressing himself.

It's not graceful or seductive or anything like that, but then again, neither is Tweek – and that wasn't his intention anyway. What his intention was by doing this isn't exactly clear to him, but either way, the second he gets his first foot into the jeans, he's committed to hopping and jiggling from side-to-side, and making a lot of awkward eye-contact.

The pants are a little tighter than he'd anticipated, (which is not surprising, since he probably last wore these things when he was about thirteen), and thus require a little more leverage.

Craig starts off with that daring quirk of his eyebrow, and then devolves slowly into something close
to constipation – mouth pursed and eyes squinting. It's only when Tweek shimmies the damn things up over his butt, wiggling his hips like he's trying to be Shakira, that the other boy snaps.

His face cracks into a toothy grin and he slumps forward over the mug of coffee still clutched in his hands, shoulders shaking with silent mirth.

"You— eurgh. You still wanna watch me do a reverse goddamn striptease? Wanna keep bugging me to let you see me change?" asks Tweek, wanting to stay grumpy, but finding himself too distracted by whatever the hell this morning is turning out to be. Only by a supreme show of willpower does he resist the urge to either throw something else at his best friend's head, or break down into another senseless fit of giggles himself. "W-wasn't all that special, huh, you fucker?"

"Amazing," is all he gets by way of reply.

That said, it's a while before Craig can get out anything else coherent.

Eventually they both manage to dress properly and make it downstairs, where Tweek slumps so far down in his seat that he can't see much of his mom over the tabletop. Craig (the creep) walks straight over to give her a polite kiss on the cheek and a friendly morning greeting, like he wasn't shitting himself over being found in Tweek's bed less than twenty minutes ago. What a suck up.

They eat in almost total silence – stilted on Tweek's part, but natural as breathing for Craig and Mrs Tweak – and, after about three cups of coffee and five minutes of ducking to avoid his mom fussing at his hair, both boys make it back upstairs for the rest of their stuff.

He's so caught up in dreading the day ahead of him, he doesn't notice Craig lagging behind until he steps off of the porch and out into the light snow. He turns to peer back at the other boy, ready to make some comment about him having to move a little faster if Tweek doesn't want to be late, when he catches the frown on Craig's face.

Fidgeting and fighting off his natural sense of unease, he waits for his friend to catch up; holds out his hand expectantly when the other boy reaches him.

Looking down at his open palm long enough that Tweek's heart starts to sink, Craig finally follows suit and twines their cold fingers together.

They stand in the middle of the white front yard, a bitter breeze stirring their hair and tugging gently at their clothes, and all Tweek can think about is the way his heart races and the hair on the back of his neck stands on end at the simplest of touches, now. Holding hands – something that they've been doing together for years – suddenly feels like it should be forbidden, or secret. It feels special. He can't help but wonder how things ended up so... weird, between them.

Jumps a little when Craig starts talking.

"You asked last night what I wanted to do."

Tweek shivers. Tugs at his scarf with his free hand and does what comes most natural to him when he's uncomfortable with the direction of a conversation – tries to divert its path.

(Doesn't want to hear any kind of rejection for his feelings right now. Not even if it's gentle. Not after the morning they've had together, laughing and joking, almost like before.)

"I— I also asked you about something I shouldn't have while you were — hnrng — drunk. It was a dick
move, man. I'm sorry."

But Craig is well-versed in the secret lore of reading Tweek, and apparently he can spot the diversion a mile off. He cuts right through the bullshit in one, merciless stroke that leaves the blonde feeling winded.

"After you said you fell for me," he says. "Fell for me." The emphasis on that one word has the thing in his stomach writhing unpleasantly to life. He takes a flighty step, but finds Craig's grip holding him there – tightening at his resistance. "Tweek."

"Aurrgh, I'm g-gonna be late," he says, eyes dancing away and face so hot the snowflakes are melting the second they land on his cheeks. Struggles a little longer, until his best friend raises his free hand and settles it on his shoulder, an extra weight to hold him still.

"You said you 'fell for me'. Not that you had a crush on me."

He jerks his shoulder out from under Craig's hold and scrunches up his face. "Eugh. S-so? Your point?"

"Were you... in love with me, when we were younger?"

You fucking idiot, he thinks, uncertain whether he's aiming it at the other boy or at himself. I still am. Sure as fuck hasn't changed in the three-year goddamn interval, so it's not likely to now. And definitely not if you keep giving me handjobs.

"What if I was? What does it— urgh. Still doesn't change anything, dude. Stuff still would've happened the same, either way." He stands stock still, tense and ready to shake the other boy off.

Chilled fingers brush across his cheek, and his head shoots back up in spite of himself. Craig's frown is there, at the corner of his eyes and the tightness of his mouth. "I just don't like it..."

Those words grab his heart in a stranglehold, and his ribs start collapsing inwards on his lungs. He feels all the air leave him in a whoosh—

"I don't like it that I might have ruined my chance with you for good."

The self-destruct sequence that his entire chest is set on pauses. Tweek blinks owlishly up at the taller boy, heart caught somewhere in the region of his throat.

"Wha?" he says, the essence of intelligence.

Sighing (again), Craig brushes the pad of his thumb across Tweek's cheek, chasing away the melted snowflakes. "Last night, I wanted to ask you if you think we can work through everything – if you think you might be able to feel that way again, one day." Blue eyes burn into his, grey flecks catching in the winter daylight and snow landing on the blue knit of his handmade chullo hat. The muscles in his jaw tense, and his throat bobs.

"And if you do, then... I wanted to ask if you'd ever consider dating me, for real."

Chapter End Notes

OKAY SO HERE'S THE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT:
when *unresolved* eventually ends, i will be writing a companion piece/prequel/sequel/goose from *Craig's point of view*. it will be long. (i may or may not have started writing it already. oops.)

**ALSO, THERE'S NOW A ONE-SHOT SET IN THIS AU.**
it doesn't have to be read if you aren't interested in fluff and Bunny and 14 year old boys being idiots, but if by any chance you *do* like those things, then you can read it [here](#). there may even be some little extras/hints about the main plot hidden in there. ;D <33
one of my snakes is throwing a tantrum because i wont let him out of his viv. he's been dragging all his decorations around the tank and turning his hides over... grumpy noodle. :|

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

In the aftermath of Craig's question, there's a ringing silence.

Craig stares at him unflinchingly, the freshness of the morning air turning his cheeks a rosy pink.

Tweek stares back, for once completely still, and thinks, this confirms I'm still asleep.

(Man, his subconscious is really fucking needy.)

Reaches up with his free hand to pinch his upper arm, just in case.

"Ow," he says in a kind of blank surprise. Things don't usually hurt in dreams, do they? Tests the theory again, on a different spot closer to his shoulder.

Nope. Still hurts.

Huh.

So he does the sensible thing and pinches Craig instead.

"Dude, stop," says the other boy, moving away when he goes in for round two, thumb and forefinger poised. "I get it; I'm sorry." Tweek struggles to register the way his friend's face is falling and his shoulders are rising in a hunch. "Look, it's fine. It's... whatever, you know?"

It's only when Craig starts to turn away that the blonde comes back to himself. It would appear that this is, in fact, reality. And this boy? This boy in front of him just asked something Tweek always thought was impossible. Something Tweek thought he'd never hear directed at him.

"No, wait," he says, and his voice is stupid and wobbly when Craig tries to walk further down the path. He tightens his grip on Craig's hand and tugs his best friend back around.

The taller boy stops but won't look at him, peering out over the street like he's really focussed on watching the drifting snow settle on the speckled tarmac of the road.

Clearing his throat like maybe that'll help him stay composed, the blonde says, "Are you... asking me to be your boyfriend? For r-real?"

This is it: insanity. Surely Tweek's heard wrong. Surely he's mistaking what Craig was saying. Surely he's misunderstanding this whole thing and making an idiot out of himself.

But the clench of muscles in Craig's jaw and the tightness around his eyes as his gaze flickers back over Tweek speaks a thousand words. The blonde's breath is stuttering out of him in a loud, shaky
gust of white, before Craig even starts speaking.

"I am," Craig says. "If you think you could feel that way for me again."

"You're serious?" He can hear the tears building up in the back of his throat, and isn't sure how to describe the erratic rhythm that's worked its way right down into his bone marrow, like his heart's beating so fast that the rest of him is left thrumming with it. He stretches out his free hand once again – this time not to pinch, but to hold onto the front of Craig's jacket. "You're not— you're not fucking with me right now, are you?"

"No,″ his best friend says, blinking long, dark lashes and looking for all the world like he's discussing nothing more important than the weather. But Tweek can see through it, to the rigidity in his stance, to the forced blankness of his face. Craig steps closer to him, unbearably slowly like he's approaching a wild animal, until Tweek's craning his neck back just to hold eye contact. Speaks in a soft voice that ought to make Tweek feel patronised, but just helps cut through his cresting unease. "I want to date you. Properly."

He finds himself swaying forwards, into Craig's chest. He's solid and warm and holds Tweek up against him as if it's the most natural thing in the world. And that's the exact moment that Tweek realizes his head doesn't have a choice in this. As much as it wants him to panic, as much as it wants him to pull away and try to reason his way through why Craig's asking him this now, it doesn't have the choice, because his heart has always been in control when it comes to his best friend. He loves Craig, and he'll take whatever the other boy is willing to give him. It doesn't matter if this is out of pity or guilt, he doesn't care if it's for convenience or fondness. He just... he'll trust Craig with this, the way he's starting to think he should have from the beginning.

"Okay, Craig," he says, pressing his forehead to the other boy's sternum. Supposes he should feel like this is something wonderful, something happy. Instead he feels keyed up, jittery, so confused he's lost the strength in his limbs. "Okay."

A hand reaches up to run through the back of his hair, catching on the tangles. Tugs him closer. "You don't sound happy."

He has no answer for that at first, apart from to keep on shaking. After a moment of focussing on the fingers in his hair and the warm hand still clasping his, he feels the words force their way up through his throat like a living thing. "I'm not not happy, man. It's just this is— it's u-unexpected. Good."

At this, Craig does withdraw, though only far enough to peer down at Tweek's flushed face. "You sure?"

"Yeah dude. I want to be with you." Can't bring himself to meet Craig's eyes, so he stares off over Craig's shoulder instead. "Even if you are a total ass sometimes. I mean, how different will it be, right?"

His best friend – his... his boyfriend, he guesses he should say – makes a sound like he's choking something back. "Right. Just the same. Nothing… different." His voice sounds dull.

Finally Tweek works up the nerve to look up and really study him. What he sees is surprising. All the color has leaked from Craig's face, leaving his cheeks pallid. His brows are drawn down low. If Tweek didn't know any better, he'd think that Craig looks close to tears.

Wait. Is he sad?

For some reason, laughter bubbles up in his chest at that bizarre thought, but it doesn't come out as
much more than a weak chuckle. This whole situation is painfully ironic, considering he's usually the one needing extra support or encouragement – not Craig.

(But then he reminds himself that he doesn't actually know much of anything about the other boy, despite claiming to be his closest friend. Not his thoughts or feelings, and certainly not his reasoning behind asking Tweek out so suddenly, when only two days ago, he'd been fine keeping whatever this is between them unlabelled.)

In a fit of uncharacteristic daring, he releases his grip on the front of Craig's jacket and cups the other boy's face with stiff fingers. Craig's eyelashes flutter shut, and he tilts his head into the touch in a way that makes Tweek breathless to watch. The blonde gulps. "Dude, I told you from the start that I wouldn't do shit with you if it didn't mean something to me. I want it to be – eurgh – special. I'd only be like this with someone important." Isn't that enough of an answer for him?

Maybe not, he thinks, when Craig's expression doesn't settle.

Pushes up onto his tiptoes to kiss the other boy and presses close, nose to cheek and head angled to one side. His best friend softens against him after a moment stood tense, and they share a slow, warm kiss that lights Tweek up inside, more a reassurance to him than anything else that's been spoken between them.

When he pulls back, Craig's watching him, lips pink and parted, pale eyes intense. "Special," he says. "I can make it special. I can—"

"You already do, you dumbass. Just by being you," he says, holding off the embarrassment and cutting down on the sentimentality of the statement with an exaggerated roll of his eyes.

Craig looks like he's about to refute this statement, when there's a squeak of hinges from a window on the upper floor of the house, and his mom leans out. "Boys," she says, calling down to them loud enough that Tweek's sure their neighbors will hear. "When I said you should leave for work, I didn't mean for you to walk out the house and spend the whole morning smooching in my front yard."

"Aurgh. Jesus Christ, mom, stop." Tweek wails, blushing hot and pulling away from where he's been pressed up against the taller boy. "We— we're going."

His- his boyfriend says nothing; adjusts his grip on their linked hands and starts pulling him away, cheeks considerably pinker than they had been a moment ago.

They both power their way along the sidewalk, hands linked and an awkward silence stretching out between them.

The moment that they get to the street corner where Tweek turns off for the store, the blonde pauses, resisting Craig's attempts to lead them up towards the coffee shop. No.

No.

He's not going to risk it - not going to risk Craig finding out about Thomas this way. Not after last night when he'd told Tweek what happened between them. It would be heartless, shoving the older boy at his best friend so soon after forcing him to relive his memories of the time that everything had gone so wrong for them. It'd be cruel.

(He ignores the ever-present thrill of fear skittering across his nerves at the thought of their reunion, at the thought of this delicate, fragile thing that's between the two of them shattering into a thousand pieces.)
Not yet, he tells himself. But soon. Soon, once enough time has passed. Soon, once he knows that it isn't going to hurt Craig. Once they've sorted things out properly.

Peers up into Craig's eyes and forces a grin - one he's sure looks even less honest than it feels. "Here's fine, dude," he says, voice trying for chipper and just coming out strained. "You can go- go home. Get some more sleep."

Craig doesn't contest this suggestion - just keeps on looking down at him like Tweek's said something wrong. Like he's hurting, and he doesn't quite know how to hide it.

It's the kind of look that lances straight through Tweek's stomach like a knife.

It's the kind of look that makes him want to say and do stupid things.

"Fine," Craig says with no inflection. Drops Tweek's hand and takes a single step back that feels more like a mile, and offers him a small smile that doesn't even attempt to reach his eyes, just lingers around the corners of his mouth like anything more would be too much effort. "Guess I'll see you then, dude."

This time, the pain stabbing through him is even more concentrated.

"Wait, that's it?" He tries to make it sound like a joke, but he knows it comes out closer to a yelp. "Really?"

Now it's Craig's turn to look confused. "I don't..."

Scowling and feeling like the world's biggest jackass, Tweek says, "Jesus fucking Christ, man. That's a shit goodbye."

He steps forwards, grabs the front of Craig's jacket to anchor him where he is, and pushes up into a rough kiss. All bite and hard pressure. It takes longer for Craig to respond this time, but that might just be due to the shock of how much more forceful this one is.

As soon as he knows Craig isn't going to pull away, and he starts to respond with slower, gentler touches, Tweek eases up his hold, resting his hands flat on the taller boy's chest and enjoying the dizzying thump of his own heart in his ears. He stays where he is, relinquishing his control over the kiss as Craig's hands settles on his hips, curling fingers through Tweek's belt loops and pulling him closer. He lets the more experienced boy guide him through the motions.

The wind is cold and there's snow slush beneath their shoes, but for once Craig is warm, and the way he's holding onto Tweek makes him feel for a little while like he'll never let go.

That's enough for him.

When they separate, Tweek stays close enough that their noses brushes - that their lips touch when he speaks, like he's passing Craig a secret.

"I'll never get sick of this."

Finally, Craig's countenance softens.

The minute curve of his mouth as he kisses Tweek again feels like the best kind of victory.

... 

When Tweek finally gets to work, he's late. By about fifteen minutes.
He's also been beaten there by Thomas and, to his insurmountable confusion, Butters.

"Well, hey there, bud! We were wondering where you'd got to," the chipper boy says as he crosses the road and comes to a halt in front of them.

Tweek runs a hand through his wild hair and stops chewing on his lower lip, which has been tingling since he left Craig on the corner, feeling flustered and maybe a little giddy. He looks between tall, composed Thomas with his fancy brown suede coat, leather boots and his mustard yellow shirt (which shouldn't look good on anyone, but somehow makes his brown eyes and his golden hair pop), and soft, round faced Butters, with his shiny blue parker unzipped to expose a top with some blonde haired anime chick on the front. Seeing these two polar opposites stood together is like comparing the inhabitants of two different planets.

And then Tweek's eyes are drawn back to Butters' t-shirt – to the anime girl with a glorious white silk dress, locks of hay-colored hair and, beneath a dazzling crown... an orange hood—

"Dude. Is that Kenny on your top?"

Butters grins the proudest, widest grin Tweek thinks he's ever seen, and puffs out his chest. "Yeah! I designed the picture and then went and got it printed on some tees in this one place in Denver yesterday, as a surprise for him. Isn't it neato?"

Staring at the sparkles and the huge, inexplicably purple eyes, Tweek isn't sure what to say. On the one hand, it's actually a really well drawn picture, with a cross-dressing Kenny riding on a charging unicorn, all backed by a rainbow. On the other hand... he feels like this is edging dangerously close to something that'll end up giving him nightmares. "Y-yeah. Neat..." His eye twitches a little. A glance at Thomas confirms that the older boy looks just as confused as he feels. He wonders how long Butters has been here, chattering the poor guy's ears off. Decides to change the subject to something a little less perilous. "Why're you here, man? We're not opening 'til ten."

"Well, you said you had a bad day yesterday, so I thought I'd come out and, and give a hand – help you out whatever ways you'd like."

This news simultaneously worries and flatters Tweek. Shit, why is it that Butters can break right through his guard without even trying? He shares another look with Thomas, who shrugs uselessly. Great. The executive decision is his then. (No pressure at all.) "Nnng. Dude, I can't pay you or anything," he says, voice only just this side of shrill. "And the customers— they're evil shits. They'd rip us apart if they had any— any idea how to use the damn coffee machine, man. They'd go straight for our throats."

"Aw shit, ass-shit, fucker."

"Hrrng. They're like... like flesh-eating, caffeine starved parasites. Parasites. Why'd—"

"Cocksucker."

"Why'd you want to put yourself through the misery?"

For that, he gets tutted at, one finger stretching out to poke him sharply in the shoulder.

"Hey, we're buddies ain't we, mister?" Lost, all Tweek can do is give a jerky nod, because after the last few weeks, he supposes that if anyone qualifies as a friend of his, beyond Craig and Token, then it's the sweet-faced blonde standing in front of him. "Well, buddies help each other out when times're tough." Pauses to thoughtfully scratch at his clean-shaven, well moisturised jaw. (Seriously, the guy smells like apple blossom and sunshine, even from over three feet away. What the fuck?) "Besides,
these guys'll be nothing, after dealin' with how my dad gets when the pantry's a mess. They can just go on right ahead and throw their worst at me." Pushes his sleeves out the way and dramatically holds up a clenched fist.

"Oh," says Tweek, definitely missing the gist of whatever it is that Butters is trying to communicate to him. (Determination, maybe. Or confidence? Both are foreign concepts to Tweek, so he can't be too sure.) Stares into the blinding flash of white teeth and thinks for the first time, wow, being friends with extroverts is going to be a lot of work. Sort of pities himself. "Okay, man. If— if you wanna hang out with us and put yourself through hell, then... you're welcome, I guess?"

(As if today couldn't get any weirder.)

"Great!" says Butters, only just stepping back enough that Tweek can squeeze past him to the door and struggle to get the key into the lock. The happy-go-lucky blonde stares down at his shaky hands and gabbles about how much of a good day it is they're gonna have, all three of them together.

Thomas, he notices, stands back and curses under his breath, seeming pretty content to just hang around and let Tweek struggle by himself, so long as it means avoiding being in close contact with Butters.

Once they finally get inside, Tweek leads the way through to the staff room, shrugging out of his jacket and throwing it down on top of a box of old paperwork, along with his satchel. The other boys do the same, and Butters peers around in the shitty, flickering yellow light like this is the most fascinating place he's been in for years. (He supposes that seeing this amount of drugs and clutter in one place probably is weird, to most kids. What a rich and vibrant upbringing he's been privileged to have...)

Snatching up three dirty aprons from the hooks and tossing one at each of the boys – the first lands in a heap at Thomas' feet, and the other smacks Butters in the head – he tugs the third on over his crazy mane of hair, and ties it behind his back in his go-to triple knot. "Sorry. Shit aim."

"No worries, bud. You shoulda seen me last week in Phys. Ed.. I smacked Scott Malkinson right in the shnozz with a soccer ball." He's weirdly upbeat about sharing that, Tweek thinks – but then considers that this is Butters, so maybe not.

"Agh, sweet Jesus... by accident, right?"

"Naw, he... maybe said somethin' that pissed me off, I guess," says the cutesy-looking blonde with a sweet little chortle.

This sort of thing doesn't shock him anymore, even if the mysterious paradox that is Butters Stotch will never make much sense to him.

What does surprise him is Thomas joining in the conversation as they leave the room, grabbing up their name tags (and in Butters' case, a blank one reading 'Hello! My name is: ...!'). "One time in middle school I – ff-fuck me, aw shit – 'accidentally' gave this kid a black eye with a shoe."

Tweek blinks. Turns to stare at Thomas like he's never seen him before. "A... a shoe?" he says, voice rasping.

The older boy shrugs, moving towards the coffee machine and averting his eyes like he's feeling embarrassed for sharing.

"He kept teasing me about something and I figure I just – cock, cockslut – kinda flipped." Switches on the coffee machine with a deft flick of his fingers. "Closest thing to hit him with was my shoe."
"Huh," says Tweek, struggling to picture the mature, quiet blonde taking his fancy boot off and smacking someone upside the head with it. Hum and squints like that might help him see it. (All it does is make Thomas fidget and flush and turn to get on with setting up the coffee machine.)

"That's nothing," says Butters. "Tweek here threw a tray full of food over this boy's head the other day. Didn't you, bud?" He helps himself to the job of straightening all the chairs and checking the floor for dirt.

Remembering Cartman's slowly reddening face and the lone fry sliding down one greasy cheek, Tweek twitches. Nudges Thomas aside with a bump of his hip so he can adjust a nozzle that the other boy's struggling with. "That was by accident."

"Boy oh boy, sure was funny though. Shoulda seen Eric's tantrum right after."

The taller boy snorts, and Tweek looks up to catch him frowning as he watches Tweek set up the machine. "Eric? That's the fat kid, right?"

"Uh-huh," says Tweek, moving slow despite the fact it makes his trembling hands more clumsy, so that Thomas can watch how to fit the portafilter into the group head without the damn things sticking or leaking all over everything – then loosens it up again and passes it over to the other boy with an accidental brush of fingers, so that he can try. He stays close to make sure Thomas does it right.

But the other boy stays still. "Good, then. He probably deserved it." The hardness of his quiet voice has Tweek blinking up at him.

Whoa. Guess he's not a fan. (Then again, who is?)

Apparently picking up on Tweek's silence, Thomas shoots him a sidelong look. This time, he smiles a small, awkward smile and mumbles, "I had my fair share of bullies in school, and I don't like them." He says the words like they're something embarrassing that he wants to dismiss.

All Tweek can do is look up into his kind, handsome face and think, you wouldn't like me, either.

Not if you knew what Craig had told me last night.

A surge of gut wrenching guilt has his face crumpling involuntarily; he blinks out of his daze when he catches Thomas' smile dropping, and twists away.

There's a lapse of silence as he hurries to the dishwasher and drags down the door, fumbling with the clean, dry cups on the rack inside. He can feel eyes on his back, but he doesn't look up until he hears Thomas return to the coffee machine, scrapes and clicks.

When he does straighten out of his crouch, he spots Butters stood in the middle of the shop floor, hands on the back of a chair and watching them both like he's seen something suspicious. It's an odd look on the sweet boy's face – a sharp glint in eyes and a pursing of his lips that lets slip that there's more to him than his goofy smiles and his innocent persona.

As soon as those big blue eyes meet his across the room, the other boy's whole countenance shifts. He's soft again, and so sweet butter wouldn't melt on his tongue. He goes back to tucking in the chair he's holding onto, and begins humming along to a tune that makes Tweek think of their fourth grade classroom. He's acting like he didn't catch onto the tension between Tweek and Thomas at all.

Tweek isn't fooled for a second.
okay, so!! i'm planning to do more oneshots set in this AU as thank you's to all my readers if/when we reach certain bench-marks in the story stats - like 1000 kudos, or 100 public bookmarks, or whatever. i figured that a fun way to do this would be to let you guys decide what you'd like to see most.

so if you're interested in joining in, throw me the name of absolutely any South Park characters you'd like a one-shot pov from, and the next short story i write will be based around the most popular one. :))
As the day progresses, the store gets steadily busier. Although it doesn't end up bursting with customers without warning the way it had the previous day, they're still rushed off their feet by the time that lunch comes around.

Funnily enough, Butters proves invaluable. He's great at clearing tables and keeping up with the dishwasher, which means that they don't run out of cups or cutlery, and that gives Tweek and Thomas time to take the orders and make the coffees.

With more time on their hands, neither of the boys are quite as manic and anxious as they were the day before, which helps them keep their individual tics in check and distracts Tweek nicely from thinking on the tense atmosphere they'd all been drowning in prior to opening shop that morning.

The only issue is that Thomas is somehow still acquiring groupies.

A great deal of the people coming in today are love-struck looking girls – many of them the same dim, hopeful faces from yesterday. There're only so many heavily dolled-up idiots with high, false giggles and simpering smiles that Tweek can stand clogging up the counter, before he starts snapping at them. If it weren't for the fact that Thomas looks increasingly embarrassed and confused by the situation himself, Tweek would probably be getting frustrated with him too, for struggling to find his voice around them.

(Just tell her nice and clearly to fuck off, he thinks more than once as he rushes past with a customer's coffee. Save me the effort of coming all the way back over here to rescue you like you're some kind of damsel in distress.)

From what Tweek can tell, this is by no means a normal occurrence for the other boy, even if Thomas has gotten admirers in the past. And there's no doubt in Tweek's mind that he must have, since someone as undeniably attractive as him is pretty standard crush material.

Apparently it's just the usual South Park shit that they're dealing with right now, though. Not surprising, since this town seems to be a hotbed of inexplicable, nonsensical behaviour and total creeps.

After Tweek and Butters have to forcibly drag two screeching girls off of each other long enough to throw both out onto the street, Butters excuses himself to the back room for a moment. (Tweek assumes he disappears in order to nurse his battle wounds. Tries not to think on it too long, otherwise he'll start mentally listing all the diseases and infections he might get from the long, welted scratches on his arms, and then he'll freak the fuck out.)

There's a lapse into silence as the other customers – having witnessed the horror of the banshee girls clawing at one another as they were hauled out kicking and screaming – re-evaluate their own plans.
to jump the poor guy's bones. Even as Tweek watches them through narrowed eyes, several turn away, mugs in hand, and resume their conversations in much calmer tones than before.

Tweek heaves a deep breath, slumping down at the counter beside the badly shaken older boy. His forearms sting like a bitch and he's got a pretty sore foot were one the girls stomped hard on his toe with her heels, but considering surface wounds, he got off pretty lightly. (This is nothing in comparison to the madness of his childhood, so he'll take it – even if by the end of the day, he's got a nervous tic so bad that all of his facial muscles cramp into one solid lump.)

Once he's sure that there isn't going to be a repeat incident (at least not for a little while), he glances up at Thomas and goes from pissed off to something close to amused. Because even if it is shitty of him to think this way, there's something kinda funny about the older boy's expression – like he's peered down into the jaws of death itself.

"What's wrong with these people?" Thomas says the words quietly, like speaking them loud enough might start it all off again.

At this, Tweek does laugh a little. "Augh. Dude, South Park is fucked up. It— it's in the water, or something. Everyone here ends up going crazy sooner or later – it's like, a rule." Pauses to think a moment. "Probably also helps that you're not bad on the eyes, man." Understatement of the century, but there you go.

He regrets saying that last bit when the second Thomas turns wide eyes on him, face flushing pink and features a rictus of what he can only assume is horror. (Maybe he fears that Tweek's gonna start going fangirl on him soon, too.) "Wh— aw, shit- shit, fucking cockfuck. What?" Rolling his eyes, he says, "Nnugh. It's just an observation, dude. I'm surprised you don't get mobbed everywhere you go."

It's hard to tell whether Thomas takes this as a compliment or not, because he makes a sound like he's trying to choke down a particularly bad slur, and scrubs his hands through his short hair. His gaze darts around the coffee shop like it's trying to help reboot his brain. "I— I dont—"

Okay, but this is slightly stupid. It's not like Thomas magically got hot over night or something – even through the haze of his Dissociation when they were younger, Tweek had looked across the table at Thomas and understood exactly why Craig would fall for him. "Seriously? God, this can't actually be a shock to you though, right?"

'Flustered' doesn't begin to cover the way the other boy is acting. Then again, neither does 'weird'. He swears prolifically enough to put even Cartman to shame, and loudly enough that almost everyone in the shop turns to stare at him for a few long moments.

(Tweek winces and jerks a little further away, in fear of his eardrums concaving under the pressure.)

Thomas stammers out some kind of excuse that Tweek's too distracted to actually pay much mind to, between rubbing his ears and catching Butters emerging from the staff room with a beatific smile, like he hasn't got claw marks gouged into his neck.

"What you fellas chatting about?" asks the happy blonde, sliding a star-shaped clip into his bangs and walking with a skip in his step. (Tweek reserves the right to feel suspicious of such a happy demeanor in light of how crappy the day has been, up to this point.)

"Eurgh. Nothing," says Tweek, twitching his way over to the coffee machine. "You guys want drinks?"
"Fuck me sideways. N-no," says Thomas from where he's crouched beside the dishwasher, face ducked out of sight as he puts in the most recent load.

"Ooh, can I have hot cocoa?" Butters claps his hands together like a small kid.

Making a face at that request, he shrugs and reaches up onto the shelf for the cocoa mix. He's never understood the appeal of hot drinks that aren't coffee – or any other drinks at all, for that matter – even if he does love chocolate. "Sure, man."

He's doling out a heaped spoonful into a mug, when Butters sidles over to lean against the counter beside him, eyeing his progress. Tweek's hand jerks of its own accord, spilling cocoa power all over the workbench, and he groans loudly in frustration.

"Rrgh. Goddamn this---"
Takes a deep breath and starts again.

Only once he's finished making the mix, frothing the milk and pouring it all into one mug, does Butters speak up, loud enough for both Tweek and Thomas to hear.

"So, how long've you fellas known each other for, then?"

That gets the older boy's attention. He straightens up and looks around at Tweek with the kind of wide-eyed panic that only someone with very little experience at lying might have. "Aw shit, asscracker dickmunch. S-since— er. Since——"

"Urgh. I stumbled into him a few weeks ago when he started working here, man," Tweek lies smoothly, twitching dying down as he slips into the act. His knuckles go white where he grips the counter and he can feel his shoulders locking up in place, but the words come easily to him, as lies almost always do. (No matter how bitter they taste on his tongue.) "I was in a shitty place though so I – nnn – I ended up being kind of a dick." Forces a shrug.

"Y-yeah," says Thomas biting back what sounds like a particularly volatile curse and brushing past them. "Go-gonna just— just going to——"

The staff room door swings shut behind him a bare second before a loud, muffled litany of swearing rises up.

In the aftermath of Thomas' sudden exit, Tweek shares a look with Butters, which conveys no small amount of confusion.

"I swear I have – eeurr – no idea what tha— that was about," he tries to say, but is so lost in the face of the older boy's apparent meltdown that his lies are painfully transparent.

Unsurprisingly, Butters does not look convinced. "Sure thing, bud," he says, patting at Tweek's arm consolingly and taking a loud slurp of his cocoa.

Trying to maintain an incensed glare, when he's clearly at least a little to blame for all the drama that's gone down in the last five minutes, is almost impossible. So instead, he fidgets and whines like a kicked dog. Turns around to make the strongest, shittiest coffee he can.

Butters' stare drills into the side of his head as he works, until he can't help but throw his hands up in the air and wail. "O-okay, okay, stop with the judgmental staring, dude. I get it, I'm – agh – a shitty person and I maybe said some stuff he— he reacted weirdly to." He knots both fists into his hair and tugs nice and hard like that might hold his malfunctioning brain together. "A-and yeah, maybe I've
— *urrgh*— known him longer than I said but, n-not really because— *because*..." His words peter out before he's done saying anything even slightly sensible in his defence.

All he can do is grab his freshly boiled (and therefore scorching hot) espresso and throw it back in a single swallow that leaves his gasping for air and grasping at his stupid flamingo-shirt collar. He bends over as he coughs and splutters, bracing himself against the counter top with one hand, and smacking the cup down onto the worktop, *hard*.

With all the patience and goodwill of a saint, Butters steps closer and runs his palm up and down over Tweek's back like that might help soothe away his pathetic wheezing.

It takes a while, but as soon as the he's able to wipe the back of his wrist over his mouth and straighten up, Tweek pulls back from the touch.

Palming away the moisture that's welled up in the corner of his eyes, he glances around the shop at all the patrons, who look bored and a little miserable now that their new celebrity crush has disappeared into the back room, and don't seem concerned by the fact that their dick of a barista almost died.

(In the brief lull in hacking coughs and their hushed conversation, Tweek can still make out the distressed noises of Thomas' tics, sounding no less violent than they did *prior* to Tweek trying to choke himself.)

When his eyes skip back over to his friend's face, he sees a frown he doesn't know how to categorize.

"I dunno what you've said or done or how you two fellas really know each other, and it ain't my business, but..." Butters gives a sad shake of his head. "Be careful, bud. That guy... he looks at you like he's in a whole lotta trouble."

"What? Trouble? *Hnargh*?" Baffled, Tweek peers down at himself, at his dumb, ugly shirt and his scuffed-up pre-teen jeans and his dirty black apron. What the fuck is Butters talking about? Does Tweek really seem that intimidating? Because in his opinion, he just looks like a twelve year old boy. "Trouble with me? Why—? What's he done?" Tweek wonders if there's something he should be mad about, in all of this. Can't think of anything, off the top of his head.

This garners a chortle from the other boy, though it's by no means a happy sound. "No, dumby. I mean, I think he's *in love* with you."

In the wake of muffled cussing and the buzz of conversation from the tables, Tweek's brain flatlines.

Tweek stares at Butters.

Butters stares at Tweek.

What? goes his mind.

And a little louder, from the twitch in his cheek: *What?*

Then, finally, his mouth. *What?*

From there, things reboot.

"Oh sweet baby Jesus, that's— that's too much—! Are you fucking crazy, dude?" He's stuck somewhere between incredulous and amused, because that's the most stupid damn thing Tweek's
ever heard. Thomas, in love with him? And Butters is basing that on what? He scrambles for the most logical answer. "No, no, wait. You're high, aren't you?"

"Who's high on what, and where can I get some?"

Spinning around with a shriek and a madly galloping heart, Tweek finds Kenny leaning heavily on the counter, hair ruffled and clothes equally messy. He looks like he's just slid straight out of someone else's bed. "Fucking hell, man. G-give a guy some – aurgh – warning."

The scruffy blonde flashes him an (only slightly) apologetic smile.

"Gee whiz, Ken, couldn't you of at least changed before you came here?" Butters sighs as he gives his best friend a brow-furrowing once over. By the way his eyes narrow, Kenny's far, far below standard. "You got lipstick on your cheek."

Scrubbing at his unshaven face with a sheepish grin, Kenny shrugs. "Didn't have time – you said I should come on over as soon as possible."

He doesn't do a good enough job at getting rid of the smear, apparently, because Butters marches across the space to him, snatching up a damp cloth from the worktop in one hand, and pulls him around by his chin. Scrubs rather vigorously at the side of his face, leaning so close to squint at the barely-visible mark that his button nose is almost touching Kenny's jaw. "Ugh, and you smell like cheap perfume," he says under his breath.

Feeling like he's missing something, Tweek says, "Wait, you got him to— to come over here, Butters? W-what for?"

Kenny straightens up and waggles his eyebrows at the jittery blonde. "He told me you've got some problems with— urk."

As if he wasn't just grappled into submission, Kenny continues speaking. "Sweetpea here told me you've got an issue with the ladies. Or at least, your hot-piece-of-ass coworker has. I said I'd gladly come around and take them off his hands." He gives that same toothy grin that makes Tweek uncomfortable, and peers around the shop. "Speaking of which, I'm not seeing this guy anywhere."

"Hrrng. He's in the back," says Tweek with a roll of his eyes and a stiff walk over to the dishwasher, which remains half-loaded.

"Ahh," says Kenny, as Butters releases him and steps back. "So that's where the swearing's coming from. I thought it was just some kind alternative hiphop you were playing."

Tweek twitches and scowls down at the cups he's stacking in the tray like they've personally offended him. He doesn't like people making fun of his tics, so it stands to reason that teasing anyone else isn't cool with him, either. "Shut up, man," he says, voice more a growl than anything else. "Don't be a dick."

"He got flustered about the girls gettin' stirred up over him." Butters has the good sense to cut in before Kenny can say anything else stupid. "Anyway, I though you were meant to be lookin' after Karen last night, mister. Why're you such a mess?"
Smirking and running his hand through his bangs (Butters makes an impatient sound like he wants to smack Kenny, since the fucking idiot's just messed up his hair again), he says, "Lola really wants me to go to this graduation party with her that all the girls are planning in secret. It's some kind of female coming-of-age ceremony or some bullcrap, where whoever gets the hottest catch wins." His head is almost visibly inflating. "Like I say, she's really, really eager for me to go with her. Climbed through my window for a late night shimmy under the sheets, if you know what I mean." Waggles his eyebrows.

"Poor girl thinks she's gonna make a good impression with you?" Tweek winces at the level of pure sass in Butters' voice. "Well, she's gotta be blind as well as desperate."

(Ouch.)

The second Tweek spots the puppy dog eyes coming out, he stops jamming saucers into the full tray, heaves it back inside the machine with a huge, noisy clatter, wrenches up the door and stabs at the on button. He does not need to see them fight or flirt, or... or whatever the fuck it is they're about to do.

Flees with a yelp of, "Eurgh Jesus. W-watch the till, man. I'm gonna go on b-break."

(Isn't sure he's even been heard, but is happy to take that risk.)

He's sliding through to the staff room just as he hears Kenny say through a whine, "Aw c'mon dude, you don't mean that. You know you think I'm a catch."

Shuddering, he pushes his weight back against the heavy door until it clicks shut behind him, and sighs with relief as their talking cuts off, replaced instead by a verbal wall of swearing.

Blinking in the low yellow light and letting his eyes adjust to the room, Tweek spots the older boy sat on the cement floor to one side of the door, head in his hands and knees drawn up close. Ahh, Tweek recognizes that pose like it's an old friend. He also realizes that he didn't quite think through escaping to the break room, where he'd be interrupting Thomas' tic attack.

So he stands there like a fucking potato and just sort of trembles for a while, before he works up the nerve to step closer to the other boy – out of the way of the door – and sinks down beside him, about an arms length away. Thomas makes no attempt to acknowledge his presence (he doesn't expect him to), and just continues to curse, his shoulders heaving and his neck occasionally snapping down to one side. One of his booted feet rises off of the ground and clicks back down again every now and then.

Feeling like maybe the biggest jackass in the world, Tweek just shuts his eyes and focuses on his breathing, like that might somehow help Thomas too.

Now that he's in here, he doesn't want to just leave the other boy on his own in case he hurts himself. Tweek has only ever really seen Thomas' verbal tics until now, so he doesn't know how bad any of his physical tics might get. And considering all the shit that's kept out here in the back room, the other boy could have any number of accidents.

Besides, says a small voice from the back of Tweek's head, if I've got mom there with me when I'm having an episode, it helps.

(And that's enough incentive for him to stay where he is.)

...

It could be five minutes or half an hour before Thomas' voice – now rough and rasping – dies down,
and his tense shoulders start to ease out of their curled heave. His heel stops clicking and his chest rises and falls like he's oxygen starved.

When he speaks, he doesn't bother looking over at Tweek. "M-my jacket—fucking thieving bastard." Gulps and clears his throat. "In the side pocket there's—fuck it up, cockhead. There's some—nnn-nasty sack of shit. There's something f-for you."

As soon as those words sink in through the *whir* of his racing mind, Tweek scrambles to his feet and stumbles his way across the room without questioning the bizarre statement. He peers down at the boxes they'd all cast their things down on that morning, and glances back over to the older boy, to catch tired eyes watching him.

When there's no sign of Thomas changing his mind, he lifts up the expensive, velvet-soft coat and eventually finds the first pocket.

Pulls out a wallet, a keychain and a lighter.

(Unless he wants Tweek to set himself on fire – not an unreasonable request, some might say – then he's looking in the wrong place.)

Turning the jacket over, his hand sinks into the second pocket. His fingers brush over old, crumpled paper.

With mounting curiosity, he reaches in further and tugs it out. Sets the jacket back on the box as an afterthought, eyes glued to the lumpy rectangular shape.

Huh.

In his hand is a long, folded white envelope that has definitely seen better days. The lip running along the top is carefully torn open and tucked back in, but it's so worn it feels as supple and delicate as the suede of Thomas' jacket, beneath the tip of Tweek's finger. There's a shape in one corner - something about as long and deep as a pen cap, and as wide as his thumb.

With a slow sort of reverence, he straightens out the envelope and turns it over to look at the front-

Feels all of his breath escape him in a *whoosh*.

In jagged, tightly clustered letters is writing he'd know anywhere.

It's the same writing scrawled in the margins of his favorite books, and on the pages of his school notes.

It's the writing that he's been scolded for by a dozen different teachers who don't understand it's the best he can do when he's in a bad headspace, no matter how hard his hand cramps with the effort of trying to write neatly.

That ugly, unfortunate script reads, 'For Craig's Tommy'.

Oh, God.
GUYS!!

Thomas won the character request at the end of last chapter by quite a margin! you can find his story in part 3 of the series! :))}
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

//ducks out of sight

;D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

In his hands the envelope begins shaking, rattling like an autumn leaf coming loose from a tree.

He stares at the cramped, fading letters until they start swimming across the grubby paper, nonsensical, throbbing in time to his heartbeat.

When he looks up, Thomas is watching him, handsome face washed out and weary in the poor lighting. The older boy is still curled into himself on the floor, but there's some sort of resolve hardening the line of his jaw and the crease of his brow.

"I— nng— I don't want this," says Tweek, his voice choked up. He can't breathe properly. "This is yours."

Holds it out to a shake of the other boy's head.

"No. Aw, shit. I want you to – damn, godfuckingdamn – have it." Thomas begins to stand, pulling himself up with one hand braced against the wall, and another on his knees. "I'm – ff-fuck – giving it back."

This—

This isn't happening.

"Is this some kind of— of sick joke?" Tweek's fingers flex against the paper, and the envelope bends, crumpling around the shape of his fist.

The other boy's eyes flit down – stick to the half-crushed letter. "N-no, no, of course not. I— coxsucking bastard— I wouldn't do—"

"Wouldn't you?" He can't help the way that his voice is rising, shrill and sharp. "Aurgh. How the fuck am I supposed to know that? I don't know you. You—"

"Asshole. Asshole licking—"

"You show up o-out of nowhere, when things are— hng— are going m-my way for the first t-time in years, and then you give me this?" He lifts the fucking thing up, shakes it violently to make a point. The object inside rattles.

Thomas takes an involuntary step forward, one hand outstretched. "D-don't—"

"Don't what?" He shrieks the words. His eyes sting and his throat burns. "Don't what, Tommy?"

They stand in silence, the older boy's hand slowly drifting back down to his side, and the younger
clutching his brittle, dried out heart in his fist.

Thomas' eyes drop first; Tweek just keeps on glaring, chest rising and falling rapidly, until his vision blurs.

It's funny, he thinks. No matter how much time passes, no matter how long he waits, no matter how hard he works to put his life back together again... it unravels.

A hundred loose threads. A hundred autumn leaves breaking away from their branches and falling to the damp, rotting ground.

At times like this, Tweek realizes that nothing's really changed at all.

Here they are.

The gorgeous, quirky older boy with his endearing tics and his sweet nature, standing right under the glowing halo of the light and looking for all the world like an angel that's been wronged.

And then the other one. The undesirable one.

The twitchy freak, stood in filthy, childish clothes with his deformed fucking legs and his ugly, scrunched up face. Screeching like that'll make it easier to spot him in the darkness.

Right now, it doesn't matter what he does, because it'll always lead back to the beginning.

If it doesn't matter, if it's not worth it, then call him, whispers a cruel voice in the very back of his head. Call Craig and let him know his precious fucking Tommy is here.

Tweek tears his eyes from the other boy and turns to stare at his bag.

Do it. Phone him.

He takes a faltering step towards his satchel—

"Tweek," Thomas says, raw. "Don't do this. Dick— nnn, dicksucker. Don't tell him like this. Please."

Just like that, Tweek freezes, back rigid and every muscle tense. How the fuck does Thomas know that he's gonna—

"Don't – fuck – sabotage this for yourself." His voice is soft. "Not when you're both ff-finally getting somewhere."

"Isn't that – hhrng – what you want?" He doesn't look back at the other boy. Doesn't want to have to look into the face of the guy who gave up the greatest damn thing in Tweek's life without a second thought. "For it to all fall apart? Huh?"

"No. Aw, shit. I've never wanted to get in the way of— fuck it up— of you two. Never."

Breath hitching, Tweek scrubs the back of his free hand across his face, like rubbing away the tears might erase the rest of the damn problem.

And in the end, it still doesn't matter. Right now, he's got Craig. He's got Craig and Thomas hasn't. Surely that should count for something – should make him feel better. But it doesn't, because just like Craig asking him to be his boyfriend this morning, it feels like a hollow victory, like something that shouldn't, by rights, be his.
(He'll take whatever he can get, though.)

Desperation, it turns out, drives him in all sorts of pathetic directions.

Shoulders slumping, he turns, twitching hard when he sees Thomas only a few feet away, brown eyes huge in his pale, drawn face. They stare at each other in the flickering yellow light, and once again Tweek gives in to the knowledge that he can't hate Thomas for anything that's happened in the past, or anything that might happen in the future. It wouldn't be fair, when Thomas has been nothing but kind – if not, at times, a little too nice for his own good.

"Ten more – *nnn* – minutes," he says, forcing the words to come out gruff, even though he just sort of feels deflated.

"H-huh?" The older boy's brows are drawn together. "Ten...?"

Taking the opportunity to break whatever weird staring match they've gotten into, Tweek steps forwards and shoves the letter at Thomas' stomach with enough force that he hears his breath escape him in a whoosh.

Fingers fly up, curling around the ruined envelope and pressing, cold, into his knuckles. His heart does a sick lurch. He yanks his hand free like it's been burned and pushes his way past.

"Ten more minutes, and then – *eurgh* – get back to work. Hurry the fuck up."

"Sh-shit, shit. Goddamn— asshat."

"And put that fucking thing away. I don't want to— to see it again. It's yours."

With that, he leaves, tugging the door open and leaving.

As he leaves, he thinks he hears Thomas say, "It's never been mine..."

Carries on walking.

... Funnily enough, Kenny proves invaluable over the course of the afternoon. The girls flock to him, bickering over who wants to take him to this damn graduation party. (So at least that answers the question of what the hell has them all acting so uncharacteristically creepy, over the last few days – and why they have absolutely no interest in Tweek who, gay or not, would be about as attractive as a potential partner as a smack in the face with a shovel.)

With Butters clearing the tables and loading the dishwasher, Thomas working the till, and Kenny distracting all the girls who come in with his oozing, greasy sort of charm (disgustingly, they lap it up), Tweek can get on with the jobs he needs to do.

Most conveniently involve standing at the coffee machine and churning out cup after cup, with very little involvement in the vague, disjointed conversation coursing between the three other blondes behind him. He blocks them out with the rattling snarls of the coffee grinders, the hissing of the steamers, and the clatter of portafilters being filled, screwed in and out of their slots, and emptied.

Every now and then the back of his neck prickles, and he glances up to find Thomas watching him. Whenever it happens he looks back down again as fast as he can, glowering at his shaking hands and trying to fight off the burn in his cheeks. He’s already angry at himself for reacting so badly earlier – especially so soon after Thomas had a tic attack – but that’s just what he’s like. Volatile. A little
unstable.

(Just generally a bit of a dickhead.)

But no matter how hard he tries to block every around him out, odd segments of their discussions filter through the racket to him.

The first, not long after the lunch rush begins to die down, goes like this:

"And you haven't taken a single one of them up on it? Not even just one number? Are you seeing someone? Gay? Ace?" A pause. "Are you even human? These girls are gonna go away broken hearted, aren't you, girls?"

"Uh-huh," says one.

"Broken hearted," repeats another.

"Aw, fucking shitpearls. Suck it," is Thomas’ input.

"And you won't even deign to take the poor things' numbers."

One of them sniffs obnoxiously. Tweek slams the dirty portafilter he's holding down against the worktop with a noisy bang, and then grabs for a cloth to wipe the hot, soggy coffee grounds from it.

"It's alright, girls, Kenny's here now. I'll help soothe your pains away. You can look and touch all you like."

(Tweek throws up a little in his mouth and, giving up on his previous task, turns the steamer on so loud it screeches, blocking out the rest.)

And a little later, as he's refilling one of the coffee grinders with a bag of fresh Kenyan roast, there's a ringing slap that makes his hand jog. A cup-worth of the expensive, imported beans goes skittering across the counter.

"Augh, fuck." He's setting the bag on the side and chasing after the beans with unsteady fingers and a lot of sharp cursing, as Butters starts yelling.

"Ken! Now that, that ain't appropriate. You can't just go coppin' a feel."

"Aw, but you're so cute and soft—"

"Yeah, but by golly, my foot up your butthole won't be if you go in for round two, mister."

"C'mon, you don't mean that. You know you like a cheeky squeeze just as much as the next person."

"Boy oh boy, you wanna bet?"

A moment of silence.

Tweek, hands full of reclaimed beans, looks around just in time to spot Kenny reaching down for a very ill advised second grope.

What follows is a red faced Butters snatching the wriggling hand straight out of the air, kneeling Kenny in the balls in one very swift move that speaks of much experience and then, when he hits the floor with a pathetic wail of, "Oh please, not the goods," a swift, sharp kick at his ass.
Cheek kicking up in a muscle spasm bordering on painful, he briefly meets Butters' eyes over the writhing body of one Kenny McCormick, and then hurriedly turns away.

Just as much as Cartman convinces himself he's likeable, or Craig pretends he's apathetic to the world around him, Butters acts like he's incapable of anything more than a sweet smile and a goofy giggle. It's hard to remember there's a sharp brain and a bit of a bite behind the glittery hairpins, those big baby blues and his perfectly unblemished skin.

And then Tweek sees him bring his best friend to the floor with one fell kick, dusting his hands off on his apron, and it isn't so hard after all.

(The scariest part of it all is how he starts humming that tune from their childhood almost as soon as Tweek looks away, and proceeds to step over the loudly groaning mess on the floor to get back to his job. No care or concern at all.)

Next time he's pulled out of his reverie, it's almost four o'clock. Butters and Thomas are chatting over by the dishwasher, and Tweek is drawn back in by the high, excited pitch of Butters' voice.

"Hey, wait, you did Drama too?" the cute blonde asks in a voice that is way too chipper. "I'm in Theatre club. And Dance.'

"Yeah, I was never any good though. Aw, cockmaster, shitfuck. I just took all the clubs I could in high school so I'd - asshole - have things to keep me busy. Mostly I'm only good at English Literature."

"Aw, now that ain't so bad. It could be a whole lotta fun to study in college. I wanna major in Dance, but my dad'd probably ground me for life. Maybe even disown me."

"Shit, sh-shit. He's not – fuck – supportive of what you wanna do?"

"Heck, no. Not if it's somethin' useless." A warm chortle. "Then again, that's just more incentive to go on doin' it. Maybe I'll even sign up to go study it abroad."

"What was that?" Kenny says, shouting across the room. "Did you just say four year road trip 'round Europe?"

"Geez, put a sock in it, Ken." Butters says right back. "You're gonna be too busy with college to bother with me." And then in a mumble Tweek thinks only Thomas is meant to hear, "Thank sweet baby Jesus."

After that, they go on chatting more about the colleges they're applying to and which courses they're most interested in, and Tweek takes the opportunity to duck out the back, unnoticed.

College is a sensitive topic for him for many reasons. It means the end of his childhood, the end of decisions being made for him, the end of whatever it is he's got here with Craig.

Mainly it's a sensitive topic, though, because he knows he's not going. His grades aren't good. He's not in a sports club – or any extracurricular club, for that matter – so scholarships go out the window. He'd never be able to live in a dorm or a shared room; he'd never trust himself not to fall back into the spiral, if he was on his own.

And besides all that, he's got no drive for further education – no interest in studying more. His passions in life are his coffee and his crafts, and he doesn't really care about anything else. Those two things are good enough for him. They're all he needs to be content, while all his friends pack up to move around the country - while Craig gets into a big college a few states away on a scholarship,
and starts a whole new life without him. They can go their own ways.

(That's what he'll keep on telling himself, because it's just another thing that they haven't discussed. At least with this, they've got a good excuse. There's no point talking about the future, when they're not gonna be sharing it.)

So Tweek stays out back for a short while to compose himself, drawing in long, deep breathes like that'll help relieve the persistent pressure on his ribcage.

When he finally re-emerges, it's with an unopened package of takeaway cups, since they went through a whole load yesterday. Butters has moved over to a recently vacated table by the window, and Kenny's lounging just outside the shop with a group of five girls Tweek recognizes from a few of their classes, but can't quite name. One or two are getting... pretty handsy with him. (Not that Kenny seems to mind.)

After a quick glance over to the counter to find Thomas staring at him like a kicked puppy, Tweek changes course and heads over to the cutesy blonde, who's piling dirty mugs onto a tray with a small, satisfied smile. Tweek could be completely wrong, but he's been getting some distinctly... non-platonic vibes from these two for a while now, but... Butters doesn't seem to care that Kenny's right on th other side of the glass, with some girl's hands his back pockets.

"Dude, it's none of my— my business but – *aurgh* – doesn't that piss you off?" he nods his head at the wide window, and sets the paper cups down on the side.

The other blonde glances up, and studies the girl currently pasted to Kenny's front like he's looking at a piece of abstract art. After a short while, his smile widens. "Nope."

"But I – *oh Jesus* – I thought you guys were— you know. Maybe, t-together. Or – *hnng* – something." He scrunches his face up and tugs at his hair, now just feeling more awkward than ever.

"Gosh, no," says Butters around a laugh so loud that it totally floors Tweek. (He flinches back a little.) "Don't get me wrong, I'm crazy for that boy the way that bunnies are crazy for carrots, but *that*," he points to the back of Kenny's blonde head, "doesn't bother me. Wanna know why?"

Tweek really isn't sure if he does or not, but decides to go along with it anyway. "*Eurgh*. G-go on, then. Why?"

"'Cause no matter how many big, bouncy boobies he sees or how many panties he gets waved in his face, he always comes right back. Second someone gets serious, he ditches out. Ken's crap at doin' almost anything reliably, and he doesn't like committing to nothing more permanent than a one night stand."

"Jesus Christ, you— you think that's a *good* thing, man? That's— that's *bad*." Tweek's starting to feel upset on Butters' behalf.

Once again, the other boy just grins – reaches out to pat Tweek's arm like he's the one needing reassurance and support. "Who'd you think's gonna be there, bein' an idiot just to make me smile when I'm sad? Who shimmies up my drainpipe to my bedroom window when I'm grounded? Who d'you think saves up for weeks just to buy me more of these dumb, ugly hairpins?"

Floored, Tweek just twitches.

(For a moment, all that goes through his head is: wait, Butters *doesn't like* his hairpins?)

And then he says, "But— but you *love* him. Doesn't that— that means it'd hurt to see him getting
close to other people. Like, jealousy and fear. R-right?"

Done loading up his tray and wiping down the table, Butters stands up straight and puts his hands on his hips. "Love ain't always somethin' linear like it is in the fairy tales and the movies, bud. It comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes. I love Ken the way I'd love a boyfriend, or a husband – I've loved him that way since we were kids. And Ken? Ken loves me like he loves his closest ever buddy – like he loves the first person he'd go to for advice, or comfort. Neither of us wants to be more than that right now and, heck, maybe we never will. What matters is that we're in it together. It works for us, even if it ain't right out a storybook."

Tugging tighter on his hair, Tweek's eyes skitter between the two blondes, and then briefly over to Thomas, who's standing behind the till, looking a little lost. His mind whirrs. "Then – hrrng – you don't care that you can't control it, or— or that you don't know if he's gonna be there from one day to the next? You're t-telling me that doesn't bother you?"

With a hum and a thoughtful rub of his clean-shaven chin, Butters says, "I remember after you had your first breakup with Craig way back in elementary – back before you guys properly loved each other." Tweek's face pulls into something close to a grimace, heat pooling into his cheeks at the misunderstanding that they're both in love, but doesn't interrupt, because making a comment like that wouldn't make any sense when everyone in town has believed they're together for the last eight years. "You said somethin' that really hit me in the heart. You said, 'Love doesn't follow a plan.' And that, that really stuck with me. I guess after I did some growin' up, I figured out why."

As someone who struggles to remember most of the previous day, Tweek sure as hell doesn't recall saying anything along those lines. He'll just trust Butters that it was him who said it. So he wrings the front of his dirty apron and he tries not to make it too obvious that he has no idea what Butters is chatting about. "W-why?"

"'Cause there's no point worryin' over what you can't control. You'll love who you love whether you want to or not, and you'll go on lovin' right up 'til love decides to let you go. There's nothin' to lose in takin' that as it is. So I say, embrace it. Live it. Be honest about it. If the person you love don't love you back, what's the worst that could happen?"

The answer comes to Tweek so easily it's like he doesn't have to think. "He— they, I mean, they, oh God. They could reject you. They could— they could hate you for it. I could— you. You could lose everything."

"And what's the best that could happen?" Butters asks in a calm sort of voice that soothes Tweek's nerves, whether he wants it to or not.

This next answer doesn't come to Tweek the way the last one did. He stares down at his twisting, fisted hands for a long while, ignoring the sound of the shop door swinging open, and someone padding across the floorboards towards them, until Kenny drags out a chair and slumps down into it like he was invited right over.

"I-I don't... I don't know," Tweek says eventually, when it becomes clear from Butters' staring that he's meant to ignore Kenny's presence and reply. "A couple months happiness before it all just falls through?"

He watches as Butters tuts and turns to Kenny. Reaching out to straighten the collar of his best friend's parker, and he says as simply as breathing, "Nope. Best option is that they love you back, for however long and in whatever way they can. Doesn't matter what way it is, 'cause love is love, and it'll find the right path in the end." He smiles at Kenny's stupid, waggling eyebrows and playfully tugs at a bit of his bangs, before pulling back and lifting the cluttered tray off the table. "Either way
you won't know if you don't put yourself out there," he says with a wink at Tweek, before he goes and walks away, a bounce in his step.

Kenny turns to watch him and, after he’s crossed half the room, cups a hand around his mouth and yells, "Oi, blondie, I love you," loud enough that every single person in the shop turns to stare at him. Tweek steps back, not sure whether to follow after Butters, or grab hold of his paper cups and run back to the break room in a flood of second-hand embarrassment.

Apparently though, Butters isn't fazed at all.

"Aw, shucks," he says over his shoulder. Lets out another warm laugh. "Love you too, mister. Now be quiet so I can get on with my work."

The soft grin on Kenny's face, as he slouches further into the chair and stretches his arms over his head, is one a lot less creepy than his usual toothy smirk, but... it still makes Tweek uncomfortable. Like he's just witnessed what should be a very private moment.

Chapter End Notes

hMM..
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

ooh my god, i am le tired. i know i've been quieter than usual recently, but it's just because i started a second job this week, and had several other bits going on. i hope to be more active as soon as possible. (i miss updating daily hrrng.) :|

(as always, there are likely to be a lot of mistakes this chapter - sorry, guys! i promise i'll be back to clean it up later!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(The end of the day forces both Tweek and Thomas – who have been working behind the counter as if they don't exist on the same plane – to witness one last show of affection between their unscheduled helpers.)

All of the customers have been lured out of the shop, and with the doors firmly locked behind them, taking care of the last handful of chores is done with relative ease, and a definite lack of disruption.

Tweek and Thomas stand uncomfortably close together, not sharing a word or even so much as looking at one another.

Butters, finished with his tidying – and mentioning how he's gotta go home so he can be on time for a Skype call with this 'Bradley' friend of his – undoes the tie in the back of his apron, and pulls it off over his head. He's busy draping it neatly over one arm, and whistling what sounds like Dolly Parton's '9 to 5', when there's a choked sound from the far end of the room.

Kenny, who's been cleaning the floor, drops the mop with a clatter that has Tweek shrieking, Thomas swearing, and Butters spinning around to face him full on.

"Dude," says Kenny, choked up. He's wide-eyed and gaping mouthed, and it takes Tweek a painfully drawn out moment of confusion to realize that he's staring at the picture on the front of Butters' top. It's the same expression Tweek imagines someone might make after being told that they've just won the lottery. "Dude."

"Heh heh." Butters, sharing Tweek's realization, rubs the back of his head and ducks his pink face. "What d'you think? I got one for you, too, if you wanna have it. Oh, but hey, you don't have to if you don't—"

He's not given a chance to finish what he's saying, since Kenny's crossed the space in a handful of fast, wide strides.

Throwing his arms around Butters and lifting him clear off the ground, the wild blonde makes a sound like his whole universe is imploding around him. "Holy shit you are the best. How are you this talented? Fuck, dude, I could kiss you right now."

"Eurgh, sweet Jesus, please don't. I don't wanna see that, man," Tweek yelps, slamming his hands over his eyes.

"Ass-ramming cocklord." Thomas puts in helpfully.
Only when a few long moments have passed without the addition of smacking, sucking noises, does the blonde pulls his palms away from his face and return to his attempts at cashing up. Takes a quick, cautious glance at the two boys stood close together in the middle of the coffee shop.

Apparently having ignored the sounds of distress from both their unwilling onlookers, Kenny holds a flustered but grinning Butters at arm length, and continues to admire the print of his anime-girl self, which has been hidden under the grubby black apron for the whole day. He whistles a low sound that Tweek can only interpret as 'holy shit', and then proceeds to hug the ever-loving crap out of the poor boy a second time.

Seeing that Butters is otherwise safe from Kenny's wandering hands (not like he wouldn't be able to fend the guy off if he wanted – as displayed earlier – but Tweek still feels like he's got to check up on his newest friend's wellbeing), Tweek turns his attention to printing off the End of Day totals on the register.

(As with every other time he's forced to try and use the ancient hunk of scrap metal that his dad calls a till, this is done with excess button punching, draw slamming and frustrated growling, until finally the receipt roll begins to print out nonsensical looking lists of orders, payment types and sketchy looking numbers. Like code. He can only assume he got it right, but even if he didn't, he doesn't fucking care.)

"Where's your stuff, dude?" asks Kenny, as Tweek tears the receipt of with violent jerk that pulls out another half a foot of blank roll along with it.

"Well, my coat's out the back," says Butters, sounding sort of breathless. "Now hold up just once second while I go grab it, okay?"

It takes all of about a minute for the two best friends to pull themselves into some semblance of order, grinning and calling out goodbyes to Tweek and Thomas. ("Hey, buddy, it's been great to meet ya. Don't you be afraid of givin' me a call so I have your number too, alright?" Butters says, leaning over the counter to pat Thomas on the arm just before he leaves.)

They exit the shop with Kenny's arm slung around his slightly shorter friend's neck as he gives him a gentle noogie, in spite of Butters' noisy complaints about the state of his hair.

The door swings shut behind them with a very final sort of *cla-clunk*.

In the stilted silence that follows, Tweek takes a moment to have the belated realization that he's just been left, entirely alone, with Thomas.

"Oh God, see me through this," he says under his breath, voice strained. Feels his right cheek begin to tic, and struggles to get his fingers to work as he counts out the separate pockets of change in the till.

Luckily though, Thomas has finished up wiping down the back bench and the coffee machine, and moves out from behind the till, towards the abandoned mop. It's hard not to watch him as he walks past - especially as his head is still low and his shoulders having been drooping since their confrontation that morning. In comparison to this time the previous day, Thomas looks plain miserable.

(It's hard not to feel overwhelmingly shit about himself, in light of that.)

Fighting the urge to fill the silence, Tweek continues counting, filling out the sheet that he's meant to and removing all the receipts they've collected over the course of the day. He's working on the job so
enthusiastically, in fact, that he finishes it a whole lot faster than he would usually. Done, he gathers up the paperwork and dumps it back inside the till drawer, not bothering to remove the excess money or to access the safe in the back of the shop – that's way too much pressure, when he's already keyed up. (What is there's a small detonator he's meant to unrig, or he accidentally makes the safe door jam shut? Whoever's on duty tomorrow can deal with it.)

Unfortunately, though, that leaves him with... nothing else to do, since the only job left is the mopping.

He makes the mistake of glancing over at Thomas again, sees the downturned face and spots a tic that has his head nodding almost imperceptibly to one side, and feels his chest tighten. Sucks in a painful breath that forces his lungs to press out against his constricting ribcage.

Before he can stop himself, he says, "I'm not – _eurgh_ – doing this because I'm angry at you, man. It's not out of spite." When Thomas continues dragging the mop across the floor in slow, listless sweeps, interspersed with the occasional muttered curse, Tweek's eyebrows furrow. "I just—that represents a really, really bad time for me, dude, a-and I—"

"I didn't love Craig, you know," says Thomas, cutting across him so suddenly that Tweek's words come to an abrupt halt. He twitches hard and grips at the counter, but keeps any involuntary shrieks under control. (Well, almost.) In front of him, Thomas seems totally unaware of his surroundings—just goes on staring at the mop as he works. "Not in the beginning. _Aw, shit._ Not for a long time. In fact, I didn't figure out I loved him until right at the end, when a— _fuck, assramer_— when you came along and handed me a bag full of your mementos, and a letter that I should've nnnnn— nasty, stupid shit—should've never gotten."

As the words sink in, Tweek feels his head spin. Feels his skin break out in a clammy sweat. Thomas stops moving; looks up to meet Tweek's eyes across the room, and his heart starts beating out a bloody tune in his chest at the hurt he finds there.

Thomas... he loves Craig. Tweek knew it, of course he did, but—

But _hearing_ it – hearing that's _he's_ somehow the reason for it – is bad.

"I love Craig because of you, Tweek," the older boy says, voice weak but even. "The same exact way I love you because of Craig."

Wait.

Tweek blinks.

Stares.

Rubs his eyes.

Makes a grating noise of distress in the back of his throat when the words still sit there, heavy, in the empty room. Fail to make sense even on the fourth review.

"_Aurgh_. W-what? What the fuck are you—"

"I—_fucking dumbass bastard_—I love you. Both of you." Between manic shaking and cheek convulsions, Tweek just about has time to notice that Thomas has turned a pretty dark pink, face crumpled in embarrassment. "O-or at least, I'm in love with the _idea_ of you two. Together. _Goddamnit_. As in... I don't _want_ to get in the way."
That's it. Thomas has cracked. That's the only logical explanation.

Tweek balls his hands into his hair and starts trying to rip it out his own head, like maybe that'll make this understandable to him. "AGH. A-are you insane? That— that makes no sense. Y-you're—you're fucking crazy, man." Stomps a foot and maybe starts hyperventilating a little when Thomas ducks his head and draws his shoulders up high. "What the f-fuck would anyone see in—in me? In me, being with Craig? That— that doesn't— aurgh."

"Aw, shit, fuckmeup. Tweek, anyone who heard Craig speak about you the way he did, would fall for you. You're— through Craig’s eyes, you're perfect."

No. This... this makes no sense.

The second he starts listing forwards into the counter, sucking at the air without drawing anything in, Tweek lets himself sink to the floor.

Fuck.

Anxiety attack.

Can't fucking see.

Heartbeat in ears, poundpoundpound.

Head between knees.

Count. Breathe in—

OhshitohGodnothingmakesenseanymore—

Breathe. In.

One, two, three, four.

Hold.

Why would anyone— he said Craig didn't do him justice— in love with—?

Hold.

... five, six, seven.

Release, one, two, three...

Tweek's fault, it's Tweek's fault. It's got to be—

Whimpers as he sucks in his second breath.

His eyes sting. Why does he always start crying when he's stressed these days? Why can't he just—

A hand presses down on his shoulder. Tries to flinch away but he's backed himself into a corner.


Wants to snap, fuck you, I know what to do. I know how to do this, fuck you, fuck you.

Gasps like a fish out of water.
Squeezes his eyes shut tighter.

Shivers and jerks when the grip on his arms moves to his hunched back, and begins moving in a slow, controlled circle.

A circle.

This whole fucking mess—

"Stop. Thinking."

Spasms.

"Start – holy shit – again."

In; one, two, three, four.

Heart; pound, pound, pound.

Warm palm against his back.

Familiar.

Hold to seven.

"Aw, shitting cocksucker. Fucking lobstershite."

Release to eight.

Again.

Focuses on the soothing weight of the hand on is back, on the sharp, burning tug of his fingers in his hair.

Again.

On Thomas' swearing, loud and close. On the press of his shoulder into the hard edge of one shelf.

Again.

On the clamor of his heartbeat slowing. On the ache in his chest, like he's bruised.

Again.

And again.

Until the world stops spinning and the press of fear seeps out through the soles of his shoes into the floorboards.

He comes back to himself by slow increments. Releases the death grip of his fists in his bangs until the knife-edge pain lessens to a dull throb. Feels the fine tremors running through him, the dampness of cold tears on his cheeks and thinks, okay, well, that got out of control pretty fucking quick.

Only when he feels like he isn't going to have the world spin away beneath him, does he lift his head, resting it on his raised knees and tilting to one side, so he can look at the older boy.

Thomas' brow is creased, and the set of his mouth is tight. As soon as their eyes meet, his gaze
skitters off to his lap. Still, he rubs Tweek's back – like he doesn't even realize he's doing it.

"Why—" Tweek clears his throat. "Why did you t-tell me that— *hrrng*— that Craig 'didn't do me justice' yesterday, i-if he made me sound 'perfect'?"

His workmate sighs, leaning back against the front of the dishwasher and stretching his long legs out despite the awkward angle. He still won't meet Tweek's eyes. "Part of me was expecting the real you to be – *shitinthewoods* – the sweet, quirky guy he always painted you as, as a kid. Cute and gentle. *Aw, cocklord.* Sometimes assertive. Mostly affectionate and a little... blonde." He smiles a small, wry smile that Tweek thinks should probably offend him, when paired with that last bit. Instead the younger boy just wipes the heel of his palm over his eyes as they continue to tear up. "A-and?" he says, when Thomas sits in silence.

"And you're *more* than that. You're loud and fiery and alive – way more than last time I saw you. *Bastard, shitting nn-nasty bastard.* You're... it's hard to describe. Like I said yesterday, I grew up listening to stories about you. *Fuck.*" Finally, he takes a peek at Tweek, the remains of his small smile falling away when he sees Tweek's face. His hand temporarily stills, somewhere between Tweek's shoulder blades; falters before it starts up again. "Seeing you in person is like seeing a character from my favorite story right there in front of me, living and breathing. Only— *aw, shit*— only I suddenly realized you're so m-much more three dimensional than I ever knew. No amount of Craig talking a-about you could've prepared me for – *cock* – the real deal."

That... okay, so Tweek tries his best to swim through that explanation, blurred eyes flickering from Thomas' face to the counter behind his honey-blonde head, and back again. Tweek gets what the older boy is saying on a basic sort of level, but... still. He can't help the flood of heat to his cheeks at the older boy claiming to— to *love* him.

(Has a brief, mad urge to name Butters some kind of prophet or oracle, because holy fucking shit, if *this* isn't totally out of the blue – if *this* isn't a twist – then Tweek's not sure what is.)

After some time spent jittering and trying not to hurl, the red faced boy finally finds his words. "*Nng.* I get loving Craig. I *get* that. H-he's handsome, a-and gentle, and he's con-considerate to the point of making me physically *sick* sometimes. Acts like I'm— *rrng*—like I'm breakable. B-but me? I'm ugly. S-stupid. A—*nn*—a twitchy freak."

They sit in silence after that statement, Tweek staring over Thomas' head and Thomas staring at Tweek's raised knees. Neither of them acknowledge the hand still rubbing the younger blonde's back, or the fact that the shop is so much colder now that the machines are switched off for the night – now that they've stopped billowing steam – and everyone else has gone home.

Behind the counter it's like a small, bizarre bubble of negative space. A hole in the universe. A hiccup where time and common sense are temporarily dislodged.

Down here it's just the two of them, two boys tucked away in the scent of burned coffee grounds and dish soap.

"The first time he told me about you," Thomas says at length, in a voice so low that Tweek has to shut his eyes to focus on it. (It has nothing to do with the cold and the tiredness lulling him into placidity with every rub of Thomas' palm against his back.) "He compared you to – *ff-fuck* – a guinea pig. *Aw, shit.* He said you squeak and shake when you're scared." A pause. "What's Craig's favorite animal?"

Tweek's stomach lurches. "This is— *urgh*— that's stupid."
"But what's his favorite animal?" Thomas repeats.

"A guinea pig."

"He told me that, back when you guys were in fourth grade. Godfuckingdamnit." Thomas hums in thought. "He kept up the secret about you two being in a fake relation— shit, stupid shit— a fake relationship for a year before he told me. Know what the only real reason he gave for sticking with it was?"

"What?" says Tweek, turning his face so he's saying the words into his knees. So his stupid, damp face is tucked down where Thomas can't see it.

"Tweek's dad stopped bothering him." Thomas says the words with a quiet sort of satisfaction that a person gets when proving someone else wrong. "He did it because of you. Asswipe— bastard. Because you asked him to."

If Tweek had more energy, he thinks that he might have bristled at the inadvertent suggestion that this huge fucking mess the two of them are in is down to him; instead he just curls into himself harder. "S— mrgh— so this is my fault?"

Thomas doesn't reply to that— just keeps rubbing Tweek's back and speaking in his low, steady voice. "He learned guitar for you. Ff-fuck. He saved up almost a whole year to— holy shit— buy you that set of watercolors you wanted. You know they cost almost a hundred dollars? He asked me to teach him about anxiety— cockslut, stupid spoiled whore— and depression so he could help you. He made me sit inside all day with him, just so he could— aspirate— make you a picture when you weren't well. The one with the— the collage of the dog." A huff of laughter. "It was awful."

Another lurch of his stomach— though this one comes out sideways, as a wet giggle. "I— rrgh— I got upset with him 'cause I thought i-it was meant to be a dead spider."

They laugh together at that, but it's quiet; choked. Fatigued.

Silence expands around them once again, infinite, before Thomas breaks it.

"Craig once spent a whole three hour hiking trip talking about— holy shitting hand grenades— about you. From the second we got out the car to— fuck— the second second we got back into it."

A surge of guilt races through Tweek, twisting around his insides like a meat hook. "Oh, God. Ergh. S-sorry... I'm sorry."

The hand stops, and the lack of movement has his head jerking upright, so he can see Thomas' big, brown eyes and creased brow, like he's confused. "What for? Aw, shit. I loved every minute of it. I wanted to hear. Cockslave. The way he spoke about you... he lit up."

Face scrunching up, Tweek shakes his head. The meat hook tugs. "Nngh. Why're you t-telling me all this?"

"Because you... you don't see. If he's anything like he was when— upyourass— we were younger, then you're missing things. Little things. Big things." Thomas pulls his hand back— finally— but that weird sense of separation Tweek feels from the outside world remains. He watches Thomas run his fingers through his hair. "Things that made me really, r-really mad at you. Aw, piece of shit." A snort. "Things that made me fall for the idea of you."

Distress forces its way out of Tweek's throat in a high, rasping whine. "Eurgh. Man, I don't— I still don't get it."
With a sigh, Thomas pulls himself upright, brushing off his jeans and looking down at Tweek in a way that says he's just barely holding off on disappointment. "Open your eyes, Tweek. Pay attention to what's— fuck it up— to what's right in front of you. What's been in front of you for eight damn years already." Steps back, holding out a hand to help him up.

The younger boy twitches, but accepts the offered help, mind whirring like an overheating computer.

As he's pulled up onto his feet by a strong, cool hand, he stumbles close enough to Thomas that their height difference is once again made painfully apparent. Steadied by a hand on his shoulder, Tweek looks up at the handsome older boy and struggles to think of anything to say in reply. His eyes sting and his brain feels as though it's just been through three rounds in a boxing ring.

Shuffles back a step and tugs free to wrap his arms around himself. Glances off at a stretch of the window, when a swirling flurry of falling snow makes him think of moving bodies in the gloom of dusk. He can't tell if he's shaking more from the cold or from weariness and shock.

(It's probably all of that. And low blood-sugar levels, too.)

Just once more, Thomas speaks up.

"The letter will help you – fuck – figure it out."

Tweek jerks back around, trying to find the same anger and panic he felt earlier. Mostly he just feels nauseous. "Mmrgh. I t-told you, I don't want—"

"And I'm telling you, I don't care. Cockfucking shithead." Now, Thomas really is glowering. "Either y-you take it, or I'll— I'll burn it.

"All of it."

Tweek's heart does a sickening jolt at the threat. At the quiet promise in Thomas' words. He feels the blood draining out of his face.

Realizes, a little belatedly, that maybe he does care what happens to his dried-out, shrivelled up heart.

(Well, shit.)

Chapter End Notes

oh god i hated writing this chapter. it would not comply. LOL weeps
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

WHEW OKAY SO i know i haven't replied to your comments from last chapter yet (ohhh my god, do i have a lot to say in reply to you guys! :O), but i couldn't resist posting this up. i was gonna do it tomorrow before going out, but i woke up at 3am and couldn't sleep and sooo yeah. this happened. i'm so stupidly excited to hear everyone's thoughts on this chapter!

(that said, beware of all the errors in this, until i am alive enough to check it over again. i wouldn't recommend 4am editing to anyone) :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They make it all the way to Thomas' bus stop before he palms the damn letter off onto Tweek. It takes more self-restraint than he realizes he has to reach out and take it from the older boy's outstretched hand, instead of just turning on his heels and running for the hills.

Their fingers brush as the envelope slips from one hand to the other, and Tweek avoids looking into Thomas' eyes as they do so. The revelation that his co-worker likes him in a romantic way is finally starting to sink in, and with it comes a myriad of uncomfortable feelings. He's never had the need to worry about hurting someone by turning them down before, so he's never really thought too long on the awful guilt and discomfort that it invokes on the person on the receiving end of a one-sided crush.

Well, great. Now he knows what it feels like, and he hates himself even more. This whole situation fucking sucks.

And then there's the fact that he doesn't understand half of what Thomas said in the shop, and he's confused about what kind of feelings Thomas actually has, since he's pretty sure being in love with two guys in a relationship and not wanting in with either of them is... well, Tweek doesn't understand it. He's only been in love with the one guy, and while he's never wanted or expected to end up with Craig, that's more because of his crippling self loathing (he's more than aware enough to recognize that), as well as that original, unwitting rejection.

He doubts he'll ever understand not feeling jealous or hurt at the thought of Craig being with someone else, the same way he's almost positive that Craig's the only person he'll ever feel this hung up over.

Thomas and his odd attraction to their relationship will, it would seem, remain a mystery to him. (But that's okay, because from the way that Thomas was talking back there before they sorted themselves out and left, Tweek is a blind, brainless fucking idiot anyway. God knows what he's been missing all along.)

"Y-you're a dick," says Tweek, brow drawn low and mouth set in a scowl as he withdraws his hand, crumpled paper in his grip. He twitches hard and finally looks up into Thomas' handsome face as the boy laughs a throaty sort of laugh.

With a flash of slightly crooked white teeth and a crinkle to his warm eyes that Tweek thinks he can finally place as affection – Jesus Christ – Thomas says instead, "Wanna share a – fucking nutsack –
smoke before you go home?"

Just as he's about to shake off the offer and step back, he freezes. Reconsiders. Narrows his eyes, and decides that no, actually, why the hell not? His weekend's already well and truly gone to shit. There's no point trying to salvage it now.

So he shoves the stupid letter roughly into his coat pocket (taking a weird sort of pleasure in Thomas' barely covered wince), and nods once, hard. "Okay, f-fine. Just as— nng— just so long as you tell me how you guys met.

Thomas blinks, caught off guard by the comment.

All that Tweek thinks is, good. If they spent years talking about him behind his back and gossiping like a couple of middle aged housewives about every little thing he did and said, then it's only fair he gets the chance to learn more, too. 'Swings and roundabouts,' or whatever the heck that saying is.

... By the time that he's stepping through his front door, it feels like the letter weighs as much as a brick, where it's been shoved into his pocket.

He replies to greetings from his parents with a shout that he's gonna be busy upstairs with a project.

(Which he's almost certain his mom understands means, "I'm miserable, so please leave me alone to wallow," and which his dad just seems to take at face value.)

The first thing that he does upon entering his room is throw his satchel down on the floor without even reaching for his cell, toe his damp shoes off into one of the piles of dirty clothing growing close to his door, and twitch his way over to his desk. Jacket still on and clumps of snowflakes melting in his hair, he sinks down into his desk chair and tugs the envelope from his pocket, holding it out before him in his badly trembling hands.

In the half an hour it's been in his care, it's gone from worn and well looked after, to scrunched up and lumpy.

(If that isn't some kind of ironic nod from the universe at how he messes up almost everything in his life – himself at the forefront of that list – then he doesn't know what is.)

Lets out a high, hysterical sort of giggle as he tugs up the flap and reaches inside. Withdraws the first thing that his hand settles on – which, actually—

He pauses. Blinks. Scrunched up his face in confusion, because originally there was only one sheet of paper in this, but now—

Now there are several.

Settling the envelope on the desk (the object inside of it makes a quiet clicking sound as it's set down), Tweek pulls his feet up onto the chair and unfolds the pages against his raised knees. His heart hammers violently into his ribcage, and he's shaking so hard all over, he thinks he might crumble into a thousand pieces.

Smoothing his palm over the open pages to flatten them out, he takes some equivalent of a deep breath – hard, when his lungs are trying to shrivel up and die in his chest cavity – and finally looks down.
It's not his writing. It's loopy and tilted and almost spidery, written in shiny black ink.

Breathless, he begins to read.

*Dear Tweek,*

*This is at least the fifth time that I've written out this letter over the course of the last few years and like every attempt before it... I'm not happy with the final result. As of the day I'm writing this, it's October. I've just turned nineteen.*

*I know that you probably don't care for much of what I've got to say - I definitely wouldn't if I were in your position - so I'll keep this as short as possible.*

*I've spent years with all of your belongings stashed away safely in my cupboard, gathering dust, and for the most part I leave them alone. As much as I feel like I know both you and Craig, the items you gave me mean very little to me. I don't know most of their origins and aside from feeling sentimental and protective about them because I know that they meant a lot to you, they're pretty uninformative.*

*But your letter and your final gift... that changed a lot for me. I don't know how much you know about that year or about my past with Craig by now, but because of your gift to me, I decided to end things between us. It was a glimpse into your mind and your relationship with Craig that I hadn't ever been able to see before and it felt like I was looking at something private. I didn't want the responsibility of looking after something so precious. I didn't deserve it. Several times I came close to throwing it all away, or sending it to Craig. But when I pulled it out and looked over everything again, I couldn't. It hurt me to even consider betraying your trust that way.*

*Now I value the contents of your letter more than maybe anything else I own. It's taught me about what love really is, and it helped me to grow up. At times you were my only friend. As much as I want to hoard these memories of yours close though, they aren't mine to keep.*

*They're yours. I want you to have them back.*

*But before you read the rest there's one last thing: as much of your heart as you put into your original letter and gift... no matter how many times I looked through them, they felt incomplete. I couldn't help but shake the thought that you left everything unfinished. And so I hope you don't mind, but I added everything that I could. For everything that you gave me when you were younger, I'm giving myself to you now too, as best as I can. Take it as me returning your heart (and your love) to its rightful owner.*

*I hope this helps in some way, shape or form.*

*Love, always,*

*Tommy xx*

For a long while after reading, Tweek stares blankly down at the page, unable to comprehend everything that he's just read.

So after a drawn out moment of brain-buzzing silence, he rereads it all. Feels his pounding heart lurch, and the living thing in his stomach twist and untwist itself as his eyes flicker from paragraph to paragraph.

There's something incredibly personal about this message - something poignant about the painstaking care taken to write out every word as neatly as possible, like even now he can feel Thomas writing and rewriting it, laboring over every word and every flick of his pen. At the thought of that - at the
thought of Thomas spending years constructing this letter, just to give back to Tweek... he feels his fondness swell, right alongside his self-hatred.

With a level of reverence he hasn't ever spared his own thoughts and feelings, he slides Thomas' page away from the others, and settles it down on the desk, beside the ruined envelope.

Next is something in short, blocky black letters that he would recognize just as quickly as his own. It's messier and more widely spaced than he's used to seeing, but it's unmistakeable.

To Tommy

I know I said I wouldn't be round for a few more weeks becuase we are going away to camp but I did'nt want to be gone for so long with out sending you any thing. (I wanted to get you a post card but we could'nt find any that Tweek liked and he said that I should just draw a picures in stead because it woud mean more even if its bad.)

Riting by hand is hard and I have'nt even started telling you a bout the holiday yet. Tweek says I've gotten lazy a bout riting and spelling sinse we do'nt do it much at school any more and I do'nt practice at home or read much, so its my own fault.

it is'nt snowy here! There is sun and we went swimming in this lake. Me and Tweek had coffee ice cream too (it was kinda gross but he smiled when I got it) and I even got got to go on this rope swing over the water even through he was scared. I did'nt let him fall ether.

We stayed up all night witch was'nt very fun but me and Tweek stayed in our own tent together. (His nose goes scrunchy when he's trying to sleep.) We spoke all night and then I fell a sleep in my pancakes.

Today we went on a hike and Tweek was really sick becuase he's scared of hights and he had a melt down. When he through up I wished I knew what to do. I felt so stupid. All I coud do was stroke his back like you showed me. I don't even know if it did anything. :(

any way Tweek's just lying down in the tent so I'm gonna go see if he's all right. I'll tell you a bout every thing else that happens wile I'm gone when I see you.

Love Craig x

p.s sinse I could'nt draw you any thing good I got you a present in stead. It's kinda crappy tho.

By the time that he finishes reading, the blonde boy feels like someone's hit him in the side of a head with a baseball bat. His fingers skate over the page of scribbles and splotches, and he figures out that this must have been the first trip their families they took together the summer that they were eleven.

Almost all of it is a blur to him. The ice cream, the lake, the tent... all gone. (He recalls the overwhelming surge of fear as he'd looked back down the steep hillside and wrapped his arms around the rough trunk of a sapling pine, shrieking and wailing himself into a stupor.)

Tweek pulls the papers close to his chest and curls his fingers around it, a hard lump rising in his throat. This is... this is precious in a way that makes him hurt. Young Craig, writing about not knowing how to cope with his anxiety attacks, and doing things for Tweek that he knows the other boy came to resent by the time Tweek fell for him. This little glimpse into the difficulties that Craig must have faced in dealing with Tweek makes him feel awful for his best friend. It's hard enough being stuck inside his head when he's in a bad place - wonders for the first time ever what it's like as an outsider looking in, with no idea what's gone wrong, or how to fix it...
Fighting down the sting of tears (just when he thinks he's cried himself, there always seem to be more), he holds the letter close until the tightness around his heart eases. Just like Thomas' letter, he carefully peels it away from the others, and sets it down on the desk.

At the next, he feels his face redden, and then crumple into an miserable frown. There's no mistaking the squashed, sloppily coloured-in heart on the front of the handmade card, or the neat, blocky text inside, even though a huge, ugly stain has turned the paper brittle and rippled, the ink bleeding out in places. Everything is stained an ugly, muddy brown.

It's a Valentine's Day card.

Tommy,

Another year gone and I guess this is as real as it gets for either of us, huh?

Still, if you'll be my Valentine's again this year (since neither of us can have that one special person), then I'd be honored. I don't deserve to have you as a friend, after every thing.

Even though I'm a piece of shit and I don't ever do anything right (not even this), I love you man. You make every damn rejection worth while and you make every failure a little easier to live with.

Be my Valentine?

Craig xxx

p.s. You should feel honored too. Tweek nocked his coffee all over my desk, which is why it's all smudged and brown. I thought you'd like the personal touch, in stead of me making you a new one.

;)  

He knows it's childish of him, but this one he doesn't bother to reread - shoves it away from him like he's been burned, and glares at the ugly fucking thing. It sits there, scrunched and discolored, mocking him. Looking at the writing inside, Tweek would guess that this was one of Craig and Tommy's last Valentine's Days together, before they stopped talking. Most likely, the Valentine's Day directly before Tweek and Craig had their fallout, since he mentions that Tweek is there.

(To think that this was lying there on Craig's desk, out in the open, right under Tweek's stupid goddamn nose. 'Blind' barely even begins to cover what a fucking imbecile he's been all these years.)

Clenching his jaw against the spasms of the muscles in his cheek, he takes a long moment to wallow in his hurt.

So Tommy got Valentine's Day cards from Craig more than once, did he? He got awful (perfect) hand drawn pictures and long messages. He got in-jokes and honesty.

And Tweek? Every year until they were fourteen, he got a shitty, store bought card with short, bland messages about three days late. He got out of date chocolates if he was lucky, and a bunch of drooping dandelions from Craig's back yard if he wasn't.

But at least he got cards, back then. The second that he'd actually wanted to receive one, Craig had stopped - like he was worried that just because Tweek was gay, he might take a fake Valentine's Day card the wrong way, and think that they had something more than a convenient, easy alternative to real feelings.

Running his hands over his face, he has to tell himself to stop. Thinks of what Thomas told him - he's
looking at these things without actually seeing the bigger picture. He's only got one side of the story and, fuck, he already knows how unreliable his own head is. So he's got to stop. Stop, and think, and just take this slow.

Don't, he tells himself as he reaches out for the card a second time. Don't jump to any conclusions or get butthurt and angsty over things that you clearly aren't perceiving right. Just... look again. Look again.

Rereads the letter.

'I guess this is as real as it gets for either of us.'

'That one special person.'

'You make every damn rejection worth while.'

Screws his face up and knocks his head lightly against the padded back of the chair. (Stops as soon as he realizes what he's doing.)

Is this... is this alluding to Craig liking someone other than Tommy, then? Is this him pining after another damn boy? Is there someone else Tweek needs to know about Craig getting hurt by in the past? Jesus Christ, at this point he's gonna have to start writing down a list, because there's no way he'll remember all the different damn people Craig was sneaking around with behind his back. Who would've thought that quiet, calm Craig Tucker would ever have had so many secrets?

How many double lives can one boy lead? Shit.

(Stifles a hysterical bubble of giggles against one palm, until his rolling stomach settles back down.)

Ignoring the urge he has to smack whoever rejected younger-Craig upside the head (and then also Craig for being such a disloyal bastard, even if they were only playing pretend at the time), he settles the drooping card back down on top of the others, a lot more gently than previously.

Inhales long and slow, before looking down at the last letter. The one he'd expected to find all along.

His writing is awful - indecipherable, in some places - and cramped so tight into the single sheet of paper that Tweek wonders how the hell Thomas got anything from this. Even Tweek knows he's going to struggle.

Thomas,

Or I don't know, would calling you Tommy be better? It doesn't feel better. It doesn't feel worse at this point either. Not much could, I don't think. Mostly I just feel tired right down into my bones. I think I must of aged a life time in this one school year, Tommy. I started off fourteen and kind of a mess, and I've ended up fifteen and dead inside. Nothing has gone right. Everything is broken. I just keep fucking up. I don't know why I'm telling you all this but I hope you don't mind. No, that's a lie. I think I need someone (anyone) to know. And I figure that since Craig loves you so much you've got to be a good person. Right? Well, whatever. You don't actually have a choice in the matter.

You know by now that I love the boy your dating, I expect. Unless Craig's been lying to you too. I wouldn't actually put that past him at this point. Anyway, I'm getting sidetracked. What I meant to say was that I overheard him talking about us (you and me, I mean) at the beginning of this year. He loves you, he really really loves you, Tommy. With all of his heart. Me? Not so much. He called me a lot of names that hurt and a lot of things that stuck there and made my brain feel like it was fucking rotting. The worst part was he has no idea I even heard it and now I can't go near him without hearing it all over again inside my head, until I can't hear anything else at all. All I wanted was to be
his friend and all I was doing was making him angrier at me. Life is a cruel, fickle bitch isn't she? Either way, hearing that conversation didn't help. I couldn't trust anything out of his mouth afterwards and even though we're still somehow tricking people into thinking we're together, I think that's as much because our friends are helping us too. They don't know we're fake of course (apart from Clyde but he's just another one who hates me anyway) but they must know something is up. They haven't asked yet. They're all leaving us alone which is great for me. All I want is to be alone these days. My favorite place in the world is the bathroom in my house because there's a lock on the door and when I run the taps loud enough it drowns out the entire world. You know, sometimes I just stare into the mirror at the person on the other side and all I see are these blobs that someone forgot to put together right. Like God rummaged through the trash and stuck all the leftover bits on one face. I could spend hours re-arranging that Picasso shit, trying to make it look normal. And then I blink and it suddenly slots together into this ugly mess I recognize, and I think 'shit, I hate myself just as much as every one else does'. Except I'm not sure I do, because like I think I already said: I don't feel anything much anymore.

I'm sorry. I keep getting distracted. It's hard to think sometimes. (I used to think that my ADD made things hard to concentrate on, but now looking back it seems so easy). So anyway, a month or so ago when all the guys were getting together I didn't have a choice but to join in. Craig was there, and it was easier to focus that day because everything was sharper for once (sometimes being a paranoid shit makes everything super clear) and while he was off doing something with the others, I took his phone. And I'm sorry Tommy, but I read your messages. A lot of them. Until my head felt like it was going to burst. And I stole your number so I could talk to you too. It wasn't right of me but I need some sort of closure. This is all too much, and I need to get rid of it before I fucking drown, or rot, or explode. I just want to stop my heart breaking all my ribs every time he comes knocking on my front door, and I sit up here and hear my mom tell him I'm busy or I'm sleeping. I just want to stop pressing my face through the gap in the curtains to watch him when he eventually gives up and leaves. I don't want to sit next to him at lunch and know he's talking to me but not be able to hear, because all I can think is 'I want to go. I don't want to be here. I want him and I can't have him. I hate him. I love him. Is this what hell feels like?'.

But Tommy, every time he comes home from seeing you (because I know that's what he's doing) he looks better. He looks happier. For a few days he puts up with everything around him better, and I want that to be his always. I want him to be happy all the time, like he is when he's with you. Maybe then I could feel something. Maybe I'd even wake up again. So have him and look after him. Please. Please, please look after him. Craig is so special, because even though he hates me he makes me feel almost like he cares, right when I'm at my worst, and he's been doing that for years. Even though he hates me and gets nothing back from being around me, he does it anyway. He's a good person, and I want someone to love him back the way he deserves. He should have all the happiness in the world, that I couldn't ever give him.

I think that is why it should be you Tommy. He keeps you like a secret because he wants you to himself. He tells you about everything in his texts. He doesn't have to try and fix you, because you help him too. I've seen it. And that's why I'm writing to you. That's why I'm gonna ask you to meet up. I'm giving you everything that I care about even a little bit. Look after it. It may seem small and insignificant on the surface, but inside, it's all the memories I could find. It's my heart, Tommy. Have it, and look after it. It's yours.

Tweek Tweak.

In the aftermath of the letter, Tweek stares blankly at his wall. Comes back to himself by slow increments.

Jesus fucking Christ. Tweek... doesn't remember most of this.

What he can recall is that it took him the better part of a week to write it all out, because every time he sat down to work on it, he started hyperventilating, or banging his head on the desk, or digging
his fingers into his thighs because he couldn't concentrate. Half the time he was out of it altogether—off in a Dissociative episode so bad, he sometimes wondered if he'd dreamed up his real life.

The only part that he remembers about this with any level of clarity is the last paragraph— that image of taking out his bloody, beating heart and pressing it into a white envelope had stuck with him for months afterwards. Even now as he rereads it for the first time since he's been himself again, his chest feels like it's been hollowed out.

It kind of puts in perspective for him just how much better he's gotten, in the intervening years—which isn't saying much, since he's been such a damn wreck recently.

He was a mess.

This time, he can't bring himself to reread the sheet at all. It's raw and too personal, and he's half afraid that he'll be sucked right back into that headspace again.

With no small sense of weariness, he drops his letter down on top of the others, and the reaches for the envelope. His hand hovers over the crumpled paper, hesitating—

Before he finally gives in. Pulls it in towards him, onto his lap.

Doesn't have to look inside to know what's sat waiting for him, but does just that anyway.

Wriggling his fingers below the flap, they stumble across the small, cold rectangular object. He withdraws it.

Blotchy, hand-painted green and blue stripes catch the light from his overhead lamp and glint. He stares at the little metal oblong, every hair standing on end and every minute tremor in his hand pronounced with the glitter thrown from the surface. Turns it over slowly, and feels humiliation rise through him, staining his face pink. There on the underside, 'subtly' hidden, is a little heart-shaped sticker, peeling along one of the edges.

And there it is... his old USB stick. His 'heart'.

(Oh God, how much more clichéd could fifteen-year-old Tweek be?)

After a while spent running his fingertip over the raised, bubbled edges of the paint, he flips open the cap at one end up and looks down at the metal connector. The paint around the edges is chipped, as if it's been used several times over the intervening years, but it's otherwise undamaged. His pulse rocks in his ears as he looks to his laptop, abandoned haphazardly off to one side of his cluttered desk.

_Do it_, whispers a part of him hungry for punishment and pain. A part of him that revels in the acute memories of his misery, and the idea of inflicting more.

His fingers convulse tighter around the USB, and his breathing hitches as he pushes out of his seat.

_No._

_Look_, it says, a needy croon.

One faltering step takes him back, _away_ from the temptation. The metal is growing warm in his clammy hand, and he wonders if it's just his imagination that it's _searing into him_. Tears his eyes away from his laptop, and opens his palm to stare down at his small, peeling heart and the badly painted stripes.
He can’t. He knows what’s in there, even if he can’t remember most of it, and it terrifies him. Treasuring fuzzy memories and being hurt that they were shared without his consent is one thing, but seeing tangible proof - of a hundred events he’s forgotten; a thousand conversations, and songs, and poems; files full of photographs and thoughts and feelings - and not all of them his own...

That's a whole different matter.

He’ll look, he tells himself. He will. He just has to calm himself down, first.

Snapping the cap back into place, he shoves the USB into the pocket of his uncomfortably tight jeans, and leaves the room.

Procrastinating over whether or not to boot up the USB leads him on a weird route through the house, trailing down to the kitchen and straight past his dad (who, thankfully, is too absorbed in whatever show he's watching to harass his son). He shakes off the offer of a full meal, even though he hasn't eaten since breakfast, instead picking through the fridge for leftovers. Nothing inside appeals to his tense, churned up stomach, but he knows he shouldn't wait until tomorrow to eat more.

It's only after about ten minutes of failed hunting that his mind conjures up something that sounds vaguely edible.

"Mom, d'we have ice cream?" he calls quietly from where he's rifling through the freezer, shoving boxes of ready meals and bags of frozen vegetables out of the way.

From her position at the stove, where she's frying up a couple sides of steak, Mrs Tweak hums in thought. "If we do, it'll be right under the shelf with the spare milk, pumpkin. On the left." Tweek follows her instructions, and begins digging with a vengeance, pulling his mom's favorite frozen yogurt out of the way and trying not to question why they've gotten so many packets of store bought waffles when his mom doesn't ever let them eat anything that isn't freshly made. As if on cue, she says, "Now Tweek, hon, don't you think you ought to have something more substantial? You're still a growing boy..."

With a grunt and a tug of a promisingly shaped carton, he says, "Eurgh. I think I'll hurl if I try eating anything else right n-now." Tugs said carton free with sore, throbbing fingers, and feels his cheek tic in place of a satisfied grin, as he peers down at the pot of Häagen-Dazs, Sweet Cream Coffee Caramel.

Score.

(He's too drained to muster up any kind of positive response, so settles for shoving everything else back into the shelving and heaving the door shut with a thump behind him.)

After retrieving a spoon from the draw and only half-heartedly attempting to swat away his mom when she swoops in for a concerned kiss on his forehead, he leaves the room. Practically drags himself over to the couch, and slumps down beside his wide-eyed dad.

Prizing the lid off of the top and digging straight into the carton, he blanks his dad and furrows his brows at the hardened dessert. (Tries not to think about how long this pot's been sat in the freezer untouched, for it to have fossilized like this.)

"So, how was it today, son?" his dad asks, with the kind of quiet that belies eagerness possibly a
lecture or two. He mutes whatever shit he's streaming on the TV and shifts around like he's trying to draw more attention to his propped up leg.

"Shit," Tweek says, with a distinct lack of interest in any kind of conversation. He doesn't speak to his dad usually, unless he really wants to feel bad about his life. Turns out that if he had to choose between making conversation with his biggest critic and looking through all of his past memories, he'd choose the critic. What that says about him as a person, he doesn't know. Keeps chipping away at the cream and brown swirls of ice cream.

A loud sniff draws Tweek's attention away from his current task, just long enough to shoot his dad a scowl. "It's that new barista, isn't it? The spazz—"

"No," says Tweek, snapping to Tommy's-- to Thomas' defence. "Though yeah, it would've helped if you'd actually given him some form of fucking training, instead of— of dumping the g-goddamn job and pressure on me, you dick."

It would seem that Richard is so thrown by Tweek actually saying more than two words in his presence, that he has no comment at all. He just sort of gapes like a landed fish. The dumbstruck look and the silence bolsters Tweek so much, in fact, that he doesn't stop there.

"Aurgh. A-and while we're at it, if you call me, or Thomas, or anyone 'spazz' where I can hear you again, I swear to god, the fact that you're my dad won't stop me kicking the shit out of you. I'm sick of being made to f-feel like an invalid just because you lack any kind of common fucking decency."

Richard Tweak seems, briefly, reanimated. "Now, son, there's nothing wrong with the word—"

Tweek spins, wielding the creamy spoon in his dad's face. "Don't. Tempt. Me. Don't do it, dad. Because I could really do with blowing some steam right now."

There must be such a level of batshit crazy in Tweek's face-scunching glower that it startles his dad into silence, and makes that rarely heard voice living somewhere far off in Richard Tweak's brain go, 'Okay, yeah, this is maybe a stupid idea,' because his face transforms into a constipated grimace. He turns most of his attention back to the TV, even though it's still muted.

Knowing that the quiet reprieve can only last so long (and taking his small victories where he can get them), Tweek prizes himself up out of the couch cushions and skulks towards the stairs, rock hard carton of Häagen-Dazs freezing one hand, and spoon brandished in the other. He knows that if he turns, he'll see his mom in the kitchen doorway, watching the interaction with worry, so he doesn't look. He loves his mom more than almost anyone in the world, but her loyalty to his dad in the face of everything stupid and hurtful he does has always wounded something small and vulnerable in Tweek – that childlike part of him that makes him desperately want to believe that he's worth something in his mom's eyes, if no one else's.

He stomps up the stairs, and hesitates on the landing, losing his momentum.

Turns towards the spare room, and sinks down on the unmade spare bed, in much the same position that he'd sat here the night before. The only light in the room is from the glare of the lamp on the landing, stretching out long and bright from the wide-open doorway and into the gloom.

This weekend feels like it's dragged on forever, one endless shock and revelation after another, until he doesn't know where to go or what to feel next. All he knows is that he's never prayed for Monday to come so hard before. Not even on the weekends Craig used to go away to Denver.
Somewhere in the midst of his acute misery, he starts stabbing at his ice cream again, and finally lever a long, thin shard from the top. Bringing it to his mouth, he stares blankly at the front of the closet, mind turning over the events of the day as sweet caramel and bitter coffee clash and melt together in a cold burst against his tongue. It's way too sugary for his usual tastes (which is probably why it was left to harden like cement in the bottom of the drawer for God knows how many years), but he continues to work the edge of his spoon into the slowly softening sides.

Craig hadn't liked his coffee ice cream. He never knew that. Does he like coffee at all? Has it always been a lie? Would he like this? Tweek brings another small lump to his lips...

("Y'still smell like you. Taste the same, too, like... like caramel. Fucking delicious. How is that fair?")

Feels his face burning and his stomach flipping at the memory of Craig's mouth on his neck and his hand against Tweek's stomach.

The last few days really have been all different levels of fucked up, haven't they?

As if eager to draw out his suffering for as long as possible, he sits there and keeps on picking.

...Eventually – more than an hour later – he returns to his room, feeling sufficiently sick and restless. Knowing that there's only so long he'll be able to hold out before he has a damn aneurism from sheer, vein-throbbing anxiety, he sets the well-attacked carton on a free corner of his nightstand and retrieves his laptop.

Curling up against the headboard and twitching so hard he has to try the password three times over just to get it right, he struggles to draw the USB from his pocket. Once in hand, he flips the cap up, presses the metal connector into the port of the side of his MacBook and waits for it to register, before opening it in finder.

Watches as, before his eyes, a hundred meticulously ordered files pop into being on the screen.

The very first (and oldest) is labelled 'Tweek's Journal no.1 (10y/o)'.

Tongue sore and mouth tacky from the sugar, he clicks.

Chapter End Notes

//tap dances down the stairs to get some breakfast
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

I HAVE TO LEAVE FOR WORK IN 10 MINUTES AND I'M NOT READY AT ALL BC I COULDN'T STOP WORKING ON THIS AHAHAHAHAH WEEPS

(please forgive all the mistakes) :'DD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The folder is... interesting.

Everything inside is dated and tagged, in a perfectly neat order. But it’s no longer one huge document, like it used to be. Thomas must have sorted it all into months, and then added the scanned excerpts of his paper-written journal to the correct days. (Young Tweek had kept several different diaries in several different places around the house, including on his laptop and his cell, so as to be sure that no one person could find out all of his secrets. It had seemed entirely reasonable at the time. Fucking... paranoia, man.)

To save space, Thomas had compressed every individual document, which is probably why the poor, tiny USB can hold such a huge amount. With an illogical rush of fear that the little thing might die on him, Tweek copies the first month onto his MacBook, before unzipping and opening it.

Starts to read.

Thirty-one different days with thirty-one different moods and dramas. This first document dates back to before he and Craig were dating – to the New Year. Most of the information is sparse, and most of the words are written in solid blocks of capitals, like his brain couldn’t compute normal levels of emotions.

January 7
MOM MADE ME PANCAKES EVEN THOUHIG IM ILL ABD IATE THEM BUT I ATE TOO MUCHAND NOW FIM BEIGN SICK ADN I CANT GO TO SCHOOL WHST IF I CHOKE ON MY VONIT AND I DIE BECUASE NOONE FINDS ME MOM WONT FIND MEOLL BE ALONE ID ONT WANNA DIE!!!!!!

January 19
CARTMAN SPIT ON ME I GOT SOIT ON MY HAIR IM FONNA GET A DUSEADE OHGODHOGODOHGO!! !!!!!!

January 25
JESUD CHRIST THE CQNCCELLED TERRANCE AN DPHILLIP NIW WHATLL I DO ALL AFTERNOON?!?!?!??

Occasionally (though rarely) there are calmer days. Maybe two or three in that entire first month.

One, in particular, stands out.

January 28
Me and the guys went to Starks Pond today. It was just me and Token and Clyde and Craig. It was
nice, because there was nothing scary going on and I had my coffee. I almost dropped it but Craig caught it. He's got really steady hands and even though he doesn't smile I'm not scared of him. He sometimes gets loud and angry but not with me. Not really with Any of our group (Clyde or Token I mean) I don't think. Being his friend is good. He even picked this one dandelion that was out alive even in all the snow somehow and gave it to me which I didn't get because that's a little weird but that's okay. I'm a little weird too so we make good friends. It's on my window sill in a cup of water and the sun shine.

He blinks. Backtracks a little, just to make sure he hadn't read that wrong.

A dandelion.

Ten-year-old Craig gave him a dandelion? What is his damn obsession with them? And what the hell was with him giving them to Tweek all the time when they were kids?

Still, he can't help but notice how almost the entire entry is about Craig. They hadn't been particularly close prior to 'dating', but they had been in their own, smaller group. Tweek can't remember ever being particularly invested in the other boy before their agreement, but... this is kinda cute. Perhaps they would have become closer friends as they grew up, whether they were forced to date or not?

(He knows that's probably wishful thinking, but it's okay. He's okay with it. He hasn't felt much of anything positive lately, so it makes a nice change.)

As he finishes that first document, he pauses. Bites at the inside of his cheek. Places his hand over his heart and realizes that its frantic escape attempts must have slowed to a much calmer rhythm at some point while reading.

This... isn't so bad.

So he moves on to February.

(Much of the same. Indecipherable scribbles, aggressive crossings out and smudged ink on the scanned pages. On the typed entries, Caps Lock. So many exclamation points and question marks that he thinks he can almost feel his IQ lowering as he reads.)

He clicks on to March.

Pauses on a scanned-in exert.

March fourteenth has only four words, carefully written out, and then a crayon doodle taking up the rest of the space. The sentence reads: 'Craig has a dimple.'

The picture is of a wide, smiling face with a pronounced pink dot on one side of it's face. The chullo hat drawn on top of his head is unmistakable. Big, round eyes are scribbled in blue and grey, and he's got a long, pink sausage in place of a nose.

There's no context, no story behind it. Just a big, badly drawn face the shape of a potato, painstakingly colored in.

Tweek's fingers spasm on his lap, like he wants to reach out and hold onto the original page.

(But he burned all of the mementos that he didn't give to Thomas. This picture is long gone.)

So he tears his eyes away and moves on. Through April, and more ridiculous adventures. More stress and fear. Starts on May, and only rarely can he make any sense out of the entries.
And then...

And then, midway through May, he stops. His stomach flips.

May 12th

OH GOD OH SWEET JEDUD THE ASIANGIR LS ARE DRAWING ME AMD CRAIG TOGETHER LIKETO GETHER TOGETHER! WHAT THE FUCK WHATTHE FUCK IM NOT GAY! THEN PCPRINCILAL MADE IS GO RO HIS OFFICE AND TALEKD TO US ABOUT CONSETNAND W=MADE ME ASK TI TOICH CRAGIS PRNIS AMD IT AMDE ME SO! IBG4PRFNUN DNPI JN FR JDEN[ JDE PJE I HATE HIM U HATE THW GILRS I HATE THW NJFIBQJUNQJNPNI!

Fuck, he remembers that day almost crystal clear.

In fact, he remembers a *lot* of the following week, he realizes as he reads. Their fight in the corridor at school, his dad telling him for the first time Tweek can remember that he was proud of him, Craig approaching him with his plan to 'break up', pulling it off in front of the whole school, and the fallout from it afterwards. All of it is fed back to him in bursts and spikes of emotions, ranging from debilitating anger, to brain melting relief. All capitals, all full of spelling mistakes.

That is, right up until they aren't.

May 20

*Im* going to go to Craig's today and ask him to take me back. He beleived in me and he made me beleive in me too. It was good when we were pretending to go out. Peeple smiled at me. Dad was proud. Now every one just looks sad. Dad cries alot. Mom keeps trying to give me hugs. I think it woudnt of been so bad after all, to be with Craig. Maybe he'll think so too?

... he didnt. Craig didnt want me... i dobt know why bit i wan tto cry. i don't WANT to go be gayw ith any one else.

There's a drawing from Paint of what Tweek can only assume is supposed to be him, sat down with his arms around his legs, and a huge cartoon frown. One big, raindrop shaped tear hangs from one eye.

While he's certain that at the time it was a very emotional picture, helping him vent his hurt, he can't help but look down at it and find it sort of amusing. Especially since the very next entry is the total opposite mood. The font has been colored in like a rather blocky rainbow.

★☆May 21☆★

GEUSS WHAT HWAT! CRAIG SAID WE COULD JEEP PRETENDING LIJE WE AR3 GOING TOUT! he found me in town and he held my hand and my stmach did thees spins i was so happy. I went to his and Craig played his game and iwtached and even though loads of the wierdos were looking through the windowa i us i didn't sit next to him becuase of them. i did it becuase talkig to Craig made me happy and i could think more clear. I didn't ant to go home, not even for dinner.

After that, there's a significant change. Tweek reads on as the entries get longer, more detailed, less distressed. His good days are marked by Craig's appearances, by his presence and his rare smiles.

"He invited me to stay the week end and I selpt in his bED WITH HIM. I SAID wasnt that wierd but he said it was fien becuase his parents didn't care and we're menat to be boyfreinds any way," says May twenty-ninth Tweek.
'I think I wanna write him a song about us being friends even though I think I'll be embarrassed,' June tenth Tweek admits, before running through all the possible rhymes he could use, and then breaking down into a vivid list off all the ways this could backfire on him, if he were to show it to Craig.

'Craig snores like Stripe,' declares July seventh Tweek in light blue ink, decorated by doodles of a guinea pig. 'And he falls asleep so quick he's gotta be a robot.'

The further through the months he gets, the deeper he's sucked in.

Through all of their Superhero drama (and subsequent fallout), their school rivalries, that one time half the town was blown up by a rogue missile, all the times Tweek freaks out and crashes, falls into slumps and almost tears his hair out. All the times he writes about Craig being right here beside him, sometimes frustrated, always supportive. Always trying his best to help.

(and he does help, he does. Tweek can spot it in the growing moments of lucidity, in the happiness outweighing the manic paranoia.)

And as he reads, time flickers out into a distant concern for him.

Around the end of July, the lights click off in the hallway beyond his door, and the street lamps glow only a dull orange on the street below his window, plunging the world beyond his bedroom into darkness.

His eyes ache, and when he begins to shiver from the frigid chill in the air as opposed to his natural jitters, he scrambles beneath the covers, propping the laptop up against the headboard and rolling onto his belly. He buries his nose into his bunched up pillow, and doesn't bother to pretend he's not inhaling deeper at the rush of citrus and smoke Craig left there the night before.

With the blankets cocooning him and the screen of his MacBook lit up with the pages of his childhood diary, Tweek loses himself.

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July 27

Thats IT THATS IT WE ARE DED OH JESUS FUCKING TAPDANCING CHRIST THERE IS NO WAY WE SHOUD OF BEEN ABLE TO LIVE THROUGH ALL THIS WEEK IT HAS TO BE A CONSPIRACY I MEAN I DONT KNOW HOW ELSE WEWOUD OF DONE IT. mom made us go to the theater with her anfd there was a this hole deal aboutunbeign quiet while the show was on but i just new i coudnt and thenCraig knew too so he tookme out side to breathe and then we got a callfrom Cartmanthat stupid peace of shit and he-HESAID WE HAD TO DO A PLAN A WHOLE MUSICAL SINCE I DID IT WITH MY 'PUT IT DOWN" SONG AND ALSO COS WE ARE GAY. WHY IS THAT A REASON? THAT IS WAY TOO MUCH PRESSURE I THINK O ALLMOST DIED. BUT CRAig got me feeling better because he lets me just TALK and so i sorted out my feeligns but that didnt help all that much BECUASE WE ARE STILL GAY SO THAT MAKES IS GOOD AT CREATIF SHIT. LIEK ITS OUR FALT HE GOT INTROUBLE WITH THE GIRLS AGIN AND SO IT WAS OUR JOB TO BAIL ALL THE GUYS OUY. I SWEAR TO GODS LEFT NIPPLE I WISH I DIDNR HAVE TO BE IN THIS SHITTYBACKWARDS TOWN! I WISH ME ANDCRAIG COULD RUN WAAY TOGETHER!

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August 13

Craig went away to his Grans AGAIN i and I had to go with Clyde and Token toplay basketball but
I'm not good at that. I wanna watch Red Racer and just be inside playing. Not outside with doing guy stuff. I got sweaty and that's gross, everyone knows there's germs outside that can't!

Craig called. He'll be home tomorrow. I can't wait to see him. I finished my song for him and I want to show him but I'm still scared. He won't laugh. Craig likes my singing I think. I hope he likes my writing too. I'm gonna make him go out to the woods with me first so we can play space explorers by our selves again. Craig likes that game. And I'll show him my drawings too. He can climb the trees and I can find him dandelions for Stripe. We'll watch the sunset and we won't get lost because Craig knows how to get home from anywhere. But I think even getting lost would be fine if Craig was there because then we could look at the stars. Craig knows a lot about the stars. He has lost of stories about them.

I miss him. I can't wait for tomorrow and no more stupid games of horse!❤

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**August 25**

I showed Craig his song I wrote him and he told me we're best friends. He wouldn't stop hugging me. It was really embarrassing because when he finally did he made me sing it again. Then he made me teach it to him! Then he sang it to me. He hugged me a lot today. I think it was the best day EVER! I don't want today to ever end.

---

**September 16**

Some of the girls are writing stories about us now. Kenny is too. He wrote a really gross one and got put in a hole week of detention when Mrs Nesbit found it. I didn't read it though because Craig got really really upset at it. He hit Kenny after he found out but Kenny didn't hit him back. I didn't know about the story till after I got mad at Craig and helped Kenny out. Craig wouldn't talk to me all the way home until I held his hand and asked if I could show him my pottery.

---

**September 29**

Craig said that he really likes me when I gave him his birthday present, which I think makes us super best friends like Stan and Kyle are.

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Somewhere in the beginning of October, maybe an entry or two from his birthday, Tweek's swirling thoughts drift off, his bedroom light still on and his lemon-scented pillow bunched up beneath his cheek.

He dreams of running through the forest with Craig at his side, browns and reds and yellows and greens of autumn leaves drifting down around them, and the pale, snowbound sky peaking through the holes left around the branches.

Their clothes stick to them in a film of glittering ice that burns them up and down their driving limbs, but they whoop and sing to the sky as they go, handfuls of dandelion fuzz and charred, torn up pages scattering like a trail of breadcrumbs in their wake.

Neither of them look back.

...
Waking up with a bizarre itch nestled into the base of his skull, Tweek lays in a tangle of confusion and headache for all of two heartbeats before his body forces him up.

It's Monday. It's— stabs at his laptop trackpad until the screen lights up— it's six o'clock. Fuck.

(That's practically a lie in. No wonder he feels out of sorts.)

With the single-minded rush of a boy possessed, the wild haired teen rockets out of his bed and scrambles through the clothes gathered in rumpled molehills across his bedroom floor. He digs out a mint green tee with the quote, 'i don't have a nervous system; i am a nervous system,' on the front. Settles on it with a scrunch of his nose when the sniff test proves to him that it's safe, and then manages to find a pair of soft, black sweatpants he usually wears as pajamas.

Struggling through his morning routine at triple the normal speed despite there being no real need to hurry, he dresses, washes his face (foregoes shaving yet again because, really, what even is facial hair?), brushes his teeth and throws himself down the stairs.

He wolfs down the hot oatmeal his mom sets in front of him and even manages to finish the lot. They make no conversation – as per usual – and after throwing back his third coffee, Tweek gets up and races back to his room. Does his best not to freak out when he spots that the melted, oozing pot of ice cream he left on his nightstand has leaked a puddle of creamy brown goop all over everything.

Unsurprisingly, cleaning that shit up takes out a nice portion of his usual Monday panic, and he's so caught up in fact, that he doesn't get a chance to glance over at the letters of the USB, or even at his cell – which has probably died over the course of the night. (Not like he'd know, since it goes untouched.)

After scrabbling for his books, panicking over his unfinished Art class homework and then falling into School Morning Apathy ('cause, seriously, what could that shrivelled up bag gonna do to him that he hasn't already done to himself?), he grabs at a grey jacket, and then goes reaching for one of his scarves on impulse. Pauses, finger twitching and cheeks hot, when he thinks of Craig's past reactions to seeing his hickeys.

Would it be so wrong to leave it uncovered, if he's trying to... figure things out? Maybe it'll give him more... more hints? More clues?

(Okay, so that might be reaching just a little, but still. He wants to go without.)

In the end, he compromises by bundling up a ratty black scarf and shoving it into his already heavy satchel.

Leaves the house five minutes early just because he wants to get on the bus. Wants to see Craig.

(Has a million questions popping up in his head, clamoring for his attention. He shakes under the intensity of his need to ask them. To find out their answers.)

It takes what feels like a small eternity for the bus to arrive at the snowy, frozen stop, and Tweek clambers aboard with an enthusiasm only slightly dimmed by his usual fear of their homicidal looking bus driver and his groaning metal death trap.

Making his way down the isle, he can't help the bubble of energy that grows the second he spots Craig sat in their usual seats. The second the other boy sees him, Craig swings his legs out of the way to let him pass, and summons up the most pathetic attempt at a smile ever.

Tweek stumbles to a brief halt, looking down at Craig's drawn, pale features and the sad slump of his
shoulders, and he thinks back to the previous morning – to Craig asking him out. Sure, it had been a little bumpy, but by the end he'd thought it had gone okay. Had he not said the right words? Tweek's stomach flops over in unease, but he just pushes through it and squeezes past. Collapses, boneless in his seat just as the bus starts rattling and roaring down the road.

Twisting around in his seat, he studies Craig's bags and his unshaven cheeks, and he feels a stab of something incredibly discomforting. (Worry.) He reaches out, and settles his fingers against his shoulder - when Craig turns to look at him, grey-blue eyes dull, Tweek doesn't ask how he is. He knows that if it's a bad day, then it's a bad day. Craig doesn't often like to talk his feelings out the way that Tweek does, so the next best thing Tweek can do is offer a distraction.

"What's y-your favorite flower?" he asks after a moment of drawn out eye-contact, and gets a slow blink of confusion for his question.

"Dandelion," says Craig, so frankly that Tweek's heart bucks a little in his chest.

"Why?" His voice is quieter, and he can't help but lean in.

With a one-shouldered shrug, Craig says, "They're strong. They can survive in any kind of shitty environment. They've got root systems that reach down deeper than most people realize. They're bright. Wild."

Of it's own volition, his hand slides off of Craig's arm, and his fingers run over the rim of his chullo, tucking in a few odd, loose strands of black hair. "B-but they're weeds."

Craig's brow furrows. "Any plant's a weed if it's growing in the wrong spot."

A small smile tugs at the corner of Tweek's mouth. That doesn't help Tweek figure out what Thomas was alluding to any faster, but he hadn't expected it to. Mostly he just likes hearing his best friend talking about something even a little passionately. His eyes skip down the front of Craig's neck to the collar of his thick grey jumper, and with an odd pang in his gut, he realizes that Craig's hidden his bite. The smile, barely formed, slips away. "Nng. I thought you'd go around with that," he taps against the mark on Craig's collarbone, "out for everyone to see, man. Just to wind me up."

The other boy's hand rises up, settling over the top of the Tweek's, and his fingers run over the rim of his chullo, tucking in a few odd, loose strands of black hair. "B-but they're weeds."

Craig's brow furrows. "Any plant's a weed if it's growing in the wrong spot."

The other boy's hand rises up, settling over the top of the Tweek's, and gently pulling it into his lap, where he stares down at the fingers and lightly traces the cuts and sore patches, the cracked skin and the chewed nails. Tweek twitches and goes stiff, not wanting to have some part of him that he considers to be one of his ugliest features stared at so intensely. But something in the slowness of Craig's study and the barely-there touch of his fingertip makes his heart buck.

When Craig speaks, it's almost lost to the roar of the engine and the bounces of the potholes in the road. "I thought it might make you uncomfortable. For people to see it."

Now it's Tweek's turn to feel confused. Sure, he probably would have been really embarrassed to have teeth marks on him showing, but on Craig? Besides... "W-we're boyfriends, dude," he says, and for the first time in his life those words are real. It feels... good, even if it is weird, and it doesn't make any sense. He doesn't know the motive Craig had for asking him out, but the way that his head snaps up and he pauses in his study, fingers clenching around Tweek's palm, he thinks it's safe to guess that there's nothing bad behind it. (But he knew that already. Craig wouldn't hurt him on purpose.) "Nothing weird about – rrgh – hickeys."

As if that is some kind of trigger word, Craig's eyes skip down over Tweek's throat. The look on his face when he finally spots the goddamn thing standing out on Tweek's neck like an ugly fucking beacon is worth the rush of blood to his head, and the thumping of his heart against his ribs. The
taller boy's face goes soft, the tension around his eyes melting away and his mouth easing out of it's frown. He doesn't grin or puff out his chest like Tweek half expected, but then, that wouldn't have been like him. Craig Tucker isn't a boastful person.

"You're..." His friend pauses, like he's lost for words. Stares into Tweek's eyes with such focus, the blonde can feel all the blood in his body migrating to his face. Craig sighs and shakes his head a little. "Even after so long, I still can't predict how you're going to react to anything."

It isn't a compliment - it shouldn't be one - but the way Craig says it, a murmur that's barely enough for anyone to hear, makes him feel like it is.

He can't help but push out of his seat as they go over a bump in the road, and press a kiss into the corner of Craig's mouth. Withdraws with his heart pounding furiously against his ribs (stupid, so stupid... they've done way more than kiss now, so why should this feel so intimate?). He doesn't get far, because Craig drops his hand and settles his palm against the side of Tweek's neck, right over the damn hickey. Follows after him for a kiss that lingers, sends shivers down Tweeks arms and makes him feel like he would fall into bits if Craig wasn't there to hold him together.

How can such simple kisses make him feel breathless?

Craig pulls back, pressing their foreheads together and letting their noses brush. Tweek stares at the crescents of Craig's long, dark eyelashes against his cheek, and feels words bubbling up too.

"I'm still f-figuring you out too." Tilts his head to kiss Craig again.

(Likes the way Craig's breath stutters out over his lips.)

Chapter End Notes

hmmm
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

two steps forward, three huge leaps back

: D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

All of Tweek's lessons drag on, and on, and on, and on...

By the time that the lunch bell finally chimes, his legs aches from being caught on a nerve and jumping for five hours, and his fingernails are chewed raw. He doesn't know why he's wound so tight.

(Except that he really, really does. He's just torn between two selfish, insatiable needs.)

Home. He wants to go home and read. He wants to click through all the files on the USB until his finger cramps up and his eyes dry out in their sockets. Despite his crippling panic upon being confronted with it again yesterday morning, he wants to reread his letter. He wants to relive all of his past. He wants to try and fill in all of the missing pieces. He's still scared to the point of the thing in his stomach turning over restlessly, but his hunger to figure everything out is greater.

Which is part of the reason that he's also being drawn away from the USB. Because in the opposite direction is Craig. Craig, who he feels like he hasn't seen for an age, despite sitting next to him on the bus that morning, and waking up beside him both Saturday and Sunday. Craig, who Thomas told him to watch, who's keeping secrets, who's poker face is still giving something away...

(Something that doesn't make sense.)

He meant what he said on the bus. He's still figuring the other boy out, but where only a few days ago he was hesitant to - was scared to - now, he's feeling... driven. He's got a purpose.

This, of course, means that everything else in his life is gonna have to take a backseat. He can't focus on taking notes or listening to lectures, doesn't want to pay attention to classmates or work on assignments. All the space in his head can hold are questions. (But sometimes even that is hard to focus on when he thinks of Craig. It's difficult to not just stop thinking and give in to feeling. He swears he could kiss the cryptic bastard for hours straight, and be left wanting more.)

Leaving the classroom and racing towards the cafeteria, he almost barrels directly into some redheaded kid he recognizes from a grade or two below him - Dougie, or something - and yelps out an apology before continuing on through the maze of corridors and the swarms of students leaving their classes.

By the time he gets to the double doors, he's breathless and red face, chest heaving. He grabs a tray from one side of the large room and joins the lunch queue as an afterthought, once he spots their usual table; empty so far aside from Token and Clyde. He has no wish to go and join the other two boys right away, though he isn't going to touch a mouthful of his food.

Even as he makes his way along the line, wincing at the plate of sloppy rice, green beans and chilly
that he's served up, Tweek finds his head repeatedly swinging back towards the entrance. Every time someone new comes in, his stomach does an odd sort of flutter, only to fall still upon seeing their face.

In fact, it's only as he's dragging his feet towards the table, reluctant to join the two bodies already there, that Craig appears, a step or two ahead of Marsh and Testaburger. He can't help the way he perks up at the sight of his best— of his boyfriend, smile tugging at his lips and the slump of his shoulders straightening out. He grins when he catches the other boy's eye, probably looking a little manic thanks to the uncontrollable tic in his cheek. Be that as it is, Craig returns a tired smile that almost reaches his eyes. Tweek can only take it as an improvement from this morning.

With far more pep in his step, he clacks his tray down on the table top and swings his legs over the bench next to Token, sat so he's facing the queue. Can't help but watch every step Craig takes, can't help the way his eyes slip over broad shoulders and a trim waist buried beneath his baggy grey jumper, can't help his attention dipping lower to tight, dark jeans—

Catches himself with a flush of embarrassment, and only flushes darker when his gaze flickers to his right and he catches Token watching him, one brow raised.

"Wh-what?" He barks the word, far louder than he'd intended. On the opposite side of the table, Clyde pauses midway through shovelling a heaped forkful of rice into his mouth. Tweek avoids making eye contact, and somehow keeps from staring at Craig's back.

Token, for all his attempted innocence, seems to struggle keeping the smug grin off of his face. "Nothing, nothing."

If he had the strength of will to keep himself from looking at Craig like a starving man (he doesn't— it's hopeless, even pretending otherwise), he would have glared at his friend.

Mouth full, and with all the manners of a pig, Clyde snorts loudly.

Still, Tweek doesn't spare him any attention, apart from to say, "Fuck off, Donovan."

Before Clyde gets a chance to say anything inflammatory that might distract Tweek from his (dare he say) good mood, Craig's reached the end of the line and is turning to carry his tray towards them. Despite the fact that they've monopolized the very same table for the last three years, he can't help but rise out of his seat a little to catch Craig's eye – barely keeps from waving like a total fucking idiot.

Still, no amount of feeling like an imbecile can keep him from scooting over far further into Token's space than necessary, so that his wish for Craig to sit next to him is painfully clear to everyone. By the time that the taller boy reaches them, Tweek is buzzing with energy, a hundred questions fighting for dominance in his head.

Seeming a little thrown by Tweek's smiling enthusiasm, Craig slides in next to him, eyebrows just a little higher than they might normally be. "Hi," he says, in a slow, careful sort of way.

"Mnnng, hi." If Tweek's voice is a little higher than it might normally be, then no one points it out.

An awkward silence ensues, in which Tweek and Craig stare at each other, at a loss for what to say.

In the end, Tweek is the first to cave. Leans forward and, just because he can, kisses Craig's cheek. His heart drums in his chest and more heat rises to his face.

The look that Craig shoots him as he pulls back is like he's been slapped. Wide-eyed, slack-jawed,
high points of colour on his cheeks. (And, for the first time, Tweek wonders... is Craig blushing because of him?)

Warmth unfurls in his belly, and he feels his high-strung energy ease off into something a little softer. Oddly nervous, he presses his foot forwards under the table, until his sneaker touches up against the ankle of Craig's boot. The touch seems to jolt Craig from his shock. His face slips back into something close to blank, though the colour doesn't leave him.

Beneath the table, Craig's foot moves against his – a slow press. Tweek's fingers clench tighter around the edge of his tray.

A loud gagging sound breaks the moment, tearing it right through the middle. Tweek looks up and meets Cartman's eyes just as the fat lump is slumping down into his seat with a tray full of vegan sludge. "Get a room, bros. You're gaying the place up right now."

"Yeah, we're trying to eat over here," Clyde adds on, in a slimy drawl that sets Tweek's teeth on edge. "You're making me wanna hurl."

The pleasant warmth twists into a surge of blistering anger, the way it so often does when he's confronted with Clyde. His face closes in on itself – a furious, scrunched up glare that goes right past Cartman and straight into the other brunette instead. "Urgh. You don't hear me complaining about how you shovelling your fucking slop down your throat makes me feel ill, so— so shut up, you homophobic piece of shit."

Apparently, that upsets Clyde a little, if the way his face turns a furious red is anything to go by. Next to him, Cartman gears up into an excited burst of noise ("Oooooh!") at the prospect of fighting, his previous involvement – and the fact that he was the one to instigate all of it – totally forgotten.

"I don't have a problem with people being gay; I have a problem with you." The way he spits the words has them flying into Tweek, acidic. But they're nowhere near as bad – don't stab through Tweek the same way – as what is said next. "Craig could bend anyone else he liked over the table right here, and I wouldn't give a crap. In fact, I'd applaud."

Tweek shoves his tray away from him and stands so fast, his head spins. The thing in his stomach rakes barbed claws down his insides. The image of Craig with someone else – with Tommy, with handsome, kind, experienced Tommy – temporarily blinds him. His blood boils in his veins. He wants to drive his fist right into Clyde's stupid fucking face.

"Come 'round here and say that again," Tweek says, voice a growl. "I dare you." He knows it's stupid, he knows that Clyde isn't the podgy, unfit boy that he had been back in Freshman year, he knows that he wouldn't logically win in any kind of fight, but he doesn't care. He just wants to kick the shit out of him.

Clyde makes as if to stand, that same ugly sneer on his face, like the one in Tweek's drawing.

Suddenly, Craig's out of his seat too, one long fingered hand gripping firmly at Tweek's shoulder. Tweek tears his eyes away from the brunette, turning his furious scowl on his boyfriend—

That is, until he spots the grimace on Craig's face. Blue eyes look down into green. "Fuck him, dude. Let's just go."

So angry he's shaking, Tweek has to resist the urge to shrug out from under Craig's palm and lunge across the table for Clyde's damn throat. As if sensing this, his grip tightens, eyebrows creasing together. Don't, that look says. Please don't.
So, Tweek doesn't. Grits his teeth and clenches his jaw. Grabs for his untouched meal and steps over the bench, jerking himself free and storming over to the tray rack. He thinks as he goes that he hears Craig say something in a low tone, but he can't be sure. Is too busy trying not to explode into shrieking fury that he doesn't bother trying to focus on it.

As soon as he's rammed his tray into the rack, he leaves the room, not even waiting for Craig to catch up.

Walks blindly, fists tight at his side and shoulders hunched. Breath billowing in and out between clenched teeth in loud, hissing pants.

It isn't until he's a good three corridors away from the entrance of the cafeteria – in a quiet stretch of buffed up floors, grey lockers and bright lighting – that he spins. With a snarl, he drives his foot into the nearest locker.

A resounding bang reverberates through the hall. His foot rebounds and his throbbing toes leave a visible dent.

A group of younger girls passing behind him – the only other people in this part of the corridor – shriek and scatter at the sudden show of violence, hurrying away towards the main halls.

Still, all he can think of is Craig, mouth on Thomas', leaning him over the table. Hands up his shirt, on his skin, pressing between his legs—

No.

Tweek's eyes burn, and his stomach churns. He cards his itching fingers through his hair in lieu of digging them into his thighs. Why—

Why, just when things are starting to go well, just when he's feeling happy and confident and like maybe, maybe he's worth something—?

He's not, he's not worth it, Clyde's right, he's disgusting.

Ignoring the few people that walk past the far end of the hall, the blonde sinks to the floor and tugs, so hard that the watering of his eyes intensifies. He stays there, knees to his chest – rocks lightly forwards on the ball of his feet, and back again, in time to, not worth it, disgusting, scum, selfish twitchy freak, worthless worthless worthless.

Lost in his thoughts, scrunching his eyes shut hard and breathing in and out as slowly as possible, he misses the sound of pounding feet and ragged breathing. The way the steps slow, and clothes rustle as someone sinks down next to him barely registers in his crowded head.

Flinches back at the hand that settles on his shoulder.

"Tweek, honey." Craig's voice is no more than a murmur, right beside him. His hand shifts to Tweek's back and rubs a circle, just like Thomas had last night—

Tweek lurches away, falling forwards onto his knees and latching onto the locker just in front of him.

As soon as he can find the strength in his legs, he drags himself upright. Fights the sick thundering of his heart trying to choke him, and turns around to face Craig, taking in the upturned face and the injured expression. The outstretched fingers that slowly curl into a fist and pull away.

Guilt churns together with the anxiety. He's not—it's not fair of him to pull away again. He can't
keep doing this to Craig, not when the other boy's done nothing wrong to begin with. Not when he thinks of yesterday morning, and the way Craig had looked close to tears over... over whatever the fuck Tweek had messed up on. It's about time he steps out of his little bubble and actually tries to sort his shit out.

And that means no more hurting his best friend over things that aren't his fault. Tweek's crippling insecurity is his own problem.

"S-sorry. Eurgh. I'm sorry. I just—" Swallows down a sound close to a wail. "I shouldn't have—"

"No," says Craig, surging to his feet. "No, don't apologise. You did nothing wrong." He makes as if to reach forwards a second time, but his hand falls to his side before it can so much as touch Tweek's sleeve – he tucks it against his leg and lets long sleeves of his jumper fall over it.

Not quick enough, though. The blonde's gaze locks on red knuckles.

His heart bucks, and he reaches out. Grabs hold of his best friend's wrist so he can pull it up in front of him. Though Craig resists at first, he eventually gives in.

Bringing the taller boy's hand to eye level, he only has to take a cursory glance at the dark, swollen knuckles to know what happened.

Craig hit Clyde. Hard.

The sting behind his eyes intensifies, even as the warmth bursts back into life in his chest. Craig— he punched one of his best friends for being nasty to Tweek? Even though Tweek was to blame too?

A slightly hysterical giggle hiccups its way out of his throat, and he brings the other boy's hand up to his mouth, brushing his lips over the inflamed skin. Craig's fingers spasm, warm, against his.

"Thank you," he says, barely a whisper. Choked up with residual anger and self-disgust, guilt and crippling sadness. Mostly though, affection. (Just when he thinks that he can't fall for Craig any deeper...) "Y'didn't h-have to do that. Could've – rrgh – been caught." He can't bring himself to meet Craig's eyes.

Turns out he doesn't have to, because a moment later there's a hand on his cheek, a thumb brushing over the delicate skin right below his eye, as if wiping away tears that aren't there. "I wanted to. What he said, it made me feel sick. He had no right—"

"He— nng — he does," Tweek's mouth lets out in a rush, before he can even process the words. He deflate a little as they register, leaning his face further into Craig's warm, smooth palm. Draws the hand held in his closer to his chest, like maybe that'll stop the pain. Repeats, more clearly, "He does. He just— he's worried about you. He's worried about m-me fucking things up."

Scoffing quietly, Craig steps closer, his fingers slipping around the back of Tweek's neck to cradle the base of his head and, stood close enough that their hands are pressed between their chests, he rests his cheek against the top of Tweek's head. "I don't know what the fuck his problem is with you, but if he had any sense, he'd be worried about it going the other way." One of Craig's patented sighs stirs Tweek's wild hair. "I'm always hurting you."

That makes the thing in Tweek's gut lurch violently. He pulls away, scowling up at Craig as fiercely as he can muster, when his heart feels like it's going to cave in under the force of the warmth he feels for his boyfriend. "N-no. No, you're not. It's not you. It's—it's my damn brain, man. I'm fucked up. I don't—" Makes a sound of incomprehensible frustration. Squeezes Craig's sore hand tighter to his chest, and shakes his head in the vain hope that that might clear it. "Yeah, okay, maybe you were a
bit of a dick e-every now and then, but... I care about you so much, dude. M-more than anyone else, ever. I don't— opening up to you, even though I'm messed up, even though I've done so much awful shit... it scares me, feeling this much."

Craig makes a sound like he's choking on his own spit. Looking up, Tweek is surprised to see his face set in an odd mix of gaping disbelief and brow-furrowing confusion. "You... care about me? More than anyone?"

Tweek balks. His whole face spasms in a tic, before slowly heating up. His gut reaction is to deny it. Or maybe scream. Or maybe knock Craig backwards and run.

(Doing all three at once sounds like a good option.)

Instead, inexplicably, he freezes. His voice dies in his throat. All he can do is stare into wide, pale blue eyes and shake. Fight the sting in his eyes and feel like he's starting to hyperventilate.

(Craig, jerking away from him. Craig, telling him to leave.)

His boyfriend – his best friend – pulls his hand out of the blonde's grasp and, before he can even register the movement, cups the other side of Tweek's face too. Holds him still and stares with a sort of intensity that makes Tweek's whole body twitch.

"You care about me." The words escape him in a gust of breath that fans over his face. "Like... like a friend. Right? Tweek?"

Whimpering, Tweek finally regains motor control. He tries to pull away – to step back – but there's nowhere to go.

His back clunks against the cold, hard lockers, and Craig follows, crowding in so close, Tweek's sure he can hear the thunderous rage of his heart in his chest, his pulse inside his head.

"Nnn— nng. N-no," he says, looking everywhere but Craig's eyes (which turns out to be almost impossible, since the other boy is leaning in close enough that their foreheads touch). "N-not — augh— not like— rrgh. Not like a friend."

Is Craig shaking? "Then— then like family. A brother, or... something."

What the fuck?

He wrenches himself back so hard that his head cracks against the locker, and ignores the clamoring feeling of oh God, oh God, I'm gonna hurl. "Sweet Jesus, d-dude. Why the fuck would I want to bang my brother?"

A short, strained chuckle escapes Craig. "That's... a good point." He reaches one of his hands back around Tweek's head to cushion the throbbing part of his skull from the hard metal, and tilts his face so that their noses brush. "I just— when you said yesterday you'd only do this with someone important, I... and that you wouldn't get sick of it—"

And that whisper, that barely there hurt... that's it.

"I l-like you, you dick," Tweek says. Scrunches his eyes shut. Half expects Craig to pull away. Half expects to be left there, in the middle of the corridor, knees weak and heart pounding out through his ribcage. "I love—"

Lips crush down against his, and the last of his sentence – the last of his breath – is lost.
Hot and hungry, teeth bite into his lower lip hard enough he can feel his pulse throb through it, can hear the hitch of his own breath as he opens his mouth to Craig’s demand. The grip on his face and neck anchors him, controlling the tilt of his head, claiming everything he can give. Eyes fluttering shut, he grips the front of Craig’s jumper in fists and holds him there as he responds.

(Gives everything, because what has he ever been able to deny Craig?)

The bruising force of their mouths and that first warm slide of their tongues sends a rolling swell of heat through his limbs and back again, pooling in the pit of his stomach, temporarily drowning out the ugly, cruel thing that lives there.

Craig’s fingers sink into his hair, knotting so hard his scalp tingles. Tweek grips tighter at the other boy’s collar with one hand, releasing him with the other and hooking around the back of his neck. His nails dig into the strong plane of muscle along the top of the taller boy’s shoulders.

Bumping noses, shared breath. The taste of spearmint gum and black coffee. The thought that if it's Craig, then maybe he can fall apart. Maybe he's safe, and he doesn't have to keep running away. It can't be so bad having the truth out there, can it?

Like he’s plucked the thoughts straight out of Tweek's head, Craig slows.

Cold air on wet lips as his best friend pulls away, just far enough that their mouths still brush with every word. "Please, don't. Don't just say it for me."

What?

"For you—?" asks Tweek, a breath he doesn't get the chance to expand on before Craig's kissing him again, tearing apart any of Tweek's efforts at comprehensible thoughts. It's a fast, rough kiss that travels to the corner of his mouth and across his cheek and down his jawline to his neck. The taller boy's hands drop away from his head and wrap around him, pulling him in for a hard hug, nose buried against the side of his throat.

All Tweek can do is adjust his grip on his best friend, arms looping around his back and shaking so hard that all his strength's left his grip weak. He stares at the wall across the empty stretch of the corridor, a miserable grey in the bright, fluorescent lighting. His manic energy – his wired happiness and his blood boiling fury – has been lost to the riot of brain melting kisses and a blank, numb haze of confusion.

Is this a dream? He doesn't think so. It doesn't feel like Dissociation, either.

(Wonders if it'd be weird to pinch Craig again.)

"Fuck," his boyfriend says against his neck, a puff of air that makes his hair stand on end and a pronounced shiver coarse down his back. "Fuck, this isn't real. You're making it up."

Clutching at Craig's back, he shakes his head; presses his cheek to the side of Craig's hat, and wonders if this is it. If he's ruined everything now. Gets the stomach aching urge to laugh, because the other boy seems to be thinking along the same lines as he is. This is surreal.

Like a broken record on repeat, he's helpless but to say it again. "I like you." Wants to apologize, wants to explain.

(He just wants to stop saying it.)

Craig shudders, pulls him impossibly closer, so tight Tweek's back arches off of the metal lockers.
"You're trying not to hurt me, aren't you? You're just saying it; doesn't get to be this easy after so many—"

The rest of his sentence is drowned out by the shrill ringing of the bell overhead. Tweek spasms, swallowing down a startled yelp – has nowhere to retreat to, since Craig's holding him there, anchoring him in this moment he's scared he'll regret later.

(Already thinks he does.)

His best friend straightens, stares down into his face with creased eyes and a small, wan smile. He kisses him again - a simple, still press of lips and that same tight, unrelinquishing hold.

Tweek takes whatever comfort he can in the fact that Craig's still here – in the fact that he isn't pulling away. Squeezes his eyes shut and listens to the words reverberating through his skull: *I don't deserve this.*

A flood of voices and feet echoes down the length of the hall, rebounding off walls and crashing into Tweek like the tide against the shore. Turns his face away from Craig's and buries it against his shoulder, already feeling the rattle of his uneven breathing return to him. The thing in his stomach is rearing its head, tasting the bitter anxiety in his blood with a purr that resonates through his bones.

"Class," he says, throat aching, as the first of their fellow students turn the corner into their stretch of the corridor. The deafening thrum of voices and the sea of brightly colored bodies approach, enveloping them and their static forms in a throng of deafening sound and movement.

"Fuck them," says Craig, directly into his ear, just for him. Brushes his lips against Tweek's jaw. The blonde's hair stands up on end. "Don't wanna let go."

But he needs to get away and escape to somewhere Craig can't see, before he starts splitting right down the middle. He doesn't want to cause him more trouble with his stupid, miserable feelings. He's so damn messed up, and dragging his best friend down with him isn't right.

(And this isn't figuring things out. This isn't taking things slow.)

"Craig," he says, louder. Brings his hands up between them and shoves weakly at his best friend's chest. "Mnn, c'mon, man. Quit it. We've – urgh – gotta go to c-class." The crowd around them swells, a wall of loud disagreements and shoving bodies. Laughter and shouting. Some idiot trying to ride his skateboard.

Finally, when Tweek's pushing grows more persistent, Craig pulls back. His small, hesitant smile diminishes when their eyes meet, and his eyebrows draw together. All that Tweek can do is keep on struggling to get free, until the taller boy's grip eases off, hands sliding down to his waist. Still has him trapped against the locker. (But that's okay – it's probably the only thing keeping him upright.) "We're okay, yeah?"

No, he thinks. Because I fuck everything up. I was meant to work you out, I was meant to be careful and all I did was get us even more tangled. Now we're both more confused than ever.

"Rrugh. I'm still figuring you out," he repeats instead. Pauses, gulps around the crushing pressure on his windpipe. "A-and we really, really need to— hrrng— to talk properly. A-about everything."

"We do," says Craig, face falling further. Lifts one hand to push back Tweek's bangs, where they're slipping into his eyes. Ducks his head closer so that he's all Tweek can see. "We will. Whenever you're ready to. Okay? You can ask me anything."
"He doesn't deserve this."

"C-class," Tweek says again. "Wanna go to— mmn— to class."

Craig sighs. Straightens up and looks down at Tweek like someone might look at a broken toy. "If that's what you want."

All Tweek can do is nod.

(And now, he's not feeling so torn anymore. Now all he wants is to lock himself up in his room and read through his USB until he forgets what a worthless person he is. Read until he can't think at all.)

The blonde lets Craig take his hand and guide him through the current of bodies, but knows already that making it through the rest of his day will be agonizing.

Chapter End Notes

so to recap on what the heck you just read:

//bashes head repeatedly against brick wall, and whispers very lightly through all the dripping blood//

progress, is that you...? or is it just another concussion?
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

//jives//

As predicted, the rest of the day is... difficult.

He actually has to voluntarily leave last class, Biology, when he starts to have an anxiety attack. He stumbles down the corridor, gripping onto the walls and the fronts of lockers as he goes. Heads towards the nurse's office, where he often goes to calm down and, upon entering to find Ms Roland busy at her desk (she waves him inside and gets back on with whatever it is that she's doing), helps himself to one of the paper bags she keeps stored in the cupboard over in the left corner of the room.

Sits down, knees to his chest, brings the paper bag up to his mouth and focuses on his breathing exercises. Watches the paper expand and shrink in time to his exhales and inhales.

Ms Roland potters about him, used to his comings and goings, and paying no mind to the crackling rustles of the paper bag. At some point the plump, stern faced lady sets down a plastic cup of chilled water and a paper plate with a cookie on it.

(He doesn't touch either, since he's generally paranoid about anything relating to food – especially when he's on edge – but he appreciates the kind gesture. Ms Roland is a nice lady, once you get past all the intimidating glaring.)

It's calming in the office when no one else is causing drama, especially tucked in at the end here. Usually it's off limits to the student body, with the rare exception given to the regular visitors.

As well as the three emergency futons set along the main wall of the room, Ms Roland keeps a spare folded right under the window behind her desk, out of sight and as far from the door as possible. It's here that Tweek spends the last hour of the day, curled tight around himself, and debating whether or not he needs to call Olive. He'll see her again this coming weekend, since he has bi-weekly sessions, but he isn't sure how well that time will pass. He's been dangerously close to a relapse for a while now, and he doesn't want to push his luck.

In the end though, he holds off. The quiet of the office and the familiar smell of antiseptic and bleach lulls him back down into safer territory, and once he's gotten his breathing under control, the rest is easier. He's not great, but then again, he never is.

Final bell trills through the halls outside, and Ms Roland comes around to check him over. As soon as she's seen he's lucid and not on the edge of hysteria, she ushers him out of the room with a hearty pat on his back that has him wincing.

Although he would have much preferred to leave after the worst of the homeward rush had gone by, he feels more like himself again now, and can see that he was spiralling out of control right from first thing that morning, even if he had felt like he was in a good mood.
Manic energy and hyperactivity are signs that his ADD is acting up, as well as his inability to focus on anything in lessons. It makes it feel a little like he's wading through treacle inside his head, while simultaneously bouncing off the walls too fast to keep track of, outside of it – almost like he's split in two opposing directions at once.

Shoulders tucked up around his head and muscles still strung tight, he makes his way through the throng of bodies to his locker, whining like a kicked dog when people get too close to him. (He hates the feeling of soft, warm flesh brushing past him. He hates dirty hands and damp, clammy breath. Almost anyone touching him makes his skin crawl. There are very, very few exceptions to the rule. Especially when he's feeling vulnerable.)

Reaching his locker, he enters his door code with noncompliant fingers and starts bundling all of his belongings into his satchel.

"Tweek."

From down the length of the corridor comes a voice as familiar as his own, slightly winded as if he's been running.

The blonde's head snaps up, and he peers around the metal door at his boyfriend, unable to fight the surge of warmth and the thrill of humiliation that bubble up in him as he recalls his attempted confession, and the way that Craig had asked him to stop. He doesn't hold anything against the other boy, and surprisingly enough, he doesn't feel hurt, either.

It's a good thing Craig intervened.

(And the method in which he did the intervening wasn't so bad either, he thinks, face heating up at the thought of being pressed up against the locker.)

As such, he offers his boyfriend a small, uncertain smile as he jogs up, brows low and pale eyes flicking over Tweek's face. "Are you okay, babe? Stoley said that you left halfway through the lesson."

Arms full of his satchel and head full of a hundred dumb excuses that he already knows he isn't going to use, the blonde backs up a step and nudges the door of his locker closed with his elbow, before slinging the strap of his bag up onto his shoulder. "I was – nng – stressed out from lunch a- and needed to chill before I flipped out, man."

Although the worry doesn't leave Craig’s face, the lines etched between his brows ease away a little. He adjusts his rucksack, and leans down to kiss the corner of Tweek's mouth.

Heart doing a weird spasm, the blonde twitches but holds still at the soft touch – even when a group of what he assumes are freshman girls, huddled further down the corridor, squeal loudly and start pointing at them.

(After all these years, they still have a pretty rampant following. Some would probably call it a cult. Normally they're pretty subtle about their movements and projects these days though, thanks to how mad Craig started getting with them when they grew out of hand a few years back.)

"You gonna be okay on the bus?" the taller boy asks as he pulls away, ignoring the high pitched giggles of their weirdass fangirls.

Tweek just offers a jolty sort of shrug, averting his eyes and pretending like he didn't want to push up on his toes and kiss Craig right back. (Mostly, he just wants to get away from the ear-splitting noise and the clamoring, jaw clenching bustle, before he slips and crashes into round two of his anxiety
attacks. Judging by his tight chest and rampant shaking, he's already not far off.) "Eurgh. I dunno, dude. I-I'm pretty keyed up right now."

With the ease of someone who isn't ever ruffled, no matter the situation, Craig just says, "So let's walk home, then."

Frowning, Tweek says, "Craig, that t-takes triple the time."

"So? You got anywhere to be?" At the slow shake of his head, one of Craig's eyebrows arch. "Besides, maybe a walk'll help."

Well, even if he's not exactly feeling hopeful about that possibility, Tweek's willing to try just about anything. And being away from other prying eyes, just him and Craig...

"Alright," he says, "s-so long as we go through the fields."

"Deal," he says, easy as breathing.

And with that, the taller boy slings his arm over Tweek's shoulders and steers them out the door.

(The blonde pretends not to notice the way that Craig puts himself between Tweek and the rest of the hall, like some sort of human barrier. Instead, he just leans into the warmth and the safety of it, and lets himself be led.)

Almost as soon as they step into the sharp, open air of the parking lot, the claustrophobia of the corridor drops away, and Tweek is able to fill his lungs with a deep breath.

Some of the tension in his shoulders and the stress balling up in his chest slips away like dust on the wind.

On their way across the parking lot to the road, they pass Broflovski, leaning against the hood of his car, with Wendy sat cross-legged higher up on the bonnet. There's something weird about the fact that his hand is on her knee, but Tweek is too busy looking around at the sea of heads and wondering if he's going mad, to think about the situation in more depth.

"Hrrgh. Y-you seen Kenny or Butters today?" he asks, head swivelling in the direction of the bus stop. He's only now realising how quiet and uneventful their bus ride in was that morning, and how he hadn't seen either boy at lunch, (for the small amount of time that he was in the cafeteria, that is).

"No. Why?" Craig asks, voice weirdly hard.

Caught off guard by the tone, Tweek pauses in his searching, and peers up at his boyfriend. The muscle on the side of his jaw is working. "Just wondering, man. Haven't seen them since yesterday —"

"Yesterday?" Craig pulls them to a sudden stop. "You were at the coffee shop, weren't you?"

Increasingly confused by the scowl tugging at Craig's face, his brows draw together. "Y-yeah, dude. They came to help out. The —eurgh— the new guy's pr-pretty popular with the girls, but he's also kind petrified of 'em, so Kenny came through to— to help out."

"He’s scared of the girls?" His expression pans out from a glower to a confused blink, apparently side-tracked by this new information. Tweek shifts where he stands, averting his eyes, before giving in and starting to walk again. Craig is forced to follow, if he wants to keep his arm from slipping off of Tweek's shoulders.
A pervading sense of discomfort sinks into Tweek's skin at the thought of speaking to Craig about Thomas this way – Thomas, who's apparently into them both. Thomas, who Tweek wants so desperately to hate, though he's growing helplessly fond of him. Thomas, Craig's old romance, Craig's old crush.

Tweek walks a little faster – short, choppy steps that take them the rest of the way out of the parking lot. Craig lengthens his strides, matching the blonde with ease.

"Yeah. H-he's gay as fuck, but he's got one of those p-pretty faces all the girls like, so they're – nng – hounding on him."

His boyfriend makes a sound in his throat that Tweek thinks is meant to be thoughtful, but doesn't quite fit the bill. "Great. Bet McCormick loved that."

Tweek's brow furrows. "Aurgh. The girls?"

"The new guy."

They stop to cross the road, and Craig readjusts his arm so it snakes its way around his waist. They duck out between cars.

"What's that mean?"

"He's always saying he's got a thing for blondes," Craig says a moment later, as they step back up onto the curb. (His words are more a growl than anything else.)

That makes Tweek snort. He doesn't get Craig's issue with Kenny, but it's one of those quiet, reliable facts of life. Kind of like Clyde and Tweek loathing one another. "Unless the new guy's grown tits or — or changed his name to Butters over night, I think he's safe, man."

Fingers flex against his side, and Tweek squirms, making a sound caught somewhere between a giggle and a screech. He catches Craig's errant fingers and pulls the arm further around him, to keep from repeat attacks.

Seemingly oblivious to the fact that he was just tickling the shorter boy, Craig comes to a halt. Again. (And isn't this great? It's taken them a whole ten minutes just to get a dozen steps up the road. At this rate they won't be home until some time next week – though it's not like the idea of missing more school is a particularly upsetting prospect.)

Doing his best to hold back an agitated tic, Tweek looks up at Craig. Twitches anyway when he sees the worried twist of his boyfriend's mouth. "You caught on, about Butters and Kenny? And you're okay?"

Huh? "Why wouldn't I be?" And then the rest of that sentence hits him. He glowers. How damn thick does everyone think he is? Between Craig's and Tommy's not-so-subtle insinuations, he feels like he might as well be a brain-dead. (If that's how they show they care, then Tweek's just thanking his lucky stars he isn't on their bad sides.) "And I'd have to be a fucking cabbage to miss that there's something going on between them, man. I mean, I know I'm slow, but sweet Jesus. Give me a little credit."

That doesn't make Craig's frown drop, though he does, much to Tweek's relief, start walking again. "It's just... he's the one."

"The one what?" The shorter boy cranes his neck to try and watch Craig's face.
"The one I thought you liked, when we were younger."

Wait... Kenny?

Tweek balks, brain attempting to tear itself in two. He makes a sound best described as a retch. "Eurrrreugh... you thought I liked Kenny? What the fuck, man?" Feeling weirdly betrayed, he reaches a hand up and smacks Craig in the chest. "I've got better taste than that. Shit." In fact, it was only in the last month that he had any interest in even so much as speaking to the other blonde. It's more that Tweek's growing kind of fond of Butters, and Kenny is an extension of the boy. (That said, he's definitely a lot more tolerable than Tweek would've thought. Still not his type, though.) "What the hell even gave you that idea?"

"It was... a few things." Craig stops talking for a little while, as if struggling to process this turn of events. He has the look of a boy trying to reconfigure his entire existence. "He spoke with you... a lot, when we were kids? I think he knew it pissed me off. You let him touch you every now and then, mostly when I wasn't nearby. And the way he stuck close to you, during that year..."

What...? That... that didn't happen, did it? Tweek doesn't remember any of it. He shakes his head. "Dude, he— he wasn't around. I'd of— mmm— I would've noticed."

(But... would he? He's already starting to learn just how much he's missed out on – how unreliable his own memory is.)

The way that Craig's mouth presses into a flat line says he doesn't agree, but since he decides to keep quiet, Tweek makes no further comment. Tries desperately to recall any of his past interactions with McCormick.

For a while they walk in silence, climbing over a low, barbed wire fence and into an empty cattle field. Once both safely on the other side, they switch to holding hands, since it's easier to navigate the bumpy terrain that way. The snow is around two feet thick in the drifts, and the air tastes bitter, like there's more bad weather to come. Tweek's already feeling the chill drive through his jacket thanks to his lack of jumper and scarf, but that's okay. He likes the cold. He likes the way that it makes him feel more alive.

In the end, it's Craig who caves first, breaking the thick tension between them with a question that makes the thing in Tweek's stomach writhe. "What's he like, this new guy...? Other than being pretty, I mean. You said your dad called him a 'spaz'?"

Heart starting up like a jackhammer, Tweek looks down at his feet. Wonders just how much this could come back to hurt him later. (What the hell is he supposed to say? 'Oh, y'know, it's the guy you used to fuck. The one you kept secret from the world for years. Sound familiar?')

"He's not. A spaz, I mean. He's— nnrg— he's a good guy." Trails off for a moment, trying desperately to think through the lashing of the thing in his abdomen, and the wash of mental images that have been swimming in front of his eyes since lunchtime. Craig and Thomas touching, kissing, the taller boy pressing the blonde down against the table, hands sliding along his— yep. There go his eyes, stinging again. Right on cue. Forces himself to think of Thomas' letter instead. His voice comes out a little thick. "Urgh. He's... not what I expected. He's kind. Hardworking. Couldn't hurt a damn mosquito, no matter how much it bit at him."

It goes unmentioned that he feels like the mosquito that's bothering and biting at Thomas, but that's neither here nor there. The thought makes his face twist into some sad parody of a grin.

He doesn't realize Craig's watching him until the silence stretches too long.
Turns to take peek up at him. The look on the other boy's face is... blank. But not because he's trying to hide anything – just sort of like he's forgotten he's got a face to express himself on at all. It's a look that makes all of Tweek's insides turn over. *Not* such a nice feeling.

So they keep on walking, hand in hand.

Each step takes them further away from the road, through untouched banks of white, through biting, blistering cold, until Tweek can't feel his feet through his soaked sneakers, and the damp of his sweatpants rubs uncomfortably against his calves. The wind picks up and sends the snow on the ground flying around them in swirls and turrets, airborne once again.

Sunshine rarely breaks through the clouds, but that's all right. It's blindingly bright out here anyway. The air smells peppery, sitting bitter in the back of his throat with each breath.

They crest a slow, sloping hillside with burning legs and clenched hands, and for a moment it feels like the world around them is dropping away.

Suddenly Tweek's somewhere else, three years ago, doing everything he can to wade through the never-ending snow, and feeling so lost – so alone – he isn't sure how he'll manage each step. The rucksack on his back is weighing him down and makes every step a struggle, until all he wants to do is sink down into the snow and sleep. To curl up and die.

(It had been the one time that Tweek had felt anything close to suicidal, if he could really call apathy and bone-deep tiredness that.)

This time it's his turn to slow.

Feet lead weights in his shoes, the blonde stops. Looks out over the far off blotches of the trees, the tear-track roads, the occasional, ugly red barn and rundown farmhouse. They could be anywhere in the world right now, and they probably wouldn't know the difference.

Out here, Clyde's snide comments feel a lot... less. They're just some stupid fucker's opinions on something he doesn't even understand.

And yeah, Tweek *doesn't* deserve Craig, but that's not something Clyde – or anyone else – has the right to comment on. If Craig wants to waste his time on Tweek, then that's up to him.

He's not going anywhere, as long as Craig wants him here. He'll gratefully take whatever’s offered. (Will fight it, even if his boyfriend decides otherwise.)

The quiet hum of a question works up in the back of his throat and, still staring out at no-where, he lets it out.

"Did you always like coffee?"

On the other end of their clasped hands, Craig huffs a breath; the blonde turns to watch it shroud his face in a white wreath.

"When we were kids, I hated it. It tasted like tar and dirt."

Why Tweek never thought to ask before baffles him. Maybe it was because Craig's never made a fuss – never so much as grimaced at the taste. Has just sipped through cup after shitty, awful cup like some kind of martyring hero. Tweek's heart thumps out an odd tattoo, so warm he doesn't feel the pain of the cold sinking into his limbs.
"Why'd you drink it then, man?" he asks, even though he thinks he already knows the answer.

An easy shrug. Icy blue eyes boring down into his, creased at the corners and set in a tired, furrowed brow. "It made you happy."

God.

His breath whistles out of him, whipped into the swirling flurries of the snow, and he forces his way through the deep snow so that he's toe-to-toe with the taller boy. Cranes his neck back to look up at him.

"Y-you hate the cold."

"I do," says Craig, voice almost stolen by the breeze.

"So you suggested walking all the way out here because..."

"Because I want you to feel better."

Tweek swallows down a lump of some raw, unnameable emotion. "The reason you k-kissed me in Token's garden at the party?"

It isn't his imagination – Craig's wind-burnt cheeks slowly darken. Still, he answers. "I didn't want you to remember your first kiss in a bad way. I wanted it to be special."

He draws his free hand out of the sleeve of his jacket and he settles it, ugly and red – chewed up, burned, blistering, scraped raw – against Craig's jacket. (Likes to imagine he's settling it down over his heart.)

"Was yours s-special?" He watches as he spreads his fingers out over Craig's chest. "Your first kiss?"

"In it's own way..." A curious twitch moves across Craig's mouth. "Kissing you in the yard that night was almost the polar opposite."

That answer... it doesn't hurt as much as he would've thought – thinks maybe that's because of where they are, and how easily Craig hands the words over to him, like gifts he doesn't know how to stop giving. And Tweek, he's greedy. Wants more.

(Wants everything.)

Lets the questions come out now without a fight – without any of the struggle he'd felt earlier, or the mania. "After everything that year, you still – rrgh – came to my house, day after day, and knocked on my door, even—even though you knew mom'd keep sending you home. Why?"

Crumbling like dust and dirt, Craig ducks his head. Tweek's no expert at reading expressions, but... he doesn't need to be, to recognize the self-loathing there. That's one emotion he's mastered. "I hated myself for hurting you. I couldn't imagine you up in your room, by yourself. I wanted you to know I was there, and that I would keep coming back, every day. So you wouldn't be alone."

The ache in his eyes says that he's going to cry, and so he steps forwards again, so that their feet are criss-crossed between one another. Presses his face against the front of Craig's frosted jacket and lets go of his hand, in order to wrap his arms around him.

His boyfriend reciprocates, pulling him closer with one hand on his lower back, and another between
his shoulder blades. His mouth presses into Tweek's hair.

"There's a— there's a lot I'm m-missing from that year. And before it. I w-was a mess a lot of the time. Didn't that... piss you off?"

"A little, at times." He feels his boyfriend shrug one shoulder. "But only because I was scared. I didn't know how to help you. I was looking for a fix, and I didn't understand that not everything could be set right, the way I wanted it to be. I only started understanding that during our freshman year."

So... he had struggled with Tweek being the way he was? But... there's reasoning behind it, this time. It still hurts to hear, but it's understandable. Mental health is fucking terrifying on the inside – let alone from the outside, when you're watching someone you care about falling apart, and you can't do anything to help them. Tweek can't imagine what he would've done if that was the other way around.

He bites back at the lump that's risen in his throat and changes the question.

"Why'd you agree to keep pretending to— to date me, when we were kids?"

"You wanted people to be proud of you," says Craig, warm breath against his hair. "I wanted that too, because it made you smile." A pause. "Plus, your dad was less of a dick to you, after. That helped."

Tweek hiccups a laugh, and turns his face harder into Craig's chest. The other boy is almost repeating, word for word, what Thomas told him. He's being honest, and all it took was Tweek asking. He squeezes his eyes tighter shut and mouths, 'I love you,' right over Craig's sternum.

(Doesn't say it out loud, because Craig hadn't wanted him to; doesn't say it out loud, because he's still got so much left to figure out and remember.)

When the threat of tears finally recedes, he breathes out a shaky sigh and pulls back a little – just enough to go up on his toes. To press cold, dry lips to the underside of Craig's rough, stubbly jaw, and then against the soft skin below the earflare of his hat.

It isn't his imagination that the taller boy tilts his head, or that his eyes slip shut at the touch. They stay that way for what feels like an eternity, Tweek shaking from his fucked up head, and Craig shaking because he's always been sensitive to the cold. The blonde moves his lips over his boyfriend's throat, whispers and phantoms of a proper kiss.

Finally, it's Craig's turn to ask another question. "Did you mean it? When you said I can kiss you at school?"

"Not just at school, you idiot. A-anywhere. Any time. I'm your boyfriend, aren't I?"

And yeah, maybe he's got a lot more to still work out, but he takes a moment to lean into this – into the way that Craig's arms tighten around him, and a low, deep sound rolls out of his throat. "You're mine."

... For a while longer, they stay there like that.

It's only when Craig's shaking develops into full blown shudders that they continue, the taller boy's
hand's thrust deep into his pockets, along with one of Tweek's.

Craig's half blue by the time they get to his house and Tweek, feeling guilty, pushes him back against the door and kisses some warmth back into him. (Obviously, he does it out of concern.)

The kisses warm them up so much, in fact, that they're both panting, and having to use the front door for support.

Which turns out not to be such a great places for an impromptu make out session, since said door swings inwards as Thomas Tucker's leaving for the bar, and they all collapse into a pile of flailing, swearing limbs.

There's much blustering and blushing as they clamber to their feet, and Tweek can only take so much awkward tugging of his jacket over the front of his pants before he turns and scrambles away, shrieking. Tries to convey that he's so, so sorry, and he'll see Craig tomorrow at school, but isn't quite sure how much of that he actually manages. And he sure as heck doesn't still around to find out.

By the time he gets home, he's still so flustered that he can't bear to face his parents, so he scrambles up the stairs and locks his bedroom door behind him.

(Great, now he's never going to be able to look Mr Tucker in the eyes again.)

It's only when he sinks down onto the edge of his bed to tug at his laces with clumsy, frozen fingers that his eye catches on his laptop… and the little USB still waiting in the port.

Oh.

*Good distraction.*

Chapter End Notes

i, personally, love cold weather. it's the summers that i struggle with. even over here in the rain-country. :|
After a quick shower and change into some pajamas, Tweek sinks down onto his mattress and, back to the headboard, pulls his Macbook up onto his lap.

It takes only about twenty minutes to finish the last of the diary inserts, catching up to his eleventh birthday, and when he reaches the end of the document, he backspaces out into the main folder section. Hovers his mouse over what's next in line.

'Other (10y/o)'

Nerves skittering up and down his arms, he clicks. Sits stock still as it unfolds in front of him, a dozen different documents and images.

The first, it appears, is a song. The first song of many that he wrote for Craig.

Entitled 'Its your call, Captin', it involves no less than fifteen repeats of the misspelled title throughout, along with a lot of forced rhymes (that always was his weakness, as a songwriter). While the wording isn't awful, it's clunky, and a pretty weird read since he has no idea what the tune that accompanied it was meant to be. What he can gather from it is that it's based on the two-person game they'd apparently been obsessed with playing in the forest that summer after they'd first gotten together. 'Space Explorers', they'd called it.

At one point, he refers to Craig as 'Spaceman Craig with an upgrade', and later, himself as 'Lieutenant Boyfriend'. It's-

A shudder of embarrassment rolls through him, and he closes the document with a stab of his finger.

It's awful.

(He has to take a brief break to flick through a few of his bookmarked news websites, before he’s feeling brave enough to continue.)

With no small amount of fear, he double-clicks the next thing in line – a picture entitled, 'Present Plans (Craig)'.

Freezes, because what he'd originally thought was a scanned-in sheet planning out Craig's eleventh birthday present, is in fact a page filled with the clumsy writing of both Craig and Tommy.

In the center of the page, squeezed into a tiny green bubble, are the words: 'Tweek's birthday present'. Spanning out from it in a network of sloppily drawn, crisscrossing lines, are at least thirty
different ideas, most crossed out or annotated with scathing comments.

One, in particular, stands out to him.

'A guinea pig?' Slanted writing asks.

Beneath this, there's an unhappy face and a heavily underlined: 'NO!! We all ready have Stripe why woud he need an other guinea pig.'

'Because Stripe is yours. Not his. Duh.'

'STRIPE IS OURS!!!!!!'

Despite himself, Tweek snorts a laugh, grin tugging at his mouth.

There are other gems, like the fact that Craig refuses to make him a gift, since, 'I'm shit at making stuff dude i cant even draw a stick man he'd hate my picshures.'

That insecurity as an artist makes Tweek pause, and think back to the main letters. Craig's refusal to draw Thomas a picture during their camping trip, aged eleven, and then two years later, his subsequent attempt at making a Tommy Valentine's Day card. (Which had, admittedly, been awful.)

Tweek pauses, wondering for the first time if maybe it was out of self-consciousness that Craig refused to give him handmade Valentine's cards. That maybe him buying them was something that he considered to be a more generous gift. And, with the addition of the bundles of dandelions he'd received on more than one occasion, despite them being out of season – almost non-existent in South Park at that time of year – and easily Craig's favorite type of flower besides...

Considering how much effort he'd gone into getting a nice gift for Tweek's birthday, he doesn't think it's unreasonable to assume that what he'd thought were sloppy, last minute presents actually had much more thought put into them than expected. Craig, who's already admitted to wanting Tweek happy, even at the tender age of ten, probably thought his gifts were kind and personal.

(He's not sure how that explains the out-of-date chocolates or the painfully blank cards, but he wants to believe, goddamn it.)

With those thoughts spinning around his mind, he moves on to the next image.

A photograph. Tweek and Craig at Stark's Pond in shorts and sandals. Ten-year-old Tweek has paused midway through opening his thermos to give the camera a demented looking grin in the background, and Craig is in the foreground, expression pouty, but cheeks flushed. His black bangs sweep down over one eye, surfer-dude style. (Was he trying to look cool?)

Enraptured by the sight of mini-Craig, Tweek almost avoids looking properly at his younger self. But... something makes him stop and look closer.

His eyebrows rise, as what he sees sinks in. He was podgy. Round cheeked, with fat little fingers and a serious chance that he could have started to rival Clyde on the chub front. He looked healthy – sun kissed and bright eyed. Almost like a normal little boy. Tweek doesn't remember a time when he wasn't all skin and bones, small and scrawny to the point of looking sick, with jutting hips and visible bumps down the length of his spine.

Throat tight for no good reason, he moves on.

Another song, inspired by the horrors of fifth grade homework.
Photos, of what looks like every fourth grade boy stuffing their faces at Casa Bonita; of Tweek, Craig, Clyde and Token gathered around the Just Dance mats at the arcade, faces a bright array of colors; of the whole gang sitting outside of the game shop waiting for the next day release of the new Play Station, huddled under blankets and holding up take out cartons from Raisins; and of Craig and Tweek at the piano in the elementary school music room, faces pressed together and smiles wide.

A poem about the apocalypse, with a whole stanza dedicated to how there'd be no point living in a world without fresh coffee, Craig or Stripe the Fourth.

Drawings from Tweek's old sketchbooks, of him and Craig holding hands, and of Craig asleep at his desk. Of Stripe in boxing gloves, attempting to fight Ruby's cat. Of Super Craig and Wonder Tweek, facing off against the Coon and Professor Chaos.

And then, at the very bottom of the file, is a picture simply entitled, 'What we had'.

Unthinking, he clicks on it. Stares at the images for a long time, before what he's looking at starts to register in his head.

It's a photo of Craig wearing a paper birthday hat in place of his chullo, flopped down on a bed Tweek doesn't recognize (are those Transformer themed bedcovers?), cell phone held up over his head, so that the shot falls on the honey-blonde boy beside him. There's a grimace on Craig's face that says this photo isn't going as he'd planned - which is probably true, since eleven-year-old Thomas is blatantly ignoring him, nose buried deep in a blue-covered book, and only one dark eye visible above the pages.

This is the image that Tweek finds himself pausing on for the longest time. There's a certain element of discomfort between the two boys, reflected in the unhappy expression and the distance between them. It isn't the same lively scene as the photos of the South Park boys, but... there's an element of privacy to it, like peering through someone's bedroom window at the scene inside, which makes Tweek feel like he shouldn't be looking at all.

Still, he saves the image onto his laptop along with the others, and moves on to the next file.

'Tweek's journal (11y/o)'

Like the previous, this one is split into months, starting on his birthday in October, and following through to the next year. It doesn't take him long to get lost in the pages - the mess of old feelings, thoughts and events that he'll never be able to recall with any real clarity.

October 26
Craig stole us some of mr Tuckers beers the ytasted GROSS like CATPEE and idont think it eveb did a thing. i feel likea dults are dum.b DDDDD:

Shit, he was definitely drunk. That's... hilarious, and also kind of concerning. How the hell were they not caught? He wonders why they ever thought that drinking was a good idea in the first place, and then pauses.

Considers the fact that they were kids, and they were growing up in South Park.

(No need for further explanation, then.)

Moves on.

November 19
I stayed at Craig's last night. I like staying at Craig's becuase his mom and dad dont mind us
sleeping in his room together. We stayed up almost all night just us, watching movies and making up the best pillow fort ever to keep the Underwear Gnomes and goblins out. He fell asleep when we were watching Inside Out though. His head is really heavy but I didn't move it all night. I got sleepy around morning and I fell asleep too. Why are his feet SO cold?

The last line makes his mouth kick up into a grin. Some things never change, apparently.

And then he gets to December twenty-sixth, and he pauses.

There's no entry.

None.

Not for an entire week.

Just... blank pages to highlight the fact that these days are missing.

That's how December ends.

Silence ringing like a gong through his mind, he backspaces into finder, and pulls up January, the tremble in his fingers intensifying.

(What if that's it? What if there're no more memories? Nothing else to read?)


Scrolls down, and...

Releases a breath he hadn't realized he was holding.

On January second, there's writing. A lot of it. A scanned page, full of tiny letters and scribbles. The words are so cramped together that he has to enlarge the page and scrunch his face up into a squint just to read it.

(Even then, he struggles.)

January 2

i hate my parents i hate them ihatethemihatethemiHATETHEM!!! and Craig's TOO!!!! we didn't want to go and Craig was angry and sad the whole trip i hate them becuzae they didnt tell him and he wanted to go see his gran and he cried becuzae he didnt have his phone or laptop or ANY THING!!!! NIETHER OF US DID!!! THEY MADE HIM CRY I WILL NEVER SPEAK TO ANY OF THEM AGAIN NOT EVEN DAD!!!! i hugged Craig for ages and i talked to him but he wouldn't tell me why he was sad, just that he WAS and that he wanted to go to denver and that he HATED skiing. i thoght may be he hated me too so i was really REALLY sad but he didn't, he said he didn't. but the whole holiday sucked why did they DO this? was this to tell us off? we werent even alowed in the same room together with the door shut because dad said we'd get up to stuff and i didn't sleep AT ALL BECUASE ON MY OWN IT WAS SCARY!!!! i had to sneek in with him at night but i we got caught becuase we fell asleep together, and then i got grounded. Dadgrounded me on HOLIDAY i FUCKING HATE HIM!!!! this was the worst holiday ever i wish we never went i HATE THEM!!!! I HATE THEM I WISH THEYD ALL GO FUCK THEM SELVES! and weve been home for 5 hours now and Craig hasnt spoken once or texted or anything what if hehates me???? what if he thinks this is my fault?!!?? i wanna see Craig. i wanna GO BUT IM STILL GROUNDED FOR SPEARING AT THEM! STUPID FUCKING PARENTS STUPID STUPIDSTU
Blinking hard in the face of his younger self's angst, Tweek has to spend a moment rereading the mess of preteen emotions, before he really gets anything useful out of it.

(Skiing? They went on a skiing trip? But... wasn't the camping trip their families their first holiday together? Yet another lapse in his mental timeline that makes his skin feel like it's crawling off of his body.)

And then he pauses. Craig, being sad about missing a trip to his Gran's, in Denver? So sad that he apparently spent the whole holiday a mess?

There's only one reason Tweek can think of:

Thomas.

Craig must have had plans to visit Thomas, and hadn't been able to cancel. He'd been upset because his plans for the end of Winter break had been totally turned on their heads without giving him any time to change them around. *That* was why he hadn't been comforted by Tweek's presence, and probably why he'd avoided him when they got back.

(The fact that five hours without contact instantly translates into avoidance in Tweek's mind, even seven years later, speaks of his unhealthy levels of attachment to his boyfriend.)

Made more aware than ever of his dependence on Craig, and rather discomfited by it, he moves on – reads through January and February, and the planning of a new song that he was writing for his best friend, about his head being a balloon; powers past March, and a weekend trip to the zoo with all of their friends, which ended in the gorillas breaking free and holding the zoo staff at gunpoint; skips past April, and a trip to the dentist that left him petrified of having anything metal within a three foot radius of his face, for fear of his head exploding; is reading through it all so fast, he almost passes right over a few very odd lines at the end of an entry, late May.

It's so brief, so inconspicuous, his eyes very nearly skips it. But once he's seen it, he feels like his brain has to pause for a deep breath.

'... *Plus Craig kept looking at me and got wierd when I tried to huug him, like, his whole head went bright red. And he keeps saying stuff about spinning around or something, I don't get him today. Oh God maybe he's getting sick*?'

There's no real reason that it should ought to stick out at all, no real reason for him to focus on them, but... his heart jolts weirdly against his ribcage when he reads it, for some reason.

Shaking off the feeling, he moves on. Works his way through the entirety of the Summer with rapt attention, eyes aching and the short, ragged nail of his thumb pressed against his lips. Smiles a finger biting smile at the mentions of their camping trip – a postcard hunt, a swim in the lake and a day spent sick in his tent, with Craig's hands stroking circles into his back – and of playing Biker Gangs with the rest of their year group.

Becoming a sixth grader seems to come with many sleepless nights of pre-school panic, and then an instantaneous hatred for their teacher. Detentions and Cartman setting the classroom on fire, and their entire class getting the blame. And then one day just after Craig's twelfth birthday (Tweek apparently writes him some kind of a short story for his present which, once again, he has no recollection of), Craig comes home from his Gran's, covered in bruises.

*September 30*  
*Ojay this is really serious I think Craig is beign hurt by some one at his Gran's. he got a black eye*
while he was gone! A BALCK EYE!!! he said he was fine and that it wasn't a big deal but his back is bust up too, and he's got finger marks on his arms too (i saw all that while we were changing for P.E class) and I REALLY don't liek it!!! i wanna punch whoever hurt him SO BAD!!! NO ONE MESSES WITH MY CRAIG OR I'LL BEAT THERI ASSES!!!! and then i'll hit Craig for tryign to keep it secret what a stupid boy! :(((((

Funny, that's something that he does remember clearly - climbing onto the bus to find his fake boyfriend beat up but relaxed. He'd winced when Tweek had gripped at his shoulders to shake the answer out of him, but had sat silently, just smiling. And then he'd pulled Tweek in for a hug that had lasted the whole ten minute bus trip into school.

Finds himself wondering over what the hell Craig and Tommy had gotten up to that weekend, for him to come home looking so happy.

(And then decides that perhaps he doesn't actually want to know.)

In the end, Tweek moves one. Scrolls through. Clicks into October. The entry that he finds himself most interested in is the very last of his entire eleventh year. It's the day before his birthday.

Small, cluttered words cover a scanned page, interspersed between intricate, half faded pencil doodles of rocket ships and aliens. Crayon stars and glitter-glue. A moon sticker in the top right corner.

Just looking at it has his heart beating a little faster. Before he even reads the first word, he knows it's special.

October 5

Me and Craig skipped school again. He said he had something he wanted to do today that was different then the normal stuff. He said as long as I wore clothes for outside then I'd been fine and he would get every thing else ready. I couldn't sleep last night I was so excited and nervos. ★ Anyway we went out before school even started and into the woods and we were like halfway there when i figured we were going to that crappy cabin in the middle of the woods that Stan's uncle Jimbo owns but doesnet ever bother using and I guess I was a little bummed out becuase really? ★ What if mom and dad find out I skipped for a dumb old cabin? But then we got there and when we walked in it was AMAZING! :*:*:* hed pinned up loads of these battery fairy lights and little glow in the dark stars and he'd covered up the windows and he'd made it like we were camping out in the middle of a field but without any of the crawly insects or night monsters and he said it was becuase when we went camping we didn't get to do this even though he'd wanted to and... it made my heart go weird. ♡ ♡ So we lay in the dark and held hands with all those plastic green stars and it was the best ever birthday present. I wish today didnt ever end. ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡

After reading, he shuts his eyes, and imagines. Imagines the drafty, dusty, miserable shithepam of a hut covered in twinkling golden lights and fluorescent green stars, and two kids lying flat on their backs on a blanket in the middle of the dusty floor, making up constellations and holding hands like they'd never let each other go.

Tweek wishes, wishes with everything, that he could go back there, to that moment.

Aching in a way he doesn't want to think about too deeply, he shoves the laptop from his chest and he scrambles to find his cell and his charger. A mad five minutes ensues, in which he wrestles with his satchel, and then with the power chord, and then with his bedding as he waits for his phone to switch on.

Rolling onto his side, he flips through to his contacts and, despite it already being late – gone eleven
– he calls Craig.

Phone to his ear and wriggling to tug the blankets up higher, he gets through to the fifth ring before the other end clicks on.

"Tweek?" There's something breathless about Craig's voice, like he just ran across half his house to reach his cell.

"Nnrg, yeah man. Y-you free to talk a minute?" He tugs lightly at his bangs with his free hand, pulling them down in front of his eyes and staring at the blur of blonde.

"Sure, yeah." A pause, and a squeak Tweek imagines is from Craig's computer chair. "Of course. What's up?"

"You remember that time we went out to Stan's uncle's cabin? Just the two of us?" He heart beats a little harder. What if he doesn't? Or worse, what if he does and it didn't actually mean anything-?

"That time in sixth grade, when we skipped class?" He sounds a little baffled, but Tweek figures that's a pretty normal reaction to what might as well be the most random damn question. Still, Tweek releases a breath at the fact that Craig knows what he's talking about. "It was your birthday, wasn't it?"

"Uh-huh." He chews lightly at the inside of his cheek as he contemplates what he wants to say next. In the end though, he doesn't bother trying to censor his words, no matter how vulnerable it makes him feel, to be this open. Only tells himself that this is okay, that he's trying to be as honest with Craig as possible. "I— I just, I keep realizing all these things you've done for me, l-like that time, with sticking up fake stars and fairy lights, or like just always listening to me talk things out, or... I dunno, dude. Just being there, y'know? Always waiting. I think I'd b-be lost without you."

There's a long pause on the other end, and then a sigh. "I don't deserve... I've fucked up a lot, too." A creak, like he's leaning back in his chair. "I'm not great with emotions. Like when you confessed and I went and left you on the doorstep so I could go beat the shit out of McCormick, instead of doing the right—"

"Wait, what?" Tweek bolts upright in his bed, eyes round and jaw slack. Craig, he— that doesn't make sense. "You didn't— you just pushed me out the door, dude. Pushed m-me out and— aurgh—and went back inside."

Another pause.

(But it's not like Tweek notices, thanks to the fact his heart is once again trying to vacate his ribcage.)

"...Babe, that's not what happened."

Fist tightening in his hair, Tweek squeezes his eyes harder shut. Shakes his head. He remembers it. Out of everything, he remembers—

Remembers running blindly to Craig's house. Remembers confessing. Being pushed away. Standing alone on the doorstep. Stumbling halfway home and collapsing in the snow to throw up his guts and cry into the gutter.

But there are blank patches.

Huge, gaping holes in the events of that day, just like everything else he's uncovered. Tweek... he knows he had a dream about Craig, but can't recall the details. Knows he must have dressed, knows
he fell over several times on the way because of the blood and the scrapes, knows that he'd already been crying when he got there because he hadn't been able to see right.

Doesn't have any idea how the hell he got back to the house, or what happened over the course of the following... what, week? Two weeks? Month?

The feeling of Craig's hand pulling off of his back – that cold, quiet refusal – eclipses everything. There was nothing else. Not for a considerable amount of time.

Days blended together, until September was October was November was December, Craig pulling back, flinching, red faced and grimacing like Tweek was diseased-

He clutches at his head hard, fingernails digging into his scalp and breath rushing out of his hollow chest. Forces himself to stop.

Shakes himself again; his temples throb fiercely. "I-it— hrrng. Craig, I don't... I don't remember it. I don't know, I d-don't know anymore. Everything's ff-fucked up." His eyes burn but he bites it back. He's not going to cry again. Not anymore. Not over this. It'd be like admitting defeat. He pulls his knees up to his chest, tilts his head back so that his neck arches, and sucks in a huge breath. "I'm fucked up. I'm so goddamn—"

"Tweek." Craig's been so quiet for the last few minutes that Tweek actually flinches at the sudden voice biting down the line. He whimpers, clutches harder at his head. Sinks his teeth into his lip. Shakes and tics. But he stops speaking for just a moment. "Stop. Breathe. Focus on that." He pauses, and Tweek takes that as his cue to follow those instructions, breath loud and deliberate in the silence. Only after a few rounds, does Craig starts speaking again. "Today's not a good day for talking about this, dude. You're probably still stressed from earlier—"

"But, Craig, I can't remember—"

"Then stop trying to force it. Leave it for tonight. Put on your music and do some art. Draw more pictures of my ugly damn face, or something."

A weak, airless giggle forces its way out of Tweek's throat, and his chest burns with the struggle for breath. (Only Craig could make him laugh mid-meltdown.) "Y-you're not— mng. You're not ugly."

"Let's agree to disagree there, babe." There's a sharp lilt to his boyfriend's voice that hints at amusement; it softens as he continues. "Just... try to unwind. If you still want to talk about it tomorrow, then we can. We'll skip class like we did that time on your birthday, and we'll go check out the cabin. We can pack food and coffee like last time too, and make a day out of it. Just us."

Tweek untangles his fingers from his hair, and then presses the heel of his hand against his eye, hard. Gives another wheezing laugh. "W-we – eurgh – can't keep skipping school every t-ime I get a little overwhelmed, man."

"Yes we can," says Craig, so blunt that Tweek's crumpled face curves up a little. "What's the worst they can do, slap our wrists? Fuck them, babe. The only person I care about right now is you. And if skipping one more day of classes will help even just a little bit, then I don't care. Okay?"

He shuts his eyes and even through the crushing weight on his chest, even through the throb of his temples and the ever growing myriad of questions, he's choked by his affection for his boyfriend.

"Mmn. Okay, Craig... o-okay."

A sigh. A rustle. "Okay, good. I'll phone you in the morning. And honey?"
"Y-yeah?"

"I mean it. You're the only person I care about. You. Just you. Nothing else matters."

Tweek's face burns so hot that his whole head pounds with his pulse. All he can manage is a gurgled whine.

There's a quiet huff of laughter from the other end, and then the line clicks off, and Tweek's left flustered and anxious.

He's left embarrassed and warm.

He's left teetering on the edge of a precipice that he knows he'll never manage to return from, if he lets himself go – has been stuck here for the last four years.

The fall is steep and rigged with potential hazards, but... he's finding it harder and harder not to give in and just let himself plummet.

(He wants to step out over the edge so bad it hurts.)

Chapter End Notes

unff. i love hot cross buns. <333

(omg wait i just had the most terrifying thought. do any countries outside of the UK even know what they are?? oh GOD!! how could anyone live without them?? i am so confused and hurt right now, i'm gonna have to go toast me a hot cross bun as a post-midnight, i-should-really-be-asleep-because-i've-got-work-in-4-hours-but-what-is-my-life distress snack. rip me.)
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

i honestly hate this chapter SO. DANG. MUCH. it's been the hardest to write since i've started working on this story, and the only things that kept me going were your comments and your support.

so THANK YOU ALL for being so patient through my longest dry-patch so far. fingers crossed it won't happen again! <333

(i am totally unapologetic about all the mistakes in this hunk o' junk. i'll come back when my eye stops twitching. LOL.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Just the thought of not attending school the next day – of being alone with his boyfriend, just the two of them, like they were on the walk home – gives Tweek something to focus on. It gives him something to work towards.

So he spends about an hour writing out a list of everything he could take with him tomorrow, and then another three quarters of an hour crossing things off and adding different ideas. What he eventually ends up with is a pretty nice set of jobs to keep him busy most of the night.

The first thing he does is stumble downstairs in the dark to start on some food he wants to bring.

Before he's even started, he's faced with a problem. His hands shake so bad, he has trouble even just lifting a damn knife out of the draw, and so he is forced to spend an extra half hour just working himself down out of his hype. Running his hands under the cold tap until they ache; breathing deep; tracing the grout between the chilled tiles with his bare toes; counting the cobwebbing cracks in the ceiling; humming the same tune his mom always does.

When he tries again, he's more focused, more controlled.

So he starts on the sandwiches, (chicken mayo and salad, since there's nothing else even vaguely related to sandwich filler or condiment in the entirety of their over-packed refrigerator), and then moves on to snack hunting.

His mom isn't a fan of junk food (unless it's homemade, of course), so anything that is in the house has been buried right at the very back of the cupboards to fossilize some time in his very early childhood years.

The list of long lost treats is painfully short, but Tweek gathers together his hoard of Devil Food Cake Zingers and Cappuccino Pop-tarts with no small amount of pride. He preps a thermos ready for some industrial strength coffee to be poured in when he wakes up first thing in the morning, returns the now made sandwiches to the fridge, and cleans up his (not inconsiderable) mess.

By the time that he's scooping his prizes up into his arms and struggling to turn off the kitchen light, it's just gone three in the morning.

But he doesn't call it a night there.
Packing his satchel for the day trip turns into more of a trial that he ever would've guessed. He stashes the treats in the front pocket, along with his keys, his wallet (not that he'll need it, but still), his iPod, his headphones and his now fully charged cell phone. In the main compartment, he shoves a roughly folded blanket, a flashlight, a spare scarf and, after a moments hesitation, a second for Craig, since the idiot is always cold and never dresses appropriately for the weather. In case of severe emergencies (and on the off-chance that Craig forgets his for the first time in all eight years they've been 'together'), he packs a first-aid kit. And a spare lighter for his boyfriend. And then an extra couple pairs of socks (the only thing worse than wet feet is missing underwear – Tweek would know).

Thinks he's probably going overboard when he reaches for his pocket knife, but ends up stashing it in there somewhere anyway.

Once that's done, Tweek traipses over to his bed, clambering under the blankets and kicking them into submission where they try to tangle around his ankles. He slides his laptop over onto the nightstand and rolls onto his side, mirroring the position he'd laid in while he was on the phone to Craig.

Sometimes he feels like maybe, just maybe, he's making headway with his mental health.

And then, he thinks as he closes his aching eyes and listens to the pounding of his pulse against the walls of his skull, I realize just how much I rely on Craig to drag me out of my dark places.

(Wonders what he would do without his boyfriend giving him purpose and support in his every endeavor. Stops, because he doesn't know whether to be disgusted by himself, or even more hopelessly enamored with Craig.)

... He's woken by the vibrating ring of his cell in his satchel what feels like minutes later, the high pitch sound cutting straight through some painful, restless dream he can't recall, but leaves his skin crawling anyway.

Prizing himself up out of bed, he stumbles across the room, still half tangled in his sheets. Almost falls flat on his face thanks to his trailing sweatpants.

Scrambling with the front pocket of his bag, he eventually tugs the damn thing free, swiping desperately at the screen and ignoring the rush of goosebumps along each of his limbs and he sinks down to sit on the floor.

"H-hello?" He clears his throat and rubs his fist against his eyes. "Eurgh. Craig?"

"Hey babe. Were you sleeping?" Craig's voice is a thick, slow drawl, like he's not long been awake himself. Knowing how long it takes him to perform even the simplest tasks in the morning, though, he's likely been up for at least an hour already.

"Nng. yeah man."

"Sorry, didn't mean to wake you."

"It's fine, w-whatever," he says, already buzzing as he recalls where they're meant to be going today. "We still going? Today?"

"If you're up for it, then so am I."
"Y-yeah. Yes. Please," he says in a voice that gets dangerously close to a screech. Reels himself back in by threading his fingers through his hair and studying the outline of unusually bright light edging in around the curtains.

"Sure. I'll come collect you in half an hour. Does that give you enough time to get ready?"

"Aurgh. Jesus Christ dude, it's only—" He pauses to peer down at the screen of his phone, and his eyes nearly bulge out of his head when he sees that he's overslept by about an hour and a half. "Holy shit. How— how'd I not wake up?"

On the other end of the line, Craig yawns. "Because you stayed up stupidly late and didn't set an alarm. That's my guess."

"Gah. Shut up dude. A-and hurry up."

Shutting off the call, he scrambles back onto to his feet and starts desperately rooting through the nearest clothes piles, overturning half his well established mountains of mess in order to drag out a suspiciously oversized black t-shirt (most definitely a cast-off from his boyfriend), an ugly, bobbly, knitted yellow cardigan that he's sure is his mom's (and thus won't only be too big for him, but'll also look fucking ridiculous), and a pair of grey Adidas sweatpants he already knows are gonna be totally inappropriate for hiking through a snowy woodland.

Perfect.

Feeling like the biggest idiot in the entire damn town (which is kind of a damning statement, considering what the other residents are like), Tweek dresses anyway, in too much of a panic over the time to worry too hard about how he looks. A cursory tug of his fingers through wild bedhead, and the blonde is throwing himself out the door and down the stairs. As is tradition, his mom is sat down at the table, filling in a word search and sipping on what is likely to be her third or fourth cup of coffee.

In order to fend off the headache trying to claw its way through his skull, Tweek pours out a huge mug-worth from the cafetière into his second-favorite cup, and doles out three extra sugars since he could really do with a damn boost this morning. After taking a mouthful of the scalding liquid, he rallies his strength and sets about making a fresh pot, draining the dregs in the sink, rinsing the glass pot, switching on the full kettle, and doling out the fresh grounds from the packet.

Only once he's rushed over the the fridge to retrieve his deformed, badly squished chicken sandwiches, does he let himself sink down into his chair.

"Oversleep, pumpkin?" His mom asks him, with a curious lilt to her voice. Why does she sound so... cheerful?

Squinting at her, Tweek makes an affirmative grunt as he lifts his mug to his face and gulps down another couple of mouthfuls. When his thirst for the over-sweetened, mouth burning drink has been quenched (and Jesus, how the heck does his mom always keep the coffee hot? It's gotta be witchcraft. Here he was thinking his dad was the witch in the family), he pushes up to his feet and pads across the cold tiles to the now billowing kettle.

With a click, he lifts it off the stand and fills the cafetière to the brim, leaving the coffee to steep and drumming his fingers impatiently against the countertop. He can feel his mom's eyes on his back, but he's honestly doing his best to ignore her.

The sound of a chair scraping across the tiles has him twitching. Mrs Tweak walks up alongside him,
and turns to lean her hip against one cupboard door. "As you're not going to have time to eat your breakfast, I'll make you up a box to go. You boys can eat on the bus in, can't you?"

Tweek opens his mouth to protest that she shouldn't waste her time making something he won't have the inclination to eat (really, he thinks, eating on the bus? Does she want him to choke? Or worse, catch some kind of godawful, incurable disease?), when he pauses. Thinks of the fact that they're not going to school, and that they're actually going to be camped out in a freezing cold fucking shack all day.

Suddenly, his mom's offer sounds a whole lot nicer. "Mmng — please. That'd be — that'd be good."

Glancing in her direction, he watches one of Mrs Tweak's small, beatific smiles stretch across her face in a way that tells him his mom was — is still, in fact — a bit of a heart breaker. Sad that her only child is ugly as ass, then. "Okay, dear," she says, and then swats his hand away as he goes to reach for the coffee pot. "Don't you worry about that. I'll make sure your flask is filled up and ready to go, before you leave. So, you run along and finish sorting yourself out."

Struggling to keep a frazzled grin from his face, the blonde backs away from the counter, collecting his heavy mug from the table and shuffling back towards the kitchen door. "Thanks, ma," he says quietly, the rare endearment he'd used as a boy slipping out before he can stop himself.

For a moment, Mrs Tweak freezes mid-rifle through one of the draws, and looks over the shoulder to peer at him. She sends him a smile and a wink, and he's stepping through to the living room when he pauses again. Stands on the once plush carpet – which has been worn down into flat, rough fuzz from decades of dragging heels – and watches his mom potter around, no doubt making way more food than either he or Craig could ever hope to eat.

Sometimes (all the time), he feels like he doesn't deserve such a great parent. The amount of stress that he must have put her through over the years, to elicit such a warm smile for something as simple as saying thanks—

That hurts.

He wonders at how she's always remained a stable figure in the house; quiet and unmoving, always cooking fresh, homemade food for him, just so that the few meals he manages to eat will at least keep him healthy.

Eyebrows furrowed, he says quietly, "Do you r-remember how I used to be kinda... fat, when I was a kid?"

His mom hums thoughtfully, not turning to look at him as she draws out a mixing bowl from one of the cub boards, and a box of flour from another. "You weren't fat, sweetie. You were just a little heavier built, back then. Like me. Now you take more after your father."

He pauses, resenting the suggestion that he takes after Richard Tweak in any way, shape or form. Blurs out before he can stop himself, "I-I hate it. Being like this. Being skinny." That last word comes out like a curse.

Over next to the oven, his mom tuts. "Tweek, sweetie, you can't help that that's your natural body type. If it really worries you, then all I can suggest is changing your eating habits. Really, though, you've come a long way a since you were younger. You're a lot healthier looking now than you were — you've gained back a lot of your weight. You shouldn't put yourself down."

Not sure he agrees with her in the slightest, he hovers for a moment longer, and then turns back
towards the stairs, mug clutched in his hands.

By the time that Craig knocks on the door, punctual as ever, Tweek's wrestled his satchel into order, has put on his best winter boots, has added a green hooded jumper over the top of his cardie as well as a black winter coat (since it is, once again, snowing), and has had his mom load his arms full of no less than three tubs of what smells like fresh waffles and cookie dough, and two monstrous flasks that there's no way they're going to be able to drink their way through, no matter how long they're out for. He manages to stash most of the extras into his bag, amongst the blanket and the scarves, but he's forced to offload one of the flasks on his boyfriend, the very second he's stepped out into the sub-arctic weather.

With all his usual grace and apathy, Craig takes the canister and somehow jams it into the top of his bulging rucksack without question, eyes hooded but face clean-shaven. Staring at the smooth stretch of pale jawline, Tweek pushes up onto his tiptoes to peck the taller boy's cheek, before pulling away with a sweep of embarrassed affection. "Th-thanks dude. For— for last night. And today."

"No problem," Craig says, as easy as breathing. Wraps one arm around the blonde's shoulder and pulls him close, cheeks that are already dusted pink darkening. (Now that Tweek sees he's responsible for that, he doesn't think he'll ever un-see it.) "Ready?"

Heart kicking against his ribs at the thought of the day ahead of them, Tweek nods. "Ready."

Silence holds as they walk out of town past the U-Store garages and along the woodland path, right up until they reach the main road and the bridge that overlooks the river. It's here that Tweek's feet slow of their own accord, peering out over the edge of the railing and into the icy, sluggish black water far below with something akin to realization.

He hated getting up close to the edge of the bridge, when he was a kid – or any long drop, really. He'd always made his boyfriend stand on the outside, closer to the fall. It's the same way he'd obsessively pored over accident statistics as a child, memorizing all the facts and figures, to the point where he can still recite them today. The same way he'd flipped through news sites, read every awful article, stressed constantly over terrorist threats and conspiracy theories until the sun rose and the moon disappeared beyond the skyline. But...

When had he stopped being so fearful of those sorts of things?

"What's up?" Craig asks quietly, and Tweek looks back in time to see his boyfriend's breath escaping him in a blooming, unfurling cloud.

Oh, y'know, just wondering how I used to be so damn fixated on death and I've just now noticed I'm not anymore, is all, he thinks to himself.

Decides it's not really something that he wants to share. It's the sort of observation that never would have occurred to him prior to reading his batshit-crazy younger self's journal entries. (Which cite hazard after potential hazard in almost every other paragraph, often in pretty gruesome detail.) While he's still pretty freaked out by the thought of getting caught in an accident or catching some kind of bizarre, untreatable disease, his current levels of paranoia on the subject are a lot less intense than they once were.

Funny, considering how much more fucked up he considers himself, these days.
"N-nothing," he says instead, blinking back to reality and shiver as he peers over the dizzying drop into the water. The hairs on the back of his neck have risen to attention, and the razor-toothed wind seems to penetrate every layer of clothing.

The only reply he gets to that is the squeeze of Craig's arm around his shoulder, and the tug of the other boy leading him across the bridge.

It's only once they're safely on the other side, and stepping off of the edge of the road to allow space for a passing truck (which they almost get knocked down by, thanks to thick, blinding sheets of snow), that the taller boy breaks the silence.

"Should I put some music on?"

"Sure, man," Tweek says, ducking his cold nose down into the padded collar of his coat and leaning into Craig's side as the other boy retrieves his cell from his jacket pocket.

After a few moments of quiet scrolling, the soft, ringing beat of David Bowie's 'Life on Mars' begins to thrum in the air around them.

They continue on to the sound of guitar rifts and high refrains, drums and bells. David Bowie switches to Pink Floyd, and Pink Floyd to the Moody Blues, and all Tweek can think is that thank fuck Craig's music tastes have developed since they were kids. Although alternative rock and 80's tunes aren't really his vibe, he associates them solely with the comfort and the presence of his boyfriend.

It's only as 'Golden Brown' is playing, low and soft, almost lost in the deafening silence of the hibernating woodland, that Tweek notices how much Craig is shivering. Considering the fact that he's unintelligently worn only his usual jeans, chullo hat and a black bomber jacket, Tweek thinks that the other boy probably shouldn't be surprised that he's cold.

With a huff and a roll of his eyes, Tweek comes to a halt and flips up the cover of his satchel, pulling back the zip and rummaging inside.

Numb fingers catching on the soft, knitted fabric of his favorite green scarf, he tugs it free and shoves it into Craig's chest. Watches as the taller boy's eyebrows climb up high on his head.

Blue eyes meet his through the flurries. "You should wear it. Your cheeks are red."

(Which, of course, makes them grow even redder.)

Scowling, Tweek just says, "Dude, just p-put it on before you freeze off your balls. I brought one for me, too." Turns back to his bag to yank out a red and blue abomination that he'd knitted himself out of spare bits of yarn, back when he was trying to teach himself how to make Craig's hat. It's scratchy and hideous – like some sort of Frankenstein's monster made out of fabric – but it's warmer than most of his other scarves. Since it's only Craig seeing him, he doesn't mind looking like a total wacko.

(Even as he tells himself that, though, his face continues overheating. He's shocked that the snowflakes landing on his cheeks don't sizzle upon contact.)

Yanking it around his neck, he tries to ignore the small smile Craig's giving him as the other boy pulls his on too.

"You're cute," Craig says, winding his arm around Tweek and pressing his hand flat against the blonde's ribs, over the top of his thick, feather-stuffed coat.
"Gah. A-and you're a jerk," says Tweek in reply, unable to help the way his voice softens around the intended insult, or the way his hand seeks out and rests over the top of Craig's.

There's a huff of laughter as the taller boy grazes his lips, briefly, over the crown of Tweek's head. "Come one, babe. We should keep moving."

Staring blearily out into the world of white around them, Tweek's pout transforms into a genuine frown. "You better know where we are, man."

"I do." Tone unwavering, Craig starts walking again, leading them through a long, winding path deeper into the forest than Tweek has been for years.

Fir trees loom what feels like miles overhead, disappearing like giants with their heads lost in the clouds. Their feet crunch through perfect, untouched banks of snow, two feet deep even under the cover of the trees. The air tastes like pepper and pine needles on the back of his tongue.

The further they go, the deeper the drifts get, and the less comforting the familiar tunes on Craig's playlist become. Their clothes are soaked through and clinging to them, their skin sore and numb, their bodies the only points of color between the grey of the thick, towering tree trunks and the all-consuming whiteness.

"Aurgh. Craig," he says, voice high and reedy with nerves. "A-are you sure you know—"

"Just a little further, honey," says the taller boy, voice calm as ever. "About ten more minutes, and the path'll open up." He glances down at Tweek, and out here where all of the color drains away from the world, the blue in his eyes shines like a beacon. "Trust me."

(Of course he trusts Craig. That goes without fucking saying.)

Tweek swallows, averting his eyes and squeezing Craig's ice-cold hand where he still holds it against his side. The silence swallows them back up.

What feels like a small eternity of aching legs and stinging skin and bleary eyes drags them forwards – drags them through the piled up snow and bites at them until they're raw.

The trees remain tight-packed, and the earth hidden beneath feet of snow remains, for the most part, flat. Everything looks exactly the same. Tweek can't help the way that his anxiety is spiking, the way that his ribcage is crushing his lungs and suffocating him. Craig just holds him closer like he can feel it too, keeping his strides slow and loping.

Just as he's about ready to wrench himself free and turn on his heels to run back the way they came while shrieking bloody murder, the tree line breaks.

'Space Oddity' thrums through the speakers, tinny, as they pause on the outskirt of the clearing.

A blanket of untouched white, crisp and bright under the open sky.

And there, in the very center, the hut. Smaller than he remembers it being, and definitely older looking. Half buried on its foundations. Long since abandoned.

All of his breath leaves him in a whoosh.

"W-we m-made it," he says, words more a sob than anything else.

"In… under an hour and a half, too," says Craig, after pulling his cell out and checking the time.
"Augh. Wh-what?"

There’s no way it was that fast.

Disbelievingly, he goes to swipe for the phone, but between his legs being encased in two feet of snow and his satchel swinging precariously when he leans forward, his pathetic attempt just has him flailing and almost falling flat on his face.

Craig grapples with him to keep them both upright (somehow understanding that if Tweek goes down, he’ll be dragging his boyfriend with him), and, hunched down awkwardly with his arms around the blonde, he gives Tweek a look caught somewhere between a smirk and a grimace. Pulls back just enough to show him the screen, which clearly reads: '09:07'.

"Believe me yet?"

Flushing the color of a damn tomato, Tweek shoves away from the taller boy’s warmth and stomps out into the open, taken by surprise when a few steps later, the snow rises high enough to engulf his thighs— his thighs, oh God, oh Jesus Christ it stings, it's rubbing coldcoldcold nails, so cold it's FIRE—

He freezes, hands turning into claws, and peers down at his legs.

Okay.

It's okay.

They're still there. It's only snow. See?

Forces himself forwards, through grit teeth and a phantom feeling of something gouging into his skin. His fingers itch.

(But he won't fall apart in front of Craig. He won't let that happen. Not today.)

So he wades through the drift, clutching his bag and his hair, and then the railing leading up the steps. Heaves himself up onto the wood, prizing his legs free and curling around the splintered, rickety railing to suck in a sharp breath.

(Feels like he's just run a marathon.)

Peering back out across the clearing to find Craig, he realizes with no small amount of shame that he was barely a step behind him the whole damn time.

(Of course he was. Why does Tweek always just assume that he's on his own?)

As his boyfriend steps up beside him, he runs his hand briefly over Tweek's back. "Let's get inside, babe," he says, ruffling the blonde's hair when he gets a jerky nod in response. That might normally exasperate Tweek, but right now he just reaches up with his ugly hands and catches Craig's, tugging it down in front of him and holding it between both of his.

Craig pauses to watch him, a crinkle at the corner of his eyes.

Shaking and gripping tighter, Tweek holds his boyfriend's hand to his chest and follows his up the steps to the door, watching as Craig reaches with ease into the eaves for the little hook with the spare key on, which they all discovered the summer they first made this their 'secret base', (or whatever lame thing it was Butters had dubbed it).
One-handed, Craig retrieves the key and inserts it smoothly into the rusting lock, twisting and jiggling roughly with it, until—

With an unhealthy, begrudging sort of grating, the lock mechanism *clunks*.

Craig withdraws the key and tests the handle.

Despite jamming a little, thanks to the dampness of the wood (and the joints squealing like stuck pigs), the door swings open with little fuss, to reveal the murky, musty smelling room beyond.

Craig steps in first, and Tweek is pulled along with him.

For one moment, his heart stops.

Out of the gloom glow little green stars.

Chapter End Notes

hnhh you guys wanted the cabin scene? yeahh well HERE YOU GO. NOW YA HAVE TO WAIT ANOTHER UPDATE LOL... this was not planned :')DD

IN HAPPIER NEWS:
unresolved gained it's first fanart!! please, shower the wonderful, talented Tamyli with love for these gorgeous pictures, because gosh knows she deserves every bit of it! :))))<333
Tweek being goshdarn adorable here
Craig being blushin' perfection here
Kenny about to get a slap from his flustered boi here
and baby!Craig givin' his man a dandelion here
asdfghhdsffff //weeps and hoards them all close// thank you so much again, sweetie!! :B <333

also, a couple of you guys have been asking for my tumblr, so even though i'm not active on it at all, here it is: i mean it - over there, i'm dead as fuuuu--
Chapter Notes

hello, everybody. i come with the peace offering of a new chapter, and a huge thanks for everyone who's been leaving me lovely, supportive messages and well-wishes over the last few months. <333 real life's been hectic and this chapter has been the biggest pain in the arse that you can imagine (i still hate it, after around 3000 rewrites), but... no excuses. i wanted to upload this by the beginning of the new season - and though i missed by a little bit there, it's still done. hehe :))))

special thanks to tami, who's been the only person keeping me sane through a lot of this. you're the sweetest :'U <333

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As he steps inside, a flurry of snow entering in a gust of sub-zero wind behind him, the door slides to with a squeak of rusting hinges, plunging them right into the gloom.

Above and around them, tucked between the beams in the ceiling and the nooks high up on the wall, the faint green of little plastic stars glow. Tweek tilts his head back and stares at them, amazed that they're still up there even after so many years, and that they haven't lost their luminescence.

But, hang on...

"Nng. Craig?" he says quietly, taking another step further inside and frowning up at the shadowed rafters.

Apparently too caught up in his thoughts, the taller boy drops his bag down onto the floor from his shoulders with a thunk, and pushes the door the rest of the way back into place with a hard nudge of his boot. "Is it too much to hope someone left one of those lamps in one of the cupboard?" Craig asks as he moves over towards the closed curtains, and peers around the edge of the ugly greying fabric at the brown grime of the window, which allows very little clean light through. Makes a sound of disgust.

"Craig," Tweek repeats louder, nose scrunched as he watches his boyfriend.

Finally, the taller boy stops what he's doing and straightens up, dusting his hands off on his thighs like they're dirty before he's even really touched anything.

(An assumption, Tweek thinks to himself, which probably wouldn't be wrong in this place.)

"Yeah, babe?" Craig asks.

"D-did you leave the stars up, that time?"

Furrowing his brow, Tweek thinks he can see the other boy tilt his head back to peer into the murk above them. "From your twelfth birthday? A few, maybe."

Something about the way that he rubs at the back of his neck has Tweek squinting at him suspiciously. "So why are there so many up there now then, huh?"
Across the room, he can hear Craig shuffle his feet – actually shuffles, like a kindergartener caught doing something naughty. "...It's lame, dude."

Jesus Christ, will he just spit it out already? Tweek tugs his satchel off of his shoulder and dumps it down onto the foot of some musty lump he can just about make out in the gloom. "Urgh. What is?"

With a sigh, Craig looks back at him. "I used to... come here a lot. That year we stopped talking. Since no one else bothered hanging out here much after that summer, it seemed like a good place. I redecorated a little. It was the only place I could think without breaking down, some days. The therapist I saw for a while said that finding my own space would be healthy. And the walks here helped me too, I guess."

What? Tweek's heart makes some sort of bloody grab for his vocal chords. "Eurgh. Th-therapist? Wait— when did you see a therapist? How come I never—?"

His boyfriend closes the space between them, reaching out to snag one of his hands where it's knotting in blonde hair. Tweek just stares at Craig's face as the other boy calmly threads their fingers together. "Depression. I took meds for it for a while too – until about a year ago, actually."

The thing in his stomach rolls over, and a sharp pain lances through his chest. His shivers aren't just from the chill, now. "Wh-why didn't you tell m-me? Hrnn. Why'd you— why would you keep that a secret?"

A light shake of his head. "At first I kept quiet because we'd just made up, and I didn't want to put more pressure on you, dude. You weren't well, anddumping that on you would've made me a dick." Tweek watches as Craig pulls his hand up to his mouth, and brushes his lips over his knuckles. The spot tingles. "And then after a while, when things started getting better, it seemed... unimportant. I wasn't actively hiding it from you, babe. It just didn't ever come up."

But that doesn't help the pain Tweek feels, to realize he'd never even noticed that the boy he loves was in a bad place. "How— aurgh. When did it start? If— if you don't m-mind me asking?"

"Dude. Of course I don't mind." Craig steps closer, keeping their fingers linked, and raises his free hand to brush across Tweek's cheek, cupping his unshaven jaw. Cold, dry, soothing. "Let me try finding a lamp first. I wanna be able to see your face properly."

And with that, he steps away. Drops Tweek's hand and turns towards the cupboards off in the far left corner of the cabin. Craig pulls out his cell and turns on the torch function, pale light briefly illuminating his face and sending the shadows behind him skittering away, before he bends down and submerges both the cell and himself into the depths of one of the cupboards. There's rustling and rummaging that Tweek can't see the source of (not like he can see much of anything when the room at large is pitch black), and only belatedly does he remember that he's got an actual torch with him.

Sinking down onto his knees, his jittery hands struggle with the front of his satchel, taking an inordinate amount of time just to get inside. It's hard finding anything at all when the lighting in here is non-existent and his bag is so full (he ends up tugging things free and dropping them indiscriminately on what he's figured out is the old mattress they dragged in here when they were younger), but he gets there eventually.

Stinging fingers brush a cold metal cylinder, and he withdraws it with it held like a prize in his fist. He pushes back up onto his numb, damp feet (thank God he brought spare socks), and walks over to Craig, finding the rubber button on the base and holding the torch over his boyfriend's shoulder, so that the bulb is aimed into the cluttered, cobwebby mess of the cupboard. When the bright light flares into existence, Craig pauses. Tilts his head back to look into Tweek's face. The way his eyes crinkle
at the realization that Tweek brought his own damn flashlight with him on a day trip makes the blonde's face heat up.

Glowering, he averts his eyes. "Sh-shut up," he says. Focuses hard on the cupboard like that'll stem the flare of embarrassed colour from rushing up into his cheeks.

(It doesn't.)

Thankfully, Craig just turns away from him and continues on scouring through the dusty shelves, through ammunition cases; chipped mugs; grimy utensils; matches and ropes and rat traps; batteries; a rusty old hunting knife, a dodgy looking hip flask; a stack of well creased magazines (that Tweek tries not to look too hard at), and an amalgamation of other random junk.

So by silent agreement, they move onto the next cupboard, and find much the same as the first. (Which is to say, nothing even remotely useful. Go figure.)

Growing frustrated with the lack of success, Tweek huffs a loud sigh and knocks his free hand lightly against Craig's shoulder. "Dude," he says, voice rough, "can we stop now? We've got a light that works, and— euurgh— and more batteries in there than we could get through in a damn lifetime."

As he finishes talking, something else occurs to him. The thing in his stomach twists, and his face scrunches around the thought. "Y-you really don't have to talk about it, man. If you don't want to. I'm— oh Jesus, I'm sorry for being so pushy."

His boyfriend clambers back onto his feet, face rising up into the shadows, even as the torch swivels in Tweek's loose grip, pointing off down at their feet. He can't see the expression that the taller boy is making, but he supposes it doesn't really matter all that much when a bitingly cold hand settles against his face, making him flinch and hiss out a startled breath that Craig muffles with the soft counterpoint of his lips. A thrill runs down Tweek's spine at the simple gesture, made somehow ten times more intimate thanks to the unforgiving chill and the quiet, unfamiliar room.

They hover there, on the edge of chaste, and Tweek wonders at how all of his blood still rushes through him at something they've done over and over already.

(This intimacy will never get old, he thinks. Never.)

Even as their lips part, Craig stays there in his personal bubble, and says so quietly it's barely a whisper, "Honey, I want you to know. I mean it. Now give me your flashlight already."

Shaking fingers rise, mindless, and collide with Craig's outstretched hand. The blinding light scatters the shadows and sends them flitting over the rest of the room, across the walls and the shut curtains, over tiny, vein-like wires and glittering bulbs no bigger than the nail on his pinky finger—

"Fairy lights," he says, the words blurring out loud and blunt. Snorts loudly and reaches out to mock-punch his boyfriend's shoulder. "Y-you put the fairy lights back up, you dumbass."

The stillness and the quiet that follows that statement lasts only a moment, but then Craig’s breathing out a laugh too, tugging the torch free and turning to inspect the nearest wall.

And, yep, he's an idiot. They both are. (But that's okay, because at least this way they match.)

A few moments of searching and quiet grumbling later, and Craig – who's relocated to the door – makes a huff of success. A small click. The room flickers into existence around them, a warm golden glow permeating the half frozen space, clinging to the walls and creeping up into the rafters. The little bulbs weave through the stars and wrap around the beams. Every so often, spider webs climb over and around them like frost. Dust motes dance, slow and thick, in the air.
Off to the side, a snort. Tweek's head whips around to his boyfriend, only to find him shaking his head. "Guess I was wrong, man."

"Huh? What?"

"Looks like it's been used pretty well."

Following the nod of Craig's head down to where he'd dropped his bag, his eyes skim across the grotty old mattress. Only, it's not how he remembers it at all.

Someone's decked it out in lurid orange and blue bedding, with one of those weird full-body pillows. It's got a scantily clad anime girl on it. There are a couple plush Hello Kitty cushions up against the wall, beneath a poster for Keeping up with the Kardashians. Tweek's eyebrows hike halfway up his forehead. And then they lower when they find a pair of hot pink panties tacked up, off to one side. They look store-bought, and across the front, in black marker, is the name 'Marj'.

"Oh, dude, sick," the blonde says, before grimacing at how much he sounds like Donovan. His face shifts from disgust at the thought of Kenny pinning up girls' panties, and moves right into horror at the comparison to his unpleasant classmate.

Thank ever loving fuck that Craig's there to distract him from the shit-show that is his brain.

"Well, at least they made the bed for us, right?" The taller boy crouches, shunts over a bunch of Tweek's dropped belongings to the foot of the mattress, and then flops down. The hint of a teasing smile on his face eases some of the nerves churning in his gut, and so he joins his boyfriend, hunching over on the edge to tug his shoes off, and releasing his damp, numb feet from their confines. Unzips and shucks off his thick winter coat so as not to get the covers wet.

(If only he could do the same with his sweatpants, since his legs feel like they've frozen into icicles.)

As soon as he's free, he pulls off his socks too, and flops back onto the bed, where Craig is leaning back on both elbows and watching him, eyes half lidded. With Tweek's back flat on the mattress, Craig turns onto his side, leaning into Tweek's space and staring down into his eyes. The smell of synthetic flowers and dust rises like a breath from the bedding, but overriding that is the citrus of his boyfriend's shampoo. It's comforting. It's home, even out here in assfuck no where, with the snow burying them alive and the real world what feels like a hundred miles away. Especially when Craig reaches over and lays one of his hands against Tweek's front – against the ridiculous scarf around his neck, and the three thick layers of clothing making him puff up to a size that could probably be considered healthy.

The other boy lowers his eyes to where his fingers are playing with the scruffy tassels of his Frankenstein scarf, and his lingering smile drops off a little. "Before we fell out, I was already in a pretty shitty place. Seeing you so ill for so long, and unable to help... I let that mess me up. I felt useless."

So... Craig's known all along that Tweek was already fucked up before their fight. Tweek has had his suspicions for a while now, has understood that things weren't right, but hearing it confirmed so simply? So honestly? It hurts. His face crumples at the reminder of so many years between them, lost – of the USB at home, full of a thousand more secrets, and Craig, tight lipped and resigned to having a broken, useless boyfriend. Craig, willing to be bled emotionally dry because of Tweek's fucked up brain.

(He doesn't want this to be his truth.)
"I always though that it— ngh— that it started when I figured out I— that I was in love with you," he says, voice thick. Shakes his head slowly. "It was o-only recently that I thought that mm-aybe it was before that, man. So fucking stupid. I was convinced it was fine before—"

"No, Tweek, it wasn't." There's something in Craig's voice – something at once hard and low – that makes Tweek's teeth clack shut. "You were bad for years, and you kept getting worse. Our parents refused to listen to me, our teachers, all the adults in town I tried speaking to— they all insisted you were fine. But you weren't. Anyone could see it, if they opened their damn eyes." The blunt edge in Craig's voice has sharpened to a tapered point, and his fingers have stilled.

Angry. Craig is angry—

The creature in Tweek's stomach rolls and reaches out phantom claws to rake along his insides. He can't help but lie there, still as stone. Silent, like a man waiting to hear whether or not he'll receive the death sentence. He trembles.

Quietness stretches around them, thick and heavy… but they're there together, he reminds himself. Tweek's here to sort this out – to right what he's done wrong – and Craig understands that. He understands. He's just thinking things through. No rushing. Tweek won't rush him, won't cut him off. No matter how much he wants to.

By the time he breaks the silence, Craig has softened again, although his eyebrows are furrowed and his jaw is clenched. "I don't know exactly when it started, but it must've been when we were about twelve. It was after you started hanging out with that fucker, McCormick. I said it yesterday – he was always around, and when he was hanging about, you seemed to get worse. You went silent, or you had meltdowns, or you'd start throwing up. He didn't ever really say anything to you that I heard, but..." He pauses – releases a gusting sigh. "But he didn't have to. Just the way he looked at you, and the way you'd react. I fucking knew he must've said something, so when you came to me eventually, after years of it, and cried about having some boy you liked, of course I thought it was him."

Tweek opens his mouth, to say something. Nothing comes out – not even a breath. He shakes his head – slow and jolty at first, and then again. Faster. "N-no. I don't— urgh— why the fuck don't I remember that. This is so goddamn annoying—" Through the sting in his eyes, he spots Craig's expression evening out. Turning blank. Instead of weaving his hands into his own hair and ripping out chunks, he reaches up and runs stiff fingers up beneath the flaps of his best friend's chullo hat, trapping him there so he can't pull away. The dark haired boy's hand twitches against his chest.

A steadying breath helps take away the ache of confusion that's trying to crush him. The more he's read of his old diaries, and the more memories that he realises he's lost, the harder it's getting to deny that this sounds... a whole lot like the symptoms of his Dissociation. But the growing knowledge of it going back so far, of wiping out so much of his life without him ever realising it?

He doesn't notice when he starts crying – just blinks through the warm blur to find Craig watching him, face close, eclipsing the golden glow of the fairy lights. Tweek's fingers curl against the other boy's cheekbones.

"I f-feel like I'm trying to put together a puzzle with – nrgh – only half the pieces. You say that Kenny was there with me for— for ages, that I was friends with him, or something. Hrrng." Or at least, he's implied it. Several times, in fact, now that Tweek looks back. Always really vague. Never outright stated, until recently. "So what... what happened? What went wrong?"

The silence that follows his question stretches, like every drift before it. Craig says nothing for a long while – just reaches up to stroke away the chilling tracks on his cheeks – and Tweek can't think around the churning up of his insides. So they stay there for a long while, Craig's bomber dripping
melted snowflakes, and Tweek dripping cooling tears.

A sigh preludes to Craig rediscovering his voice, some undetermined amount of time later. "I've tried... figuring it all out myself, for years. I have no idea what caused everything to fall apart. I've searched and I've searched, and I never found an answer. All I know is that it had something to do with McCormick, and it went down when we were kids. There's just... there's nothing there to know. There's this blank spot, and then just you, falling apart..." He turns his face into one of Tweek's cold, chapped palms, and presses a kiss to the heel. Tweek can feel the shaky exhale of hot breath, and traces the clenching muscles in his best friend's jaw with his fingertips. It takes a while, of Craig's icy free hand slipping beneath his scarf to lie against his neck, and dry lips resting against his palm, before Craig continues. "I think trying to work this out and fix you compounded my own issues."

"Y-your own issues." Tweek whispers the word, as if he's scared of breaking the spell that is an open, talkative Craig.

A raspy chuckle and another purposeful kiss pressed to the inside of his hand, and then Craig turns his face back to look at him, his eyes just a little less dull. "I didn't grow up in the most emotionally supportive of families, dude. My dad doesn't believe in self-expression, and most of the time my mom's about as maternal as a brick to the face. I had no way to really express myself. Ruby? Too young and disinterested to talk to. Our friends? Shitheads, and all with their own issues, anyway. You were my only real outlet for so long, apart from..."

He trails off. Doesn't need to finish that sentence.

(Tommy.)

"And then even I fucking shut you off," says Tweek, voice flat as he finishes Craig's confession in a way that the other boy clearly had no plans of doing. He'd abandoned Craig to himself before Craig had ever even hinted at leaving him. Regardless of Thomas' (or anyone else's) part in any of this, Tweek sinking into himself was the real catalyst of their falling out. His throat bobs, constricted, and his eyes slip shut so he doesn't have to look up into the face of the friend that he left alone with no way out. The friend who only ever tried to help him, and support him.

How could Craig be so selfless for the sake of someone like Tweek, in spite of having his own issues? It's more than Tweek will ever deserve, more than he could ever comprehend—

Something in the back of his brain belatedly clicks into place.

(Oh. Oh.)

Green eyes fly open. The entire right side of his face twitches, and his heart thumps, hard, against his ribcage.

(Oh, sweet Jesus.)

"Holy shit, that's what it was." The words are blurted out so loud and sudden that Craig actually pulls back a little, eyebrows raised. "You—nn—you and Clyde." Craig hurriedly backs away from him as Tweek bolts upright, nearly taking out his boyfriend's chin. "Gah. I overheard you and Clyde talking, that year we had our f-fallout."

His mind is spinning, his cheeks heating up in spite of the cold air. It's like he's been electrocuted, he's so—

"You—you said to him, 'Tweek's a jittery little freak. Just a fucking mess I'm always picking up after.'" The bubble of laughter in his throat escapes, high and loud. Perhaps a little manic. (He can't
Ignoring the way that Craig has frozen up, Tweek grips onto the front of the taller boy's scarf, and rises up onto his knees so he can look properly into grey-blue eyes. There's no way to fight the grin on his face, even though he mostly just feels ill. A revelation this may be, but it isn't a happy one. It just hurts. He's so angry with himself for missing all of this for so long. For making himself some kind of a martyr, without trying to see things from Craig's side.

"Tweek," his boyfriend says, voice choked and small, but the blonde just shakes it off, and speaks over him, thrumming with manic energy.

"You were looking after yourself," he says. "I'd hurt you over and over again, and you— eurgh—you couldn't take it, anymore. You didn't hate me, or, or anything. You didn't know I l-loved you, 'cause you thought it was Kenny, for some fucking reason, e-ew. No."

He stops for a breath, chest heaving to try and keep up with the rapid onslaught of words and emotions welling up out of him.

"Honey," his best friend tries again, but Tweek just releases one hand to shake it dismissively in the air, pressing so much closer to Craig that he's practically in his lap.

Eyes darting everywhere, he says, "You had to push me away, hhh-had to shut Clyde down. You were j-just protecting yourself from—"

"Stop."

The word is so loud and so raw that finally, Tweek shuts up. Flinches like he's been slapped. Finally, he sees – really sees – the look of Craig's face. He's crumpled in on itself, his eyes glassy and his mouth turned down into the grimace that Tweek wears like a second skin when he's in a bad place. It looks alien on calm, collected Craig.

(His heart lurches in time to his stomach.)

"Please," Craig says, low like it's aching in the back of his throat. "Please don't... don't make me out to be the victim. I was in the wrong. I lied to Clyde. I'm sorry, I didn't meant it, I'm... I'm so sorry."

"Craig," says Tweek, barely a whisper. He's got a hundred things to say in reply to that statement, and another hundred to soothe away the shock and self-hatred in his boyfriend's voice, but none of them are enough. Nothing is enough to express the painful relief at all this new knowledge, or his mounting frustration at the complexity of everything still left for them to figure out. So instead he just shifts his grip on Craig's face so that he's cupping the soft, warm sides of his neck, fingers tangled in black hair, and he draws him in for a kiss. Hard.

Moves to straddle him fully, setting his full weight down on the other boy's lap – frosty, damp fabric and solid warmth. His thighs bracket Craig's hips, the way his palms frame his face.

It takes a heartbeat, maybe two, for his boyfriend to reciprocate. He melts against him like thawing ice, and the kiss eases into something slow. Something drawn out and comforting. The scrape of teeth, the stutter of hot breath, the wet drag of a tongue against parched lips. Arms curl around his back to pull him close, and Tweek arches into the touch, lets himself be drawn into whatever shape Craig wants him.

And when the other boy disconnects, pushing his face into the Frankenstein scarf around Tweek's neck, the blonde returns the hug. Wraps his arms all the way around those broad shoulders. Thinks
that this – that them, together like this – is so much simpler than either of them ever lets it be. There's
no point trying to hide Tweek's love, at a time like this. It's plain as day, and for once he's struggling
to care about any of it - his messed up past or his stupid, messed up brain.

(Tweek loves Craig, and so he'll give him everything.)

Thinks that for this moment at least – breath settling lower and steadier by the second, heart calm and
skin peaked into gooseflesh – he belongs entirely to this awkward, gangly boy.

Unwinding one of his arms, he traces numb fingers down the outside of Craig's sleeve towards his
hand. Tugs on the crook of the other boy's elbow so that his friend pulls back away a little, releasing
the grip and looking up at Tweek with a silent, tired question.

Silver eyes turned gold in the fairy lights. Heavy dust and sweet citrus.

(So much fucking love, everything else is sort of drowned out. Like all of his goddamn common
sense – that's long gone, too.)

Tweek just holds that gaze, brushes down past the hem to the cold hand, and strokes his thumb over
knuckles. Curls his finger around the outside of his boyfriend's palm, and guides it down—

Down to rest over his ruined thighs. Raised, welted lines. His scars.

Through the numbness and the bitter cold, Tweek feels himself shaking. Feels fingers twitching
against his leg. Hears the hiss of his breath from between his teeth.

(And his thighs are burning, burning—)

"I've g-got something to— nnrgh— to tell you about, too."

Chapter End Notes

again, i love you guys so sooo much!! please expect replies to comments, new and
old, over the course of the next few days, and hopefully a new chapter up once a week! ;)))
They sit there: silent, shaking and damp to the bone.

In the relative darkness of golden fairy lights and glowing green stars, Tweek thinks that it's hard knowing where he ends and Craig begins. The hand on his thigh – *right there, pressing down, unbearably gentle*— is still. A heavy, cool weight overlaid on the wet fabric and scar tissue. It should feel invasive and wrong (and to an extent, it does), but he's still numb.

Still numb from speaking openly about what he'd overheard four years ago. Still numb from finally understanding *why* Craig was angry and defensive – *why* he spoke the way he did about Tweek. Some errant part of the blonde's brain comments on the possibility that he's gone into shock, but largely the thought goes ignored. He's too busy staring into blue-grey eyes and wondering why he hadn't decided to open up to his best friend sooner.

(Knows logically that things are different now – that he wasn't *capable* of doing this before. Knows that it likely would have broken them apart again.)

In his chest his heart beats sluggishly, the same way his racing mind has stilled. He's moving through molasses as he pulls his hand away from Craig's.

When he begins talking, his voice is low and steady, too. He listens like it's a stranger that's speaking somewhere far off, and it takes long moments to recognize that it's *him* saying the words.

"I used to... get overwhelmed. *Mnn.* Overloaded. Before we stopped being friends that— that year, I was already..." His hand rises in the air between them, and performs some weird, swirly gesticulation towards his thigh, usual tremors and all. "I don't really know when it got so bad exactly that I felt like I hh-had to hurt myself this way to get out my feelings, but... I dunno, dude. I thought I'd *explode* if I didn't. Everything was too much."

Somewhere in the middle of his speech, Craig unwinds the arm still around his back and lifts it to the side of his face, toying with Tweek's bangs. His palm scuffs against the blonde's unshaven jaw. Their eyes break contact, so that the taller boy can follow the motion, and it's that which finally gives Tweek the chance to ground himself in this moment. In the sights and smells and sounds pervading the hut. Tries to draw himself back out of his head.

(Can tell it doesn't quite work.)

"You've always done that, to some extent," his boyfriend says, voice rough and so low, Tweek has to watch his lips to make out the words. For a moment, he struggles to recall what they're discussing. "Pulling your hair, biting your nails, scratching." A pause. A frown. "Banging your head on stuff." Long fingers curve up and over the back of his skull, sinking into his wiry blonde bird nest like he's

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
cradling something precious.

Breath sticks in Tweek's throat - a sour lump that won't budge. He nods a small, jerky nod anyway, and ignores how dry his mouth feels. Continues. "I-it's sometimes hard to— to express myself. There's no... outlet, most of the time. Urgh. That's why I do all my lame craft stuff now, and m-y art. Writing helps too." It's weird saying all of this out loud. And sure, he's spoken about it before with Olive, but with Craig it's different. He thinks of that weird, backwards moment in Tweek Bros. with Thomas. That moment where they'd huddled together behind the counter and Tweek had had a meltdown - the feeling of reality splitting down the middle and creating a void of space in which only they existed. Suspended in a bubble.

Dish soap and burned coffee grounds have been replaced with stale, perfumed sheets and warm citrus, but it's almost the same.

(The world outside the hut has dissolved away into a frozen white expense, and it's left them here, untouched. A dark, floating island in a sea of ice.)

"But I didn't always have those things, or any coping methods, and I think I... I don't know." Says, before he can stop himself from making it too complicated too fast – from making this scary for Craig, "Sometimes, it's hard for me to know what's real and what isn't."

(He doesn't want to stop, now he's started rolling. He's been a tangle of secret knots for years now, and he's finally unravelling.)

"When things get to be too much for me, my brain— eurgh— my brain short circuits. It pulls me out of the situation to, like, protect me, and makes everything feel like a dream. I-it's called a Dissociative Disorder." Looking down at the still, heavy weight of Craig's palm on his thigh, he hears Olive run through his diagnosis in his head. The list of symptoms - all the boxes he'd ticked, and her explanations for each one. Discussing various simple coping methods, asking what he thought about medication and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and all the while, Tweek thinking, this is my life now. He stares off over Craig's shoulder so that he doesn't have to see his face. Craig stays quiet, his only movement the slow run of his fingers through Tweek's hair. It soothes down the growing panic in him, at least a little, and he lets his eyes slip to half-mast. "It makes reasoning difficult sometimes. Like when— rr— like when I got bad that y-year, I beat the shit out of Cartman. Or I hurt myself worse than usual, so bad they had to take me to hospital. O-or th-this one time, I read your cell when you left it lying around." I found out about Thomas, and I stole his number, and I contacted him too, he thinks. Knows he should say it. Can't seem to get the words out. "Rrgh. Sor— sorry, man," he says, as his ribcage shrinks in around his sluggishly thumping heart.

Luckily (or maybe unluckily), Craig chooses this exact moment to start speaking again, breaking his mental cycle of, tell him, just fucking tell him. "Babe, don't apologize when you've done nothing to warrant it. You did what you thought you had to, at the time." The words sound tired. Hollowed out.

Tweek can't stand the thought of his actions carving such a deep impression into the other boy. He distracts them both by jolting upright, so instead of sitting his weight down on Craig's lap, he's kneeling over him. Settles a hand on one of his boyfriend's shoulders to steady himself and knows that he shouldn't keep putting off the inevitable. Swallows around the dryness. "Dude, I want to do what I can now, b-because I don't want either of us to— to hurt unnecessarily anymore. Keeping all this hidden from you until now... it's fucking stupid."

The hand on his thigh slides to one side, and then up to his hips, slipping below the layers of his jumpers and running cool fingertips along the elastic waistband of his pants. Tweek can feel him
toying with the elastic, and finally he draws himself back into Craig's searching gaze. For the first time since he decided to show his scars, his heart skips a beat.

('Can I?' Craig's asking, without actually verbalizing it. He doesn't have to. They both know what it means.)

An almost imperceptible nod is Tweek's only reply. The fingers in his hair retreat, settling instead on the opposite side of his waist. He braces himself with both hands when his best friend's grip shifts and finds purchase on the fabric.

As Craig tugs the waistband down over his hips, inch by painful inch, Tweek's breathing speeds up in his tight chest.

Down, over the curve of his ass, the graze of knuckles through the thin material of his boxers.

Down, down until the brush of skin on skin, and soft fabric over his scars, and his sweatpants gather around his lower thighs, locking his knees on either side of Craig's lap, like he's—

he's trapped, he can't move, the weight on his legs cutting into him, the overriding stench of searing fat, flesh splitting open like ripe fruit—

A garbled wail wrenches its way free from his mouth, and he recoils from his boyfriend hard. His skin stings as though he's burning alive.

(Gotta get away— he's gonna die, a mouse in a trap—)

But there's an iron grip locked onto his upper arms, and he's reeled in, pulled forward so he tilts and topples against another body. Released just as fast as he's caught, arms wind around him, and Craig says in a gruff exhale of air, "Tweek, babe, shh, it's okay."

There isn't any pain, not really. The blistering heat and the stink of cooking meat aren't real. It's just… in his head. He's safe where he is, this is the boy that he loves curled around him like he could shelter him from the world, or maybe from himself. There's— there's nothing to be scared of.

He tells himself this over the clamouring fear and the growling of the creature inside of him.

As always, though, Craig cuts through all of it. All of the bullshit.

"You're alright," he says, his voice barely a murmur. Breath skitters over his ear, and his nerves light up in a different way. One of the hands on his back moves in a circular motion, drawing him out of his panic. "I won't look if you don't want me to, honey."

(But he wants him to see. Everything he is belongs to this stupidly patient boy, and he wants to give him that. Wants to show him that in a way that doesn't require words.)

Scrunching up his eyes up to stave off the tears, he makes another noise – another high whine. Has to think for a long moment, fists curled into Craig jacket, and has to breathe through it. Just long enough that he knows he won't bolt. Craig’s warmth rises up through the thick layers of wet clothing, and the sound of his slow, steady breaths reassures Tweek in some instinctual way.

And easy as that, the worst of the tension leaks out of him, the blind panic and rushing fear. The monster lowers its head, and the rush of adrenaline tingles in his limbs, replacing the phantom pain. He melts against his best friend, holds onto him like he's his only lifeline.

"Shit, I'm— eurgh. I'm fine," the blonde says, though even to himself, he sounds uncertain. A cold
sweat has broken out around his temples and the nape of his neck, and he's not sure how to calm the shaking. Swallowing involuntarily, he adds, "I want you to look, dude."

There's no more noise from Craig – just the feel of a half frozen nose brushing the delicate skin beneath his eye, and dry lips pressing against his stubbly cheek. It's probably some sort of testament to what a mess he is, that Tweek doesn't have any kind of reaction to the kiss, no matter how chaste.

Still, when the other boy pulls back, so does the blonde. They both sit straight, and almost in time with one another, tilt their heads to look down at the exposed skin between long blue boxers and bunched up sweatpants.

A single, fine white line peeks out at them, parallel to the edge of the fabric. Slightly raised, but small and inconsequential. Most of the guys in town, minus maybe Butters, have bigger scars.

(Not so bad, he can practically hear Craig thinking.)

Then, though, Craig reaches down and slowly – so slowly he thinks that time itself is stalling – gathers up the thin fabric, and rucks it up Tweek's thighs.

One by one, other scars are brought out into the open – marks almost mirroring the first, though they're varying lengths, varying widths. A collection of straight, unmeasured strokes. All are raised. All catch the golden light and shine in a way that makes his stomach turn.

And then the worst – the very first – is exposed. It runs perfectly from one leg to the next, an almost unbroken line the width of a pencil. Where the others are narrow and have grown pale with time, this one is puckered, standing up from his skin in a pink welt. It's hideous, and it's going to change things between them forever.

(Difficult to believe that it could be for the better.)

Fingers brush against the outside of his thigh; he jerks back.

This time when he pulls away, Craig doesn't hold him there. He scoots away on the bed and kicks the sweatpants off from around his knees. Tugs his boxers back into place to hide the marks. Keeps his eyes low.

His best friend says nothing – remains frozen where Tweek left him.

"Geurgh. F-food. We should— let's— let's eat," the blonde practically shouts. They both flinch.

Face so hot his eyes prickle, he scrambles around the other boy and to the end of the bed, where they shoved a load of the things that Tweek had dragged out of his satchel. "My mom m-made us some stuff, dude. Like, like waffles. A-and cookie dough. Jesus, she— I think she knew we were skipping classes." He rambles as he digs about, toes curling and movements jolty.

Craig turns around to help him, and Tweek's so grateful that the other boy quietly accepts one of the little plastic boxes without hesitation.

Cracking the lid on one of them, he peeks inside to find fresh fruit. Juicy, cut up strawberries and fat little blueberries. Closes it back up – sets it down on the mattress between them. Pulls a third container out, and uncovers it to find the waffles - cold and slightly soggy now, but still homemade. He knows they'll be delicious, and that they should both probably eat like he suggested, but he just feels sort of sick.

"The – aurgh – waffles're there. I don't— I'm getting the coffee. You want some?"
He turns away, leans over the bed to grab for the handle of his discarded bag, and drags it close. Digs out the canister.

Hunching his shoulders, he sits back with it held tight in his grip. Stares down at the chilled metal – feels himself curl down around it, drawing his legs up to his chest.

Rough, ugly fingers shake, his knuckles white where he's pressing too hard into it. Craig barely shifts from where he left him, but the blonde's not stupid. He can feel eyes on his face, and knows that he must look like a fucking idiot, making so much drama out of this.

"Y-you don't hate me, do you?" His words are so small, it takes him a moment to realize that he's even said them out loud. Decides that there's no point stopping there. Honesty is shit and all of these feelings are the worst, but he's not sure he could switch it off now, even if he really tried. (What if this does push a wedge between them, after all?) "I— oh God, I know I'm a fuck up, I know I've hurt you, but you don't— please don't—"

"Dude, I couldn't hate you if I tried," comes the equally quiet reply. A pale hand comes into his sight and gently eases the thermos away from him. Tweek turns his head just enough to watch the Craig's long fingers wrap around the cap to loosen it. "And believe me, when I was younger, I tried. Not that you ever deserved it."

A watery giggle sneaks out of him before he can help it. His face rearranges into some crumpled, half-hearted attempt at a smile. "A-agree to disagree."

Apparently Craig deigns that sentiment unworthy of a reply, because he just holds out the opened thermos for the shorter boy like it's a peace offering.

Tweek takes it in trembling hands and just watches the steam rise, unfurling in waves and dancing through the air in mesmerising patterns. Inhaling the scent of rich black coffee, he wonders aloud, "Did Clyde ever tell you wh-why he hates me?"

To hide his nerves, he takes a small sip, coughing a little when the scalding liquid burns his tongue.

"I never really asked." Craig shrugs – a movement that Tweek catches from the corner of his eye.

"He found out about— about me looking through your phone."

(He knows I went to meet Tommy, and he knows I split you two up, Tweek thinks. He knows I ruined your chance at happiness with someone who wasn't a total fuck up, and I never bothered telling him I didn't do it on purpose. What was the point?)

"Oh."

Quiet falls between them once again, a safety blanket to counterpoint the emotional vulnerability of their conversations. Tweek takes another couple of sips, watching the goosebumps rise on his legs, and then hands the drink back to Craig.

They remain this way for a while, sharing the drink and ruminating on their thoughts. Somewhere up in the rafters, a single bulb flickers on and off.

"They don't change anything - your scars." He shoots the dark haired boy a look, and finds, to his surprise, the corners of his lips curled up in a smile. "You're still hot as fuck, and—"

"Jesus fucking Christ," Tweek says, interrupting with one almighty cringe.
Craig shoots him a fake glare. "You're hot as fuck," he repeats, "and I'm still totally in—" Stops suddenly. Scratches at his jaw. "Er…"

A pause. Tweek can hear the clack of his friend's teeth. His face has gone sort of pink, and he watches as Craig fiddles with the bottle.

When the moment draws out to the point of Tweek's whole face twitching involuntarily, bright red and anxious, he blurts out a very loud, "Holy fuck, Craig, 'you're still totally,' what?"

Clearing his throat, the other boy says very quickly, "I'm still totally into being your boyfriend. I still wanna touch you. And kiss you. And do stuff with you." Runs his hand through his hair. "Like, a lot."

Oh.

Well.

Okay.

That's... that's good, he thinks, cheeks practically aflame. Embarrassing, but still a great fucking outcome, considering all the stuff they just talked about. Tweek knows that they haven't discussed everything, (feels the weight of their inevitable conversation about Thomas pressing down on him heavier than ever) but the air between them is already strained. They've shared a lot in such a short space of time, and it feels wrong to even consider adding to it.

Besides, Tweek's nerves are pulled so taut, he thinks they might snap at any moment. He's shaken and jittery and he's seriously just done with the tension.

Besides, fuck knows how much more Craig can take, either –talking right now about Tommy would probably break them. What's the chances of that conversation going well, in any kind of situation? Tweek'll count his lucky stars (the glowing green ones that his boyfriend stuck to the ceiling, to be exact) and be grateful that this whole shitshow's gone as well as it has, so far. He doesn't expect any more miracles than that.

Nope, he'll take what he can get, thanks.

So he forces out something between a chuckle and a grunt. "Oh God. I can't tell if you're a sap, or just horny as fuck."

"Who said I couldn't be both?" his best friend says without missing a beat. Craig's grin is a little wider than before, even though Tweek's pretty sure he's still tense. And he's shivering again. Visibly.

(Tweek's only following the laws of the universe when he figures that if he's feeling the cold, then that means Craig's probably turning into Frosty the fucking Snowman right about now.)

"Ge— nnrgh. Get outta your jeans. And your jacket," he says, frowning. Twitches a little.

(He totally ignores the way what he just said could have been misconstrued. Not his neatest segue there... and by the way the other boy is blinking owlishly at him, he doesn't think so, either.)

"What." The look of blank shock on Craig's face would be funny, if only Tweek wasn't kinda distracted with the potential of his boyfriend contracting hypothermia.

"Your clothes are wet and it's below freezing, you dipshit."
Thankfully, the misunderstanding is pushed aside just as fast as it snuck up on them both. Huffing a laugh, Craig settles the thermos on the floor beside him and unwinds the scarf Tweek gave him on their walk here, discarding it beside the bed. He then unzips and shrugs out of his coat, draping it out across the dusty floor – the blonde assumes this is to give it a chance to dry. (Should probably do the same with his things too...)

It's only when the taller boy stands up and unbuttons his jeans that Tweek realizes that he's staring. He distracts himself by divesting of the outer layers of his own outfit, so he's left in only the oversized black t-shirt and his boxers. Mostly he strips down so much because he knows that any extra layers between them will get in the way of them actually warming up as well as they could and sharing body heat – he knows this not only from countless survivalist documentaries and biographies, but also from the awful, clichéd rom-coms he's been lured into watching with his mom over the years.

(There's also, of course, the part of him that can't help but think that wearing his mom's cardigan while sharing a bed with his horny sap of a boyfriend would be... *eurgh*. No. Just, no.)

The problem is, once all of that skin is exposed, he becomes incredibly aware of just how frigid the air is. His shaking amps up a notch or three, and without a second thought, he's crawling up the mattress past Craig (who's now out of his jeans and wearing only a tight pair of black boxers, barely visible under his grey jumper), and is wrenching the covers back to climb under.

He's moving so fast to scramble under the sheets, that he almost misses the shiny glitter of something sticking out from under one of the Hello Kitty cushions. Despite himself, he pauses, blankets caught around his feet. There's a sinking in his stomach and another horrified blush rising to his cheek. He knows instinctively that whatever it is will be mentally scarring. Or humiliating. Because, really, this is clearly *Kenny McCormick's* hangout.

Still, he can't help himself. It's like he's on autopilot, and watching from the side-lines as he lifts the cushion to find, beneath it, a long string of square, foil packets. Beside them, a questionable purple bottle with the foreboding words 'Slide and Glide' written on the front.

Condoms. Condoms and lube.

*Kenny has condoms and lube* here, on a bed in an abandoned cabin in the middle of a forest, and a pair of panties pinned to the wall. (He tries hard not to think about the creepy anime-girl body pillow.)

Tweek is horrified; it's hard to hold back the yelping burst of laughter that this discovery evokes in him, or the way that he drops the cushion back down on top of it. "Oh God, oh Jesus, *eurgh*."

"What?" The mattress dips as Craig steps across it and sinks down beside him. Balancing himself with one hand on Tweek's shoulder, his gaze passes across the general vicinity of the pillows. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," says Tweek, voice a squeak. "*Eurgh*. Just not, y'know, sure I wanna use this bed, c-considering who's been here." He very purposely tugs the edge of the comforter up and over the cushion in question, so that all that pokes out is Hello Kitty's poor, naively blank face.

(If only she knew the horrors of what she was sat on, he thinks with a hint of hysteria.)

Craig makes a humming sound – the kind he makes when he's amused. "You found something dirty."
The blonde's cheek twitches, but he keeps his face mostly calm as he twists at his waist to look up at the other boy. "N— hhrm. Nope. No."

One eyebrow hitches up, and Craig leans in more, blue eyes intent on his face and nose almost brushing his cheek. "I don't believe you. You're too flustered."

Tweek's eyes narrow. You smug bastard, he thinks. You think you can tease me with this shit, just because you're more experienced? Does Craig really wanna play that game right now? "Just get under the covers, man," he says, leaning forwards himself, so that their brows are pressed together. "Before you freeze to death." Despite his burning face, and his accelerated heart rate, he doesn't give in. There's something electrifying about the way that Craig's eyes dip down to his lips as he swipes at them with his tongue – it almost makes the basis of their discussion more pleasant. Almost.

(And then Tweek thinks, McCormick's secret stash of condoms and lube, and has to stop himself from pulling a face. Ugh.)

At the challenge of Tweek's stubbornness, Craig's eyes visibly light up, crinkling in the corners. "I thought you said you didn't wanna use the bed."

"Urgh, geez. You're such an ass." Tweek splutters the word and gives him a little shove. The other boy takes it in his stride, grinning openly and looking at Tweek in a way that makes his heart pound. "Just- just get under before I decide to kick you out altogether."

Apparently understanding that he's toeing a very fine line, Craig just continues making that stupid, suggestively dimpled smirk and shunts over to the other side of the bed. Shoves the body pillow off onto the dusty floor (thank fuck), and clambers underneath. Tweek follows suit, moving maybe as far away from the cushions, (and right into Craig's personal space), as possible. As easy as breathing, his boyfriend opens his arms to him.

Cheeks hot but the rest of him freezing, he resigns himself to icy toes pressing into his calves, warm breath tickling the hairs on his neck. It's cheesy as fuck, but they really do fit together like two pieces of a pretty shitty puzzle.

He sinks into a bit of a daze, face pressed into the crook of Craig's neck and one arm wrapped around his waist. They're both shivering, and Craig's teeth chatter right next to his ear, but there's something almost blissful about the moment.

Like after spending countless years choking around splintered ribs and bloody lungs, he's just taken his first clear breath.

And it is at this exact point that Craig's stomach releases a long, furious rumble, effectively ending the moment.

Unable to help himself, he dissolves into a round of wheezy giggles.

Craig holds himself rigid. Huffs. "It's not my fault," he says, sounding very much like a petulant child. "You mentioned waffles."

That, of course, just makes things ten times funnier.
oh, and also, *i added a new story to the series,* i hope you guys enjoy it. ;) <33
Ah, happy New Year, everyone!! Have this extra long surprise update and an uncomfortably lingering imaginary hug to see you into 2019 :'D

(i love how i always say 'i'll come back and edit this again later', and then i never do, so today i won't even bother'"")

After getting through the laughter and an unreasonably long grumbling match over who should leave the warmth of the bedding, Craig eventually relents and extracts long, icy limbs to fetch all the various containers from where they were strewn by the side of the bed. Tweek doesn't think that he's ever seen his boyfriend move with so much speed.

They retreat back under the covers together and gorge themselves like children sneaking midnight snacks. The cookie dough and the waffles are kinda soggy now, but they're sweet and stodgy enough to silence Craig's stomach. The fresh fruit cuts through it all perfectly, and the coffee washes it all down.

As they eat, speaking falls by the wayside. Tangled limbs, noisy slurps and the blind shovelling of sticky food into their mouth fill the quiet. Tweek thinks sort of distantly that not for the first time, his mom's cooking has saved the day. It's giving them both a break from any more awkward conversations. A chance for them to ruminate over their own thoughts for a moment is no small blessing. So much of Tweek's life has been turned on its head recently, he's surprised he hasn't finally snapped – hasn't gone crazy yet.

(No small fucking miracle that is.)

As for Craig, who's hardly a conversationalist on a good day, this whole cabin-in-the-woods, heart-to-heart situation has to have been one of the shittiest things he's gone through for a while, and he did it all just to make Tweek feel a little better after a particularly crappy day. The blonde boy thinks it's been a lot of that, recently – Craig giving, giving, giving, and Tweek taking it all and wanting more, always to the former's detriment. Jesus knows he's done enough of that to last a lifetime, recently.

His boyfriend is a fucking blessing. Tweek knows this. Knows it the same way he knows that Craig had said nothing about his scars for his sake - ignores the immense surge of relief forcing the air out of his lungs in funny little wheezes every time he thinks on it too hard. Somehow his boyfriend had known that asking the inevitable questions right then would break him, and he'd kept quiet – hadn't pushed for more than the skinnier boy was able to give.

(A fucking blessing.)

In this weird, quiet way, they continue. They eat until all the pots are empty, wipe sticky fingers over the bed sheets, drink bitter coffee 'til the taste of syrup and sugar is washed away. They stay close, lying under the covers with their arms and legs splayed together.

Tweek's heart is steady, his breathing calm. The monster inside of him is placated. It reminds him of
the night all this first kicked off, lounging around in bed before Craig had persuaded him to go to Token's party. He'd been so comfortable then, so sure. His stammering hadn't been as bad – his shakes and tics had been almost non-existent, some days.

But had he actually been better off? Would he have been content with things staying like that forever, with half of his memory missing and all of his real feelings locked away?

Tweek still doesn't know if everything they've gone through is worth it in the long run – doesn't know if Craig wouldn't prefer to go back to what they had before they got physically involved – but... he's being selfish again, he thinks. Because maybe he was fine before, not ever hoping for this, not dreaming anything would ever happen.

Still, the answer's no. He wouldn't go back to that. There's no way he'll ever not want to know the feeling of being curled close to Craig, safe and appreciated. He never wants to lose the right to tangle his limbs together with Craig like this, cold feet to ankles and fingers sneaking under tops to press against lower backs.

The blonde chews the inside of his cheek and presses the chilled tip of his nose into the juncture of the other boy's neck, Craig's stubble scraping his temple, and sighs a hot breath that gets caught between them. His eyelashes flutter, lulled closed by the gentle rise and fall of his boyfriend's chest.

At some point long fingers starts fiddling with his hair, gentle tugs and lingering twirls. Tweek hates other people touching his hair, he thinks foggily, and maybe tries to say that aloud. Isn't sure he succeeds.

Craig's voice rumbles, low. It lingers; lilts. Something familiar. A tune?

Overhead, the dust motes dance.

... Images of Craig's head floating off like a balloon startle Tweek awake.

He runs his tongue over fuzzy teeth, reaches up to scrub at heavy-lidded eyes. His elbow bumps against a warm body, and he slowly registers the chest beneath his cheek, the heavy arm thrown over his shoulders.

Soft snoring stirs his hair, tickling at his scalp. With a bone-deep lethargy he's not really sure he's ever felt before, Tweek stretches where he lies, pointing his toes and pulling muscles taut in just the right way to cause a pleasant ache. He aches a lot, day-to-day, thanks to the constant muscle spasms and the shaking, and it just plain sucks. This, though?

He feels... well rested. Also sort of lost. Waking up from a deep sleep is a rare luxury for him. But beyond that, thoughts of their conversation creep in – all the secrets that spilled out between them after years of silence.

(And all the secrets that didn’t.)

There's the ever-present tightness of his ribcage crushing his lungs – bars of bone caging him, barely containing him – but the weight of lingering sleep pushes it down, keeping his thoughts just the other side of lucid.

Feelings flit by (panic guilt relief) too fast for him to grab at, and for once he lets them. He shifts, turns his face into a warm neck, and finds himself mimicking Craig's breathing until he's steady again.
Tweek’s just starting to drift back off for a second round of sleep, when he comes to an uncomfortable realization. He shifts. Squirms. Rolls slightly to alleviate his discomfort. After several painfully drawn out minutes, he finally gives in and accepts that he kind of needs to pee. Scratch that, he’s busting for one. And that requires getting up.

As if it’ll help in some way, he curls his fingers into Craig’s tee and huffs out an irritable sound caught somewhere between and growl and a groan. The problem is, all his frustration does is break the spell of his tiredness and leave him wide awake, staring through the gloom at Craig’s chin. And the more awake he is, the more that he’s bothered by his unclean teeth, his boxers riding up against his thighs, the fact that Kenny McCormick’s stash of lube and rubbers is about a foot away from him—

Yeah, okay, that fucking does it, he thinks with no small amount of venom. Might as well get up and save himself at least a few more of those horrifying thoughts.

Untangling himself as carefully as he can from his still snoring best friend, Tweek shuffles his way out from under the thick covers and somehow, miraculously, manages to make it to the floor without knocking over any of the empty containers or falling on his ass. He blinks blearily in the low light of the cabin, disorientated and already shuddering from the harsh bite of cold. It’s dark in here. More than he remembers it being.

Body-clock well and truly fucked, he surveys the spread of clothing on the floor as carefully as his groggy head can manage, and ends up sliding into his jumper and coat, since they’re debatably the driest to touch. (Debatably, he thinks, since his numbing fingers struggle to tell the difference between frigid cold and actual dampness.)

He dresses himself with jerky movements and a string of whispered curses, before stuffing his feet into Craig’s shoes (they’re probably dryer, he reasons, since Craig had the sense not to wear sweatpants out in the snow). Shuffles towards the cabin door with his bony legs bared to the cold, nothing to protect them but stupidly long boxer shorts and Tweek’s overwhelming need to pee.

When he cracks open the door and peers out, his eyes bug. It’s almost pitch-black outside, save for maybe a foot or so of very faint golden light spilling out around him from the fairy lights, and even that’s hard to see through thanks to the thick, fast flowing flurries of snow.

After a moment of dry mouthed horror and knocking kneecaps, the blonde braves the fucking blizzard attempting to bury them alive, just long enough to stumble to the edge of the tiny little porch, untuck himself with a prayer (to God, Jesus and Satan too for good measure) that his dick doesn’t catch frostbite from exposure and fall straight off, and he pisses. He pisses faster than he ever has in his entire life, teeth clacking in his skull.

By the time he returns inside, slamming the doors shut on the storm behind him, every bit of him stings fiercely, as if his skin’s been flayed off. His fingers and toes throb, and he’s panting like he’s ran five laps around Stark’s Pond in only his underwear.

Undressing is harder than dressing had been, and he’s sort of starting to worry that he's just given himself hypothermia.

(Still better than feeling like I'm was gonna pee myself, a pretty stupid part of him thinks loudly. Despite himself, the rest Tweek can't help but agree.)

Before he returns to the bed, he upends his almost-empty bag for his tiny bottle of hand sanitizer and his cellphone. After accidentally emptying half the bottle of the former onto his hands, he flicks the excess goop off onto the floor (and the clothing... and the bed sheets), grabs his phone with still-
damp hands, and scrambles back up to the top of the bed.

Craig, somehow sleeping through all of it, grunts and rolls onto his side as Tweek squirms back down beside him. He barely stirs long enough to make an unhappy sound at his stupid icicle of a boyfriend tucking himself in against him. Even as much as he despises the cold, sleeping Craig reaches out and tugs Tweek closer, nose nuzzling into snow-damp blonde hair. Like he wants Tweek to leech all of his body heat.

Teeth chattering and muscles twitching, Tweek goes along with it all pretty easily. With the knowledge that sleep is now an impossibility, he spends the next half hour alternately shaking and cursing his body, curled into Craig's front and buried far enough beneath the covers that he's half suffocating.

Eventually, he warms up to the point that he's able to move around and check the screen of his cell for the time. His eye twitches when he sees it, though he really thinks he shouldn't be all that surprised, considering the fact it was pitch-fucking-black outside.

It's half past eleven. They've slept through the entire fucking day. Just like that, twelve hours lost. Twelve hours of, of...

Well, shit, Tweek's not sure there's anything more productive that they could've been doing today than this, but even so, he feels... jittery. Thinks that at least if he was at home, he could read some more of his journals while Craig slept, or maybe make himself some fresh coffee. Could even, he finds himself thinking (much to his embarrassment and shock), distract himself with other things, like finding various different and highly interesting ways to wake Craig up.

Flushing and scrunching his face up in disgust at the thought of doing anything like that out here, in Kenny's little sex-hut, Tweek shakes off the odd sense of loss and turns his attention back to his phone.

After a quick heads up to his mom that he's staying round Craig's for the night (assuming she's still awake), the blonde ponders what to do. Since there's no service out this far, he ends up spending the next few hours scouring through all the various group chats he's part of. Rereading all of Kenny's overt flirting and Butters quips in the Blonde Squad chat delivers just the right dosage of discomfort to remind him of Craig's misunderstandings surrounding McCormick, and Tweek's supposed feelings for him.

He moves on, getting stuck for a long time on Craig's texts instead. Flips all the way back to the ones from just after that night. After Token's party. One in particular makes him stop. Has him choking back a weird, hysterical laugh. (Muffles it against Craig's shoulder.)

17:56
u know what dude? fine, go fuck urself. when u want to grow the fuck up and talk about this like adults, u kno where i am. im not gonna play this game with u.

It isn't funny, he thinks. It isn't funny and he knows it, but... but he can't stop rereading it, and grinning. His face hurts. He's pretty sure his lip's split open from the cold. Feels his eyes sting, and his gut ache.

Weeks on, and he's only now listened to the advice in that text and talked with Craig, though he's still avoiding some big subjects. He's too much of a coward to bring some stuff up, and yet… Craig didn't really abandon him at all, did he? Not once. The other boy just keeps on indulging his childishness.
Eventually he moves back onto the newer texts, to the hesitant messages they'd shared trying to bridge the gap between them after the fight, and then joking around about whether or not Tweek found Craig kissable. (Shock horror over the answer to that one, he thinks with old embarrassment, rereading Craig's blatant flirting and his own nervous, stuttering attempts at it.)

And then a little while later, Tweek pauses, finger hovering over one particular text.

04:20
when i tod u abotu ne3ding space the ither day
is was bc idon thinnj i u kno btu babe
damnti ur alwys rig ht ther and o want it 2 stay taht way froever uknow? gayr ight.
so fucjin hay
omu man xxxcccccx

Unlike the first time around, he gives it a chance. Reads through the drunken message carefully several times. His heartbeat picks up as he decodes each line.

'When I told you about needing space the other day,' it says, 'it was because I don't think you know, but babe... damn it, you're always right there, and I want it to stay that way forever, y'know? Gay, right? So fucking gay.'

Tweek stops to hiccup a watery giggle and blink away the sting of tears. Craig sleeps on, breathing deep and undisturbed against the crown of his head.

He savours the translated message for the sweet, stupid, drunken sentiment that it was. While okay, yeah, Craig's clearly gay and definitely doesn't seem to mind spending time with him, there's still something raw about it. Understanding it now with relative ease after all his prior indignation and confusion, he feels like a fucking idiot. Was he really so blind? Especially when it came to that last line, which had so baffled him before.

(But he gets it now, and more than ever, it hurts.)

'ilu man,' Craig had written.

God, he wishes—

He wishes that were true the way he wants it to be – the same way Tweek loves him. But, it's okay. He knows that sober Craig likes him well enough to put up with his endless shit and to want to kiss him and to accept his scars, so—

That's enough. And as long as it's never openly acknowledged – never denied out loud – then he still has the ability to pretend all this could grow into something lasting. Something more real than uncertain, fledgling feelings and an unswerving loyalty to Tweek as his best friend.

(As a boyfriend, he amends to himself. Thinks that's gotta count for something, right?)

Either way, he ends up setting his cellphone off to one side, shifting further into his boyfriend's – his boyfriend's – arms, and listening to his slow, steady heartbeat.

He doesn't manage to fall asleep again, but it hardly matters since not long after, Craig slowly starts to stir.

Instead of doing the polite, normal thing and turning away, or pretending to sleep – hell, even just retrieving his phone again – Tweek lies there and watches. He follows the tiny, almost unnoticeable
flickers of movements behind Craig's eyelids, and the twitches at the corners of his mouth. Like the goddamn creep he is, he stares as Craig grimaces, face stretching into an unabashed yawn – reaches out and brushes his fingertips over the rasp of stubble starting to darken Craig's jaw. When the taller boy blinks open heavy-lidded eyes and looks back at him, barely a foot away, Tweek's just keeps on looking.

(Jesus Christ, he really is a creep around Craig, isn't he?)

"Mm?" his best friend says. And then, "Mneurgh."

(Wow. What an intellectual. No wonder they've got boners for each other.)

A snort of laughter forces itself out of his throat, and instead of saying anything, reaches up and does the lamest thing that he can apparently think of: ruffle Craig's hair.

There's a moment of slow, sleepy blinking, but Tweek spots Craig's lips pulling up into the worlds smallest grin right before long arms snake around him and crush him against a firm chest.

With a wheeze and a short-lived attempt at flailing his way to freedom, the blonde eventually settles back against him too, looping his hands together behind Craig's back. Barely holds off from doing something really embarrassing, like stretching out and rubbing their noses together.

(Ugh. When'd he turn into such a fucking sap?)

Maybe he's flustered over decoding the drunk-message. Maybe he's sentimental about all the revelations they haphazardly staggered through day before. Mostly, he just feels weird. Especially since Craig's got morning wood and it's pressing insistently into his stomach. He's pretty sure they can both feel it, but his boyfriend's somehow not being awkward about it at all.

It's only when he starts kissing a slow line from Tweek's jaw down his throat, his warm breath making his pulse jump, that he feels the need to disengage. Especially since his immediate physical response is to grow semi-stiff in his pants. Call him a weirdo, but he's not comfortable doing anything while Hello Kitty and the Body Pillow From Hell™ watch on.

"Urgh, let's— fuck. Wait," he says, voice a low groan and his skin tingling in all the places Craig's lips have been.

His boyfriend pulls back enough to make eye contact, looking almost entirely asleep. Sort of pink too, high up on his cheeks. "Kind of a mixed signal there," he says, voice a rumble that hits Tweek square in the stomach.

And then the accidental euphemism registers to him and all the spare blood in his body rushes up into his head. Nerves skittering up and down his spine, he opens and closes his mouth a few times.

Narrows his eyes. "You— eurgh, your jokes are shit."

"Y'know you love them really," is the drawling reply. Craig's too busy staring at his mouth and sliding his fingers along Tweek's hip, just below his t-shirt. When he does nothing to stop the furtive touching, Craig boldly slides his palm higher, rucking up Tweek's top below the covers and stroking over his ribs.

Squirming, he tries to concentrate on why them boning in an abandoned cabin in the middle of the woods wasn't so appealing half a minute ago, but sort of trails off as Craig splays out his fingers and brushes his thumb over his nipple. He maybe squeaks when it happens a second time. Really, it isn't like what was bothering him couldn't wait. "I-I dunno. Somehow, having to listen to them day after day gets kinda dull."
A huff of laughter and the brush of chilly toes against his shin are the only replies he gets to that. Either Craig has used up his morning supply of words, or he's waiting for him to hurry up and finish talking. The way his hand settles heavily on his side when Tweek doesn't explain himself implies it's likely the latter. He can't help mourning the loss of contact, and can tell Craig knows it too by the crinkling at the corners of his eyes.

Sighing and feeling slightly more mulish than he might like to admit, Tweek pulls further away, rolling onto his back to stare up at the still glowing fairy lights. Craig's hand slips down to his lower stomach, and his breathing does this dumb little hitch when he realises how close those long fingers are to his dick. "Jesus fucking Christ," he says in his whiniest voice. "This sucks."

"What does? Being totally alone with your hot, horny boyfriend, without any chance of interruption?"

There's only so much sarcasm Tweek can take after all the shit he's put himself through recently, so he feels justified when he reaches out and cuffs the douchebag's shoulder. He scowls, tilting his head to the side to make sure Craig can see it. "Yes, being totally alone with you sucks," he reiterates. "Especially since we're both – rrmm – horny, as you so delightfully put it."

All he receives is a flat look.

"I'm not jerking you off or— or dry humping in Kenny McCormick's sex shack, on a mattress probably soaked in – gah – a lifetime supply of STIs." His face scrunches up at the thought of one of Tommy's creepy fangirls from the coffee shop being pounded into the mattress by Kenny's bony arse. Eurgh.

For a moment, quiet. And then, grumbled, "Yeah, okay. That's... good point." The hand on his stomach slips away, and Craig turns his nose into the pillow, rolling onto his front. Mutters something that sounds suspiciously like, "Finally allowed to touch you after forever and that fucker's still screwing things up."

Considering all the crap they talked about yesterday, Tweek feels compelled to ignore that whole mess of a comment and pretend he isn't as red as a stop sign. General confusion shoved aside, he sits up straight and scruffs a hand through his hair, pushing bangs that have fallen forwards back out of his eyes. Only when he turns and catches the taller boy eyeing up his bared midsection does he tug his top back down to cover his belly and the slight bulge in the front of his boxers. Craig's eyes are dark when he tears them away from Tweek's crotch and looks back up at him, and the blonde twitches in his boxers. Wants to lean down and kiss him 'til they're both breathless, 'til they're clanging to each other and touching and not able to stop— Jerks his eyes away first.

(Holy shit, this is just— cruel. Is he being punished for something?)

"Hrng. W-we should go soon," he says, aware that he's babbling and totally helpless to stop himself. Distracts himself by reaching out over Craig and rattling one of the empty coffee canisters. "Maybe our clothes are a little drier now."

(They won't be. No thanks to the fact that they're in a heap on the floor of an ice-cold room.)

"What time is it?"

He reaches for his cell and checks the screen. "One."

A groan. "In the morning?"
"No, moron, the afternoon." Oh God. He's being a dick and he knows it, but he's helpless to stop himself.

"Well, g'night then," Craig says, and just like that, he shuffles to get more comfortable and turns his face away from Tweek.

He can't help it; he squawks. "Hey— what? You're going back to sleep? What, fourteen hours wasn't enough for you?"

Silence.

"What am I s'posed to do?" he says, starting to tug at his hair.

"Shh. Sleep." Craig mumbles, words muffled by the cushion. Not muffled enough to hide the amused lilt.

(And that's the final straw.)

"Aurgh, you're such a douche." Tweek wails. "Oh man, I can't do this. I've already slept, like, triple the amount I normally do in one night, and you're joking about me sleeping more?" He flails his arms wildly, nervous energy and sexual tension accumulating into one almighty, head-wrenching tic. "How'm I gonna do that? You dumb jerk, that's too much pressure—"

His raving comes to an abrupt end when Craig twists, grabs handfuls of his tee, and drags the blonde forcibly back down under the covers, half pinning him to the mattress. Citrus and flowers wash over him, followed by dust and damp. Craig's face is a blur in front of his, his breath puffing out over Tweek's chin and throat.

"Babe, don't take this the wrong way, but I'm doing my best not to jump you here." His boyfriend props himself up on an elbow and wipes a hand over his face, pulling far enough back that Tweek can clearly make out his features. "Hard to do when even your crazy rambling makes me wanna kiss you. So could you just, I dunno... keep your voice down?"

Subconsciously holding his breath for several beats after Craig's startling announcement, he eventually says in a very low, very quiet voice, "Fine, I'll be quiet. But if you go back to sleep for the next half a day, I'll smother you with the creepy body pillow."

Laughter vibrates through Tweek where their chests meet. "You're a sadistic bastard, aren't you?" Craig says fondly.

"Only when provoked." He tries for a sharp glare, but can't help it creeping into a grin.

In the end, they both stay in bed. Since they don't want to risk getting herpes or genital warts, they keep their remaining clothes on and their hands (mostly) to themselves. Despite the teasing, Tweek does the majority of the talking, rambling on about the random childhood memories that have been stirred back up by what he's read on the USB stick so far. All their dumbass adventures and games as children, all the funny little thoughts on old teachers and class events.

Nothing shocking, nothing new. Just... stuff he'd never really been able to recall properly, before reading the journals. Things he's regained – just stupid little things – that have Craig's mouth twitching up at the corners, and his hands drawing Tweek closer.

When the dark haired boy inevitably ends up dozing at around three o'clock, more asleep than he is awake, Tweek leaves him to it. Turns back to his cell (and their old messages) again.
Craig might not want Tweek to acknowledge his love for him out loud, but... even if this is the only clarification that he'll ever get – that one instance of nonsensical, drunken rambling – then he'll take it. He'll be grateful for it, and he'll keep his mouth shut.

(He tries to fool himself into thinking that the ache in his chest and the downwards trajectory in his mood isn't fuelled by the revelation. Whatever Craig offers him, he'll be grateful for – will be happy about. He will be happy. He will.)

...They finally leave the hut just after six, theorizing that the walk back should only take them an hour tops, and so they should have time to sneak into Craig's for a quick clean up and a change of clothes. There's enough clothing at the taller boy's house to accommodate them both for at least a week without doing any laundry, thanks to all the things that Tweek's left there over the years, and thanks to Tricia catching an earlier bus in to school for club activities most mornings, and Thomas and Laura leaving for work before the sun rises, the kitchen and the bathroom'll probably be free for them. With any luck, it'll be empty when they get in.

Even though the snow stopped falling some time through the night, the trudge home is miserable, spent mostly in silence aside from their growling stomachs and Tweek's occasional complaints about his slowly brewing headache. (Apparently getting extra sleep just fucks him up. He always did think that the amount other people slept seemed unhealthy.)

By the time they reach the nearest road, Craig's turned half blue from the cold, and Tweek's shuddering so hard that it's proving difficult to walk in a straight line. They huddle close to one another as they cross the bridge, all damp clothes, wind-reddened cheeks and fingers meshed together in the depths of Craig's pocket.

It's quarter-to-seven when South Park comes into view, sprawling out below them in a motley blur of bright colours and half-buried streets, barely visible in the pre-dawn gloom. The sight inspires Tweek into a speedy march, dragging Craig along behind him.

When they get to Craig's porch, the driveway is empty – neither of his parents' cars are parked up – and all the lights inside are off.

There's a moment of uncooperative rummaging at the door before Craig manages to produce a key from the inside pocket of his jacket and they shuffle their way into the dark, silent house. The air smells of toast and coffee.

(What Tweek wouldn't do for a steaming hot mug of pure caffeine right now.)

Nothing stirs as they mutely clamber up the stairs, and then not-so-quietly bash open Craig's bedroom door.

After dumping all of their junk on the floor, there's a moment of stillness – a moment of awkward standing and shivering – where both of them seem to have lost all cognitive functions.

Tweek looks into Craig's pale eyes and Craig looks back into his, the warmth of the house stinging after the twenty-four hours of almost constant cold, and it's like everything they talked about in their own, private little world yesterday morning has— has changed things.

It's different in here now. Between them, there's been an invisible barrier broken down. The cold's eaten away all of their fear and their nerves and the hut's dulled down their self-restraint.

Not being able to touch Craig last night the way they'd both wanted when they'd been curled
together in bed, half naked physically and emotionally, had been one of the most annoying things Tweek has to have ever experienced.

But nothing's stopping them now.

(Apart from the fact Tweek's worried he might have frostbite, but his heart's pounding in his ears and Craig's room is too small and too familiar and—)

"I want a shower," he says, voice raspy. It feels like his words reverberate against the walls.

"Oh." His boyfriend swallows reflexively and nods. "Okay, cool."

"Y-you should have one too, man. You're like, half— half frozen." His mouth is on autopilot, his face is numb. His heart is trying to beat its way free, up and out of his throat.

"It's— fine. You go first." The taller boy takes an abortive step backwards, as if to put some space between them.

Tweek reaches out and stills him. He's distinctly aware of all his blood migrating upwards, into his face.

Nothing's stopping them.

"W-we could— faster if we— hrrn. Jesus, see me through this." He rubs a hand over his face hard and tightens his grip on Craig's sleeve. Takes a deep, fortifying breath and, eyes averted, says very quickly, "Wecouldjustshowertogther."

The silence that follows his statement forces him to peek up, stomach flipping nervously.

Craig looks like he's had his breath sucker punched out of him.

Unsure whether that's an assenting look or one of horror, he babbles lamely. "Oh God, I just meant — we don't have to if you don't want to. Augh. Thought maybe you'd— fuck, such an idiot—"

"Yes," the other boy says, stepping forwards so sharply that their chests bump, and Tweek's voice dies in his throat. Two icy hands settle on either side of his face, followed by dry, chapped lips pressing into his. It's bruising. Stilted.

They part briefly, foreheads touching. "Y-yeah?" He gulps, nerves alight. His split lips throbs.

"Babe," Craig says, "it's a no-brainer."

And then he kisses him again.

Breath stuttering out, he returns the fast, hard kiss, and stumbles back towards the open door, heart thumping in his ears. His lips tingle when Craig pulls away, hands lowering to tug at the front of Tweek's coat. There's frustration at his stiff fingers in the way Craig grimaces, and it takes long enough that Tweek helps. The second the damp, heavy material slides off his shoulders and hits the floor with a whump, they're on each other again, mouths clashing, backing out onto the landing and blindly scrabbling for purchase on their clothing.

There's a brief interlude where Craig catches him against the wall, wrists pinned on either side of his head and knee pressing up between Tweek's legs. A ragged sound rakes its way out of Tweek as he grinds against the sudden friction. Something about being pressed into a hard surface, hands immobilised and Craig flush against him makes whatever common sense wasn't killed off by the cold
shut down.

After that, the rest of the way into the bathroom is a blur of ripping off scarves and yanking jumpers over heads. The door's slammed shut unceremoniously behind them as Tweek returns the favour from the hallway, pushing him up against the wood so he can taste the bared curve of Craig's clavicle. He rakes his nails through Craig's hair and lets the other boy reel him in for another open-mouthed kiss.

The sweatpants and the jeans are next to disappear, kicked off to one side. Only when Craig's fingers slip over the waistband of Tweek's boxers does reality slam back into them.

They're standing, almost entirely naked, in the Tucker family bathroom. The light overhead is bright, the piles of clothes scattered around the damp, their fingers and toes white from the walk home. He looks up sees wind burnt cheeks, a red nose, a swollen mouth. Thinks about how it's okay, Craig's seen all of him already, Craig knows.

It doesn't stop his chest from clamping down on his lungs like a vice, or his face from scrunching up. (His thighs burn.)

Craig pulls away from him, leaves him shaking and clutching at his upper legs.

The sudden roar of rushing water behind him has Tweek startling; he looks around when a wet hand lands gently on his shoulder, and his eyes run over his boyfriend's flat stomach, his faintly freckled arms, his lean muscles. All this skin, all of it free to touch.

"Honey, y'still wanna? It's cool if not," he's saying, but it takes a while for the words to make sense to the blonde.

He twitches. Nods sharply. Turns and grasps at the taller boy's hands, guiding them back to his hips and to the top of his boxers, even though the monster's turning his stomach, twisting it into a knot tight enough to choke him off.

Leaning down, Craig captures his mouth – strokes his tongue over Tweek's lips and sucks the lower into his mouth. It's slower this time. Sincere. Steadying.

Tweek runs his trembling hands over Craig's sides, to his underwear. Takes the initiative and tugs them down first, feeling his length spring free and the fabric slide down his thighs to pool on the floor at his feet. The dark haired boy just keeps kissing him until he's senseless, tongues brushing together wet and hot. Every slide of their mouths grows slower, dirtier. Heat curls in the seat of his spine, unfurling slowly through his cold limbs.

Pulling back to catch his breath only gives Craig the chance to kiss his way to Tweek's throat, nipping teeth and dragging lips. Tweek groans, digs fingernails into Craig's back, follows him blindly as his steps under the spray of the shower. Hot water pours down on them, steam catching in their throats, soaking hair and biting into chilled extremities. He's so distracted by a sucking, scraping pressure against the sensitive skin just below his ear and the burning rush of water, that he barely notices that Craig's slipping his now sodden boxers off.

In fact, it's only the wet sound of them hitting the floor, and the sensation of bitterly cold hands running over his bare ass that keys him in.

Shuddering is about as far into panic as he gets before his boyfriend's pulling him into his body. Chest to chest, thigh to thigh.
Eyes stinging and breathing elevated, he grips hard at the other boy's shoulders like that might anchor him.

—burning, burning alive, trapped, gonna die—

"God, you're amazing." Rough words growled against his ear as strong fingers grip his ass, forcing them together harder. Hips buck and their slick, straining lengths rub together in way that makes his knees go soft. "So fucking hot."

He holds on for his life, lets himself be tugged into another hard kiss. When one of Craig's hands slips between them and grips him, pumping, Tweek moans out loud, pants against Craig's mouth, let's the other boy swallow the sounds and cage him in against the icy, fogged up glass.

He's powerless to do anything as Craig's twists and tightens his fist, moving down his body in a trail of licking, sucking kisses that have him arching his back and covering his mouth to mute the needy sounds. Lips lock around his nipple, lapping at it, and Tweek sinks his free, stinging hand into dark hair to hold on.

"Ngh. Fuck." Wails in protest when the hand encircling him stills – when the hot, wet suction eases up, and his nipple is left tingling.

Hears the thump of knees hitting tiles, and gasps, bashing his head back against the glass when sharp teeth sink into his jutting hipbone. Tweek eyes shoot open, and he blinks through the stream of hissing, scalding water at his boyfriend. Craig's kneeling in front of him, breathing hot air against his skin, mouth barely an inch away from his straining dick.

One hand runs down the outside of Tweek's thighs, and his fingers spasm in black hair. Ribcage crushing his lungs, he whimpers.

(—too close, he's trapped, he's gonna die here, gonna burn alive with them—)

A gentle kiss in place of teeth, and eyes the same color as the winter sky locking with his.

"Can I?" is all Craig asks.

Chapter End Notes

i was too drained to write another 3000 words of pure porn (bc, lbr, that's what always ends up happening with me lolol), so i left you all on a cliffhanger.
again.
;U
"Can I?" Craig asks from where he kneels in front of Tweek, hands settled against the outside of the blonde's thighs and lips tracing his hipbone.

Tweek fights through the burning, the *crushing, searing flesh, metal and smoke, the falling, falling*—

Fights through it, threading his fingers into his boyfriend's hair and peering down at pale blue eyes. He's shaking so hard he's practically vibrating with it, but Craig is an anchor, still and steady.

He swallows around the rawness of his heart beating itself bloody in his chest and he nods. "*Mrn. Y-yeah. Please.*"

Like that's all he's ever wanted to hear, Craig's long, handsome face softens and he presses another kiss against wet skin. The blonde watches as he chases after droplets with the tip of his tongue, stomach fluttering hot.

Craig releases his thigh with one hand and wraps it around the base of him, turns his attention to Tweek's length in a way that makes him want to look away, or cover himself.

But he doesn't get the chance to ruminate on that, because then Craig licks him — just a short, testing stroke of tongue — and Tweek makes a high-pitched sound not unlike a squeak, fingers tightening. It's apparently enough incentive for the other boy to lean in again, parting his lips in an 'O' and taking his head into his mouth.

Heat. Not slicing into his thighs, but drumming down from the shower head and billowing up in steam. Worming through his stomach with the pressure of a tongue curling around him.

"*Nff, Cra-aig,*" Tweek says around a broken breath, unconsciously widening his stance when the other boy begins pumping slowly with his fist. He only just restrains himself from doing something embarrassing like thrusting forwards into the tight grip and the hot cavern of Craig's mouth, pressing his head back against the glass and shutting his eyes against the overwhelming sensations.

It gets harder to stay composed when his boyfriend pulls back with a pop and angles his head to one side to swipe a long, broad stroke up the underside of his length. He shudders and twitches, even as Craig stops with his experimental touches, his hand stilling.

"Let me know if I do something wrong, dude," Craig says, voice low and a little unsteady. "I've never done this before."

That has Tweek's eyes widening, has him distracted from the tangle nervousness and pleasure in his gut. He peers owlishly down at the other boy, whose face grows pink under the weight of his bewildered stare, blinking back up through the steady stream of water at him.

"What?" Tweek says, closer to a squawk than he might like. "Y-you've never—*really?* Your first
"Well, yeah," says Craig. "S'not like I'm some kind of sex freak or something. Never really wanted to do this with anyone before." Tweek doesn't think he's ever seen anything make Craig turn that shade of red. The creature in his stomach does a weird sort of squirm.

(possessive, he realizes. Tweek feels possessive.)

"I'll tell you," he says very rapidly when it looks like Craig's about ready to let the floor swallow him up. "Dude, you do a—anything I don't—I don't like, and I'll tell you."

Rewarding him with another slow, stomach-melting smile, the dark haired boy leans in, taking Tweek into his mouth and forming a tight ring of suction. As Craig pushes down on him, Tweek slides against his tongue. His blood pounds in his ears and all of his attention pinpoints on the friction, the slick warmth.

As Craig's head rises and falls, he watches Tweek's reaction through dark, spiked eyelashes, fingers twisting around his base and his free hand skating up the outside of his thigh to hold his hip when he starts rolling forwards without thinking.

Tweek's burning again, burning from the inside out, threading his fingers in closer to Craig's scalp, his nails scraping.

"Fuck, Craig, you're—mn. Damn it." He babbles incoherently as his boyfriend pulls back, tracing the tip of him, stroking his underside with the slippery palm of his hand. He pants when he's engulfed again, helpless not to trace the path of the water over the long, lean lines Craig's body with his eyes. From his fine freckles to his pink, stretched lips, all the way down to the straining hardness arching up between his legs, going ignored. Almost all of him is flushed, and his fingers press Tweek back into the glass with bruising force as his hips twitch and jerk. "Unfair. You're—ah. So fucking gorgeous."

And God, he is gorgeous. Tweek's not sure what he's done to deserve this kind of a miracle after all the shit he's been pulling recently, but he'll take it. He'll take whatever he can get.

Then Craig increases the speed, bobbing faster, humming a growl that makes his stomach tighten and sinking sharp nails into Tweek's hip—

And all coherent thoughts unravel.

Electricity shoots through his thawed limbs. He arches and he gasps, open-mouthed and breathless as Craig bears down on him, refusing to pull back off of him even as Tweek tugs at his hair, moans out words of warning that make no sense even to himself. A sob tears itself out of his throat.

He crests a tidal wave of yeyesyesyes and don'tstoppleaseGod and suddenly, he's free falling, cumming so hard he can't make a sound. His shoulders shake, his back bows, his eyes snap shut. Only Craig's hold on his hip keeps him upright as his knees buckle, and still the other boy is swallowing down around him, wringing the very last of his orgasm out of him.

Eventually Tweek comes back to himself enough to let up on his tight hold on the other boy's hair, chest heaving and brain fuzzy. He urges Craig up and off of him with a hand on his jaw, tremors running right through him from his head to his toes. He's over-sensitive and spent, and so full of affection all he knows is that he wants to kiss Craig until he blacks out.

The taller boy stands up, wiping his mouth off with the back of his hand and looking far too pleased with himself. He crowds in close when Tweek winds one arm around his neck, and presses his lips
to Tweek's. It should be off-putting, he thinks as the kiss deepens, to taste himself bitter and salty on Craig's tongue, but... he makes a face. It's weird. He doesn't mind it. Still the thought of it is distinctly... unpleasant.

"Gross," he says in a pretty thoughtful manner, once they pull apart.

A huff of laughter and a rare sighting of Craig's dimple make him give in too, grinning and lightheaded. "Hot," Craig repeats, nuzzling his way down Tweek's neck with open-mouthed kisses that have him tilting his neck to one side.

"You're crazy, man." Despite that ringing endorsement, he pulls Craig closer and reaches down between them when Craig's jutting length nudges at his flat stomach. As his fingers curl around him, Craig groans in a way that sends sparks up Tweek's arm and all the way down his spine, like his boyfriend's voice is hardwired directly to Tweek's dick.

He pulls the other boy in for another kiss, deep and slow, tongues curling, tracing, running over the line of straight teeth and splitting, swollen lips. He twists his palm like Craig did to him, traces the slit at the tip, follows the shape down in a tight, painfully slow motion that has Craig gripping his shoulder, thrusting hard into his fist. Tweek considers pulling away and driving Craig slowly insane with light, teasing touches, but— not today. Another time, maybe.

(Next time, he says to himself.)

Right now, he wants to see him fall apart – wants to wrap his arms around him and feel the shudders running through them both where he's holding him up. So he pumps, hard and fast, corkscrewing up and driving back down. All the while he bites and he licks at Craig's panting mouth, and he runs his nails lightly over his back.

A litany of rough, rasping words ring through the room as the other boy pulls back for breath, and Tweek kisses along his jaw, his cheek, his shoulder – anywhere he can reach. He watches his boyfriend gasp – meets hazy eyes and pumps, rubs the thumb of his free hand over a nipple, studying the clenching of his jaw, the furrow of his brow.

"Tweek," Craig says, turning his face into the blonde's hair where it's plastered to his head. And again: "Tweek."

A thrill of that possessiveness runs through him again – makes him want to bite marks that say, mine, he's mine, to anyone that sees them. The words catch in his throat, just barely unsaid. No one's gonna take you away from me. I won't let them.

"It's not fair," Tweek says instead, pressing the shape of the words into Craig's clavicle – into the soft skin below his ear – and changing the angle of his hand. He watches his boyfriend gasp – meets hazy eyes and pumps, rubs the thumb of his free hand over a nipple, studying the clenching of his jaw, the furrow of his brow.

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"It's not fair," Tweek says instead, pressing the shape of the words into Craig's clavicle – into the soft skin below his ear – and changing the angle of his hand. Steps up onto his toes and scrapes his teeth over the shell of Craig's ear. "Jesus. It's not fair you do this to me." It almost hurts how much he means those words. "Mrrn. You— babe, you've ruined me."

(Craig's ruined him too everyone else, forever.)

And just like that, his back pressed to the glass and Craig pressed to his front, he watches his boyfriend come to pieces.

... The rest of the shower goes by in a haze of gentle touches and citrus scented shampoo, until they're clambering out and drying themselves off on a couple spare towels.
It's only as Tweek's furiously scrubbing his hair dry that he peers over his shoulder at the floor and realizes they didn't think to get themselves any clothes. (His stupid damn face darkens up at the thought of why they'd been so distracted, but he can't help the twitch of a smile pulling at his lips.)

"We're idiots, dude," he says, voice light. And then he thinks on it a little harder, and his eyes widen. Shit. School. "Ah, fuck. We're idiots."

Craig looks up from the basin, where he's shaving off his stubble. "What?" The white towel around his waist is slung distractingly low, and it takes all of Tweek's focus not to forget what he's saying.

"We're gonna be late." He wraps the towel around him, mane of partially dried hair dripping onto his neck and shoulders, and swings open the door without a second thought. Gets maybe three steps out of the bathroom when he hears a strangled, "Eurgh."

He falters mid-step.

Spins around, butt-naked except for the long towel hiding everything from his hips to his shins.

Oh, God no.

Halfway down the hall stands Tricia, wrapped up in her blankets and looking pissed off.

Tweek shrieks, covers his vitals and legs it the rest of the way into Craig's room, almost tripping on his mom's discarded yellow cardigan as he goes.

"Holy shit, Ruby," he says around the doorframe, head about to explode from sheer mortification. "W-what— why are you— NNRG— Craig, your sister's home."

"Ugh, please just shut up," says the fifteen-year-old girl, sniffing loudly and shuffling towards the stairs. "As if it's not bad enough I get woken up by your gross-ass shower sex, I've gotta listen to you shouting too?"

(Oh Jesus Christ, this is so fucked up. Tweek would very much like to die now, thank you.)

Craig sticks his head out the bathroom, and Tweek meets his eyes briefly. There are high points of color on his cheek, above the white of his shaving cream. "Why the fuck are you home?"

"Why do you think, dickwad? I'm sick." She gives a hacking cough and starts to stagger down the stairs, blankets and all. "And you're making my headache worse."

Craig just rolls his eyes. "Welcome to my world," he calls after her, before disappearing back into the bathroom. Tweek's the only one that sticks around long enough to see her flip them both the bird over her shoulder.

Well and truly humiliated, he slams the door shut behind him and begins rummaging through Craig's wardrobe. His face is on fire.

... somehow, they make it to the bus stop in time to catch the final ride in, clambering on board with stitches in their sides and their clothing lopsided. Tweek's got none of his school stuff and neither of them had time for breakfast (they were just barely in the house long enough to rinse out the canisters and fill them back up with instant coffee), but at least they'll be attending classes today, right?

He doesn't question it when Craig takes the window seat in their normal spots, his back to the view
and his legs open. One foot is raised, resting on the seat cushion, and the other is planted flat on the ground. He tugs Tweek's hand until the blonde slumps down in front of him, leaning back into a hard chest.

As he shuffles about, trying to get comfortable, arms wrap around his waist. The bus engine revs, pulling back out onto the road.

"Sweet Jesus, quit it," he says, pushing Craig's face away when the boy nuzzles his way past the collar of Tweek's borrowed shirt and stirs his hair up with a long exhale. "Fuckin' tickles, man."

Craig just makes a sound that could be either complaint or amusement, and buries his nose in Tweek's lemon scented hair instead.

They sit like that for long moments, until the homicidal school bus driver swerves alarmingly around a street corner. Tweek tenses up, gripping hard at Craig's sleeves. "Hrgh. Dude, this guy's gonna kill us one day."

Very helpfully, Craig hums. Presses a kiss to the top of his head. Tightens his arms a little and splays his hands out over Tweek's stomach.

The bus lurches again, and the familiar shriek of metal grates right along every last one of Tweek's nerves.

"No, man, I'm serious," Tweek says over the racket, eyes darting around the near-empty bus. "This thing's a death trap. One day, it'll kill someone. I-it'll run some kid over, or, or that crazy fucker'll flip it and we'll all be crushed alive." His cheek tics as they go over a bump in the road so fast, he half expects to be flung from the seat. "Oh God, i-it'll probably explode with us still inside."

"You realize you say shit like this about everything and nothing ever happens, right honey?" Craig proceeds to mumble something about, "So much for sex being good stress relief," which gets him a smack on the arm and a glower.

"Sh-shut up, you ass." He sits up a little straighter and peers around the interior of the bus, just to be sure no one overheard that last bit. As there's only seven other kids on board in total (all of whom are gathered in seats worryingly close to their maniac of a driver), he figures they're good. "You know I raise good points."

"What, like the time you refused to go on the merry-go-round because you thought your brains might get scrambled? Or like when you refused to go to Stark's Pond all summer because you said there was a monster living in it? Oh, wait, what about the way you think you're gonna be pushed to your death down every set of stairs you encounter?" He pauses. When he speaks again, there's a lilting edge to it like he's trying not to laugh. "Do I really need to validate any of your dumb ideas for you?"

"Wow, what crawled out your ass and died?" Tweek says, all snark. The driver slams on the breaks, and he wriggles in his spot, 'accidentally' elbowing Craig in the ribs. As the other boy doubles over to the side with a wheeze, Tweek merely sniffs. "I think you forget what kind of a fucked up place we live in, dude."

"A white-bread, red-neck town in the ass-end of nowhere?" his best friend says once he's caught his breath, still rubbing his side.

Tweek turns in his seat, nose scrunching as he glares. "Turkey invasions. Giant guinea pig pandemics. Mecha Streisand."

Rolling his eyes, Craig just tugs Tweek back down into his arms. Probably so he doesn't slip off the
"Yeah, yeah, I get it."

The, 'oh my God, please stop talking,' is heavily implied, mostly thanks to the fact that Craig proceeds to kiss him into silence. Again.

It's only out of the goodness of his heart that Tweek goes along with it.

... When they clamber off of the death-trap twenty minutes later he looks behind him, down the row of empty seats, and frowns.

This isn't the first time they've come in on the bus, with Kenny and Butters are nowhere to be seen – Monday, neither of them were around either. It— doesn't sit well with him. Maybe it's just the morbid tone of the conversation they were having during the trip in, but there's an itch in the back of his head that makes him stop dead once he's got both feet on the ground, and look around the busy parking lot for a familiar flash of lurid orange or sky blue.

Nothing.

Craig gives him the side-eye and pulls at their linked hands until Tweek falls into step beside him.

He just shrugs it off as an odd mood and continues on inside.

(Runs his fingers over the outline of his cell in his pocket to stop himself from digging his nails into his thigh.)

... "Alright everyone, shut up," says their harried looking homeroom teacher, Mr Bhatt, the second he dumps his armful of folders onto his desk and turns to start wiping down the white board. Without so much as a glance over his shoulder at them, he announces plainly, "Tucker, Tweak, Principal's office. Now."

A few of the douchebags in class jeer and shout as they stand, but Craig just walks towards the door like he doesn't hear a word of it, expression apathetic.

"Augh. Shit, man," Tweek says, eye kicking into a nervous tic.

Stumbling after him, Tweek catches hold of his boyfriend's hand the second he's close enough.

As the door is slamming closed behind them, they hear Mr Bhatt raising his voice over the din of excited chatter. "I thought I told you all to shut up."

For his part, Tweek spends the entire walk fretting.

"I knew w-we shouldn't have skipped, dude," he says as he twists the bottom of his borrowed jumper in between his fingers. "I knew we'd get caught out. N-nnr. Not worth it. It's not worth this pressure."

For his part, Craig just stays silent. Tweek glances his way several times and finds that he's all relaxed shoulders, habitual slouch and sleepy, heavy-lidded eyes. He looks ready for a fucking nap.

They don't even get a chance to sit out front of the Principal's office to try and calm down before being called inside. The rough faced, rough voiced school secretary manning the desk out front just
waves them toward the door with one clawed looking hand as soon as she spots them. (Her shiny red manicure catches the light in a foreboding manner.) "The Tweak and Tucker kids are here to see you now, Principal," she says into her tannoy – well. More like growls.

Tweek's feet try their damnedest to freeze him to the spot, but Craig just powers ahead, dragging the blonde along with him. He doesn't bother knocking or waiting to be called in before, in typical Craig fashion, he yanks down the handle and steps straight through the doorway. (Just goes ahead and invites himself inside.)

About ready to have an aneurism, the blonde follows – stops digging in his heels just long enough that ends up level with Craig, who comes to an abrupt halt about two feet from the front of the huge mahogany desk. Tall bookcases and official looking certificates fill the walls, along with the school flag and some kind of commemorative plaque. The whole room screams middle class.

When the door slams behind them, Tweek yelps. Loudly. "Jesus, son of a whore."

"Yes, thank you for that, Mr Tweak," the principal says, voice deep. He leans back in his chair, and it squeaks forebodingly under his not so inconsiderable weight.

Face flaring up red for what feels like the fiftieth time this morning, Tweek averts his eyes to the top of the desk and tries really fucking hard not to twitch. There's a huge bucket of KFC on the desk, wafting greasy, chicken-y goodness across the room at them. (It smells fresh.) And then he spots the mug beside it, and his mouth waters. Sweet Lord, he wants his coffee. And maybe a drumstick.

"I've called you here today, gentlemen," the large man states, crossing his arms over his rotund belly, "to discuss your recent behavioural issues."

Shuffling from one foot to the next and biting his lip to hold himself back from anything stupid, he waits as the silence around them grows. Tries tearing his attention away from the food, with only limited success. (Does KFC even open this early?)

"Nothing to say?" Principal Powers asks, tone calm but brown eyes needling. After letting Tweek stew in his misery for another lengthy moment, he reaches for a sheet of paper on the desk and studies it. "Why don't we start with you then, Mr Tweak?"

"Argh," is all he manages to get out. Craig squeezes his hand.

"You've skipped... two full days of school now, as well as several of your classes. On top of that you failed to appear for homeroom on the first day of this term, turned up to... Mrs Christie's class late, and disrupted her lesson by shouting and cussing. Is this correct?" he glances over the top of the sheet, and Tweek squirms under the weight of his gaze.

"Nff— fuck— I mean, y-yeah? I already d-id detention on – eurgh – on that though, sir."

"Hm. Well, then." He says nothing else on the subject, instead reaching for another sheet. His thick brows sink lower over his eyes as he reads. "And you, Mr Tucker. Two skipped days, several missed lessons, causing fights in the cafeteria and the corridors, provoking other students in your classes... Not turning up for your detentions?"

What the—?

Wide-eyed, Tweek turns and stares at his boyfriend. Craig just looks up at the ceiling and does nothing to refute the claims.
A lengthy sigh draws his attention back to Principal Powers. "Quite frankly, I'm surprised that you haven't ended up in here sooner. This list is... disappointing, to say the least." He pinches the bridge of his nose and sets the papers aside. "Were I any less lenient than I am, I would be tempted to suspend you, Mr Tucker. But the fact of the matter is, this seems largely out of character for you."

Still Craig says and does nothing.

Looking like he's not paid enough for this shit (Tweek knows the feeling, since he knew fuck all about any of this), the Principal just waves a hand at them. "After-school detention from Monday to Friday next week, Mr Tweak, and two weeks worth for you, Mr Tucker." As an afterthought, he says, "I'm giving you both phone calls home, as further incentive for this to be the last of such misconduct."

Stomach dropping, Tweek opens and closes his mouth, words sticking uselessly in his throat. "Can we go now?" Craig says, flat and drawling.

"Go on. Go back to your classes." With a wave of a broad hand and another loud sigh, they're dismissed.

Words running on a loop through his head, Tweek bites his tongue – manages to walk out the office, past from the glowering secretary and halfway down the hall before he can't hold it back any longer.

"'Fights', man?" He yanks at Craig's hand until the older boy turns to face him. His words echo off of the lockers. "As in, plural? What the fuck?"

All he gets is a surly shrug and a muttered, "Not been in a great mood."

"Yeah, well, I'd have said that was kinda glaringly obvious, you jerk." He pulls his hand away, incensed that his boyfriend hadn't bothered telling him he'd been having issues.

"Babe, chill, it's not a big deal." There's a level of amusement in those words that Tweek doesn't appreciate.

"You could've told me," he says, and then instantly feels like shit for it. He hardly has the right to be upset over Craig keeping secrets from him.

Still, the words hang in the air between them and all that Tweek can think is, is he really lying if it's by omission?

(Yeah, he thinks. Not saying shit is starting to feel just as bad as openly telling lies. And to think, he'd always valued his honesty. What a fucking fraud.)

A sour taste on his tongue, he bites into his lip and turns away.

"C'mon, let's just— go to class."

Behind him, Craig stays silent.

... Stressful start to the school day that it might be, Wednesday picks up pace after that.

Classes blur together, one monotonous headache after another. Lectures followed by silent studying followed by enough homework to last them all until graduation. (Not that even half of it'll get done.) He spends the seemingly endless hours locked in his head, ruminating about what a piece of crap
he's being over the whole Tommy issue, and how the fuck he's gonna get himself out of this predicament.

(He doesn't want to keep quiet about this for any longer than he has to, even though he's only known Thomas was here since Saturday morning. That's less than a week, but it feels like it's been forever.)

Lunch is uneventful thanks to Clyde, Cartman and Kyle getting into a fiery debate over the latest bit of legislation their giant douche of a president is trying to pass. Tweek blanks them, attention instead torn between wolfing down his sketchy-ass cafeteria lunch, and trying to ignore the bump of Craig's elbow against his side, or the press of a boot against his still-damp shoe. By the time they all finish up and move on to their next classes, Tweek's red in the face and not sure if he'd prefer to smack his boyfriend upside the head, or drag him into the janitor's closet and kiss him 'til they're breathless.

He makes do with rolling his eyes when Craig reels him in for a hug right in the middle of the busy corridor, fighting off an involuntary smile at the cold nose and the whispered, "Okay, I should've said something, stop ignoring me already."

(The smile fades just as quickly as it grows, because he's not mad at Craig. He's mad at himself.)

Pulling himself away, he puts on a glower for show when Craig brushes a kiss over the scruff on his cheek (somewhere down the corridor, a bunch of younger girls squeal loudly) and just says, "Hrng. Cute, man. Real cute."

"That's why you like me."

"Ugh, you're the literal worst." But he links their fingers together and offers Craig a fake glare, and they're as right again as they've ever been.

(Well, until about ten minutes later.)

Changing for Phys. Ed. ends up being embarrassing as hell thanks to the patchwork of hiccups, bite marks and scratches exposed when Craig drops his kit on the bench and unabashedly pulls his jumper up and over his head.

"Dude," Stan says from across the room, voice slurring suspiciously as he squints at Craig's back. "The fuck you guys doin' in the bedroom? You look like you were mauled by a bear."

"Mind your own business, Marsh," Craig says, cool as anything, and then proceeds to leave his top off just to— to embarrass Tweek or gross out the guys or— or—

Tweek's so damn flustered that he goes to change in the bathroom, which is probably a good thing considering the fact he's not wearing any underwear. (He feels naked going round school without his long boxer shorts on, even when there's no risk of undressing involved – let alone when he's gotta change in and out of his spare sports kit.)

By the time Phys. Ed. is over, he and Craig have been teased to within an inch of his life by his classmates, and all he wants is to get home and be on his own. To face the music with his parents; see if he can get hold of Butters or Kenny through the worryingly silent group chat; finally just sit down and work further through the contents of the USB.

Perhaps that'll help him wind down from the drama of the day. Perhaps it'll help him feel a little less shitty about his life choices.

(He's really not holding out much hope.)
NOTE!!!
in case anyone's missed, there's a new chapter up of Thomas' side-fic unfounded, as well as two other fairly new stories in the series:
a craig-centric one-shot, called uncharted
and a kenny-centric multi-chapter, called undone
if you decide to pay them a visit, i hope that you enjoy!! <33

(also, all current character and story playlists can be found on the series page, here)
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

ahsgdjhdhk it's snowing again. like, 3+ inches just in the last couple of hours. what the hell is up with the weather this year?? i'm meant to be living in a mild climate, please and thank you.. :U

(on another note, this chapter almost killed me lmao. i had a lot more i wanted to address in here but i had to cut it in half bc it was 12,000 words long and still going and just,,, n O . so yeah, it still needs some preettytyy substantial editing. i just had to stop looking at it before i tried braining myself, haha")

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After grabbing his belongings and leaving Craig at his front door with an abrupt kiss and a mumbled excuse about having to deal with his parents, Tweek power-walks home, digging his cell out of his pocket with his free hand as he goes. With any luck his dad'll be at the store for at least a few more hours, so his mom will be the one that answered the call earlier. From past experience, that means a disappointed frown and a slightly burned cup of coffee with no sugar or milk. Mrs Tweak doesn't really scold or reprimand the way that normal parents do.

(And in fact, this method makes Tweek feel guiltier than any level of being shouted at or scolded ever could. Mrs Tweak's wobbly frowns and pointed silences make his inner-child want to curl up and cry. It's a pretty effective way to get an apology out of him – in fact it's one of the few methods that actually work.)

With that thought in mind, the blonde doesn't really feel that worried. He withdraws his phone as he walks and flicks through to the group chat entitled, 'Blonde Squad (ˊ͈ ᗛ ˋ͈ ᗤ) 〜'.

Unlike at the weekend, when Butters and Kenny were messaging back and forth in a trail of never-ending emojis and puns, jokes and back-handed compliments, the chat is silent. Not a single new message has been sent through since late on Sunday night.

Tweek's feet slow on the sidewalk leading down to his house, his eyebrows drawing together. The very last messages seem incongruous when compared to their previous interactions in the chat, but he wants to shrug it off as some in-joke that he just doesn't understand. Unfortunately though, the mess of Kenny's text and the haste of Butters' short, serious reply don't really inspire that sort of feeling.

23:36 guess what's goindown tonight, bby boy/?
   itss that ti me again ∆( ≤_≥ )∆

23:36 Your timing is awful as usual.
   I'll be round asap.

It only occurs to Tweek after a long moment of standing on the sidewalk teetering beneath the weight of two full bags, half-swallowed by his boyfriend's too-baggy clothes and staring blankly at his cell, that maybe Kenny was drunk or something. He and Craig just spent the night in Kenny's
secret sex shack, hadn't they? If the guy's weird enough to have his very own hideaway, then is it really such a stretch to think that Kenny would drink or get high long enough to miss several days of school? And would it be so out of character for Butters to join in?

Shaking off his curiosity over what the hell the two of them could have been doing for the last three days, Tweek types out a one-handed message.

16:41
Where are you two? You guys haven't been in school the last few days. What's going on? Are you okay?

After he's sent the messages off, he pauses. Flushes red. Jesus Christ, he sounds way too fucking concerned, considering the fact that they aren't even really proper friends. He's probably overreacting. Loads of kids ditch school, and after the detention he shared with the pair on the first Wednesday of the semester, it's pretty evident that the two of them are hardly ideal students. Skipping classes is nothing when you consider Butters had been in trouble for arson and Kenny for indecent exposure. Really, the teachers were probably ecstatic that the two of them weren't anywhere to be seen.

Feeling like a total idiot, Tweek shoves his cell roughly into his pocket, rearranges his hold on his bags of damp clothing and empty tupperware containers, and continues down the path to his front yard. As usual, the family car is in the driveway (since neither of his parents commute to work) and the lights are already on in the living room window.

Not thinking on it twice, the eighteen-year-old juggles with his things and manages to unlock the front door, leaning heavily against the frame and almost tripping over the trailing bottoms of Craig's borrowed pants. One of the empty plastic tubs, perched precariously just inside the flap of his satchel, falls out with a noisy clatter as the door swings open, bouncing into the hallway. Tweek flinches at the sudden noise, but otherwise just sighs. His nerves are a lot calmer than they had been just after the weekend, and he doesn't feel like he's gonna fall apart at the slightest of things right now—even after a shitty day at school, and his guilt over the Tommy situation. He's feeling pretty level-headed, right now.

(Famous last words, really.)

"Tweek? Is that you, son?"

The blonde's eye twitches at the low sound of his dad's voice from the next room.

What the fuck is he doing at home? Why isn't he at the coffee shop—

Oh. Wait. The hospital.

After his trip to ER, he'd been told to rest up at home for at least a few days, hadn't he? If he's home this early, the only logical conclusion is that he mustn't have gone to work at all today, and so he's been propped up in front of the television the entire time, probably driving his wife mad with his constant bitching.

Stomach dropping, Tweek figures out what that inevitably means: his dad will have been right by the phone, ready to snatch it up at the first ring. He must have been the one to answer the call.

Great. Just fucking great.

Retrieving the runaway tub and kicking the front door closed behind him, the eighteen-year-old sinks down onto the floor, dumping his bags into a rough pile and tugging off his damp shoes. "Yeah, it's
"Come through here then, please." His dad sounds serious – it's the kind of level tone he uses when he's Very Disappointed, and gearing up for a rant. It's a tone that Tweek is intimately acquainted to from his childhood, when his dad could lay into any subject with a patronisingly soft-spoken manner that made most people want to punch him in the face. He only really pulls it out around Tweek on special occasions, these days. Like when his disappointment of an only child fucks up in school.

With an involuntary wince, Tweek climbs back onto his cold feet and edges his way into the room, trying to fight down his urge to bristle before the conversation has even started.

His dad is sat on the couch, the wrinkles around his mouth and eyes more pronounced than usual thanks to his tight-lipped expression. The severity of the look is kind of ruined by the fact that one weirdly fat leg has been thrown up onto the seat beside him and covered with Mrs Tweak's favourite floral throw blanket.

Speaking of his mom, she's off in the kitchen, pottering about an unholy amount – definitely making more noise than usual. Tweek's gonna make an educated guess that they've had an argument over the whole issue, or at least that his mom is displeased with his dad, since normally she hovers wordlessly in the doorway and frets when he and his dad face off.

So, she's pissed off. Hopefully not with Tweek. Since he's already come to the conclusion that she knew he and Craig were skipping, he can assume that he's safe. Good, he thinks, sparing the doorway a quick glance. No guilt trips for him today then.

(That doesn't stop the lurching of his heart at the prospect of the upcoming conversation, though. Tweek may occasionally be a dick, but that doesn't translate into him actually enjoying confrontation. On the contrary, going into something with the foreknowledge that it's probably gonna turn out badly just plain fucks with his head.)

"I got a phone call at about midday today from your school counsellor," his dad says, cutting through Tweek's fretful thoughts the moment the boy's shuffled himself into the center of the room. "I don't suppose that you know what it was entailing?"

The sheer level of condescension in that question makes him want to roll his eyes, eating into his very limited reserves of patience. He gives a shrug and says bluntly, "I skipped classes with Craig. No biggie."

That, clearly, is a fucking idiotic thing to say. (He must have inherited his poor conversational skills from his dad.)

Mr Tweak's expression grows even tighter. "Why? What could possibly make you want to skip out on your education?"

At that, he openly scoffs. His dad manages to say things in just such a way that he has Tweek marching right past reason and into territory of 'argumentative' with close to no effort. Richard Tweak is the only person able to rile him up quicker than Clyde.

Jutting out his jaw, he speaks without thinking his words through. "Nrr. You realize that we're teenage boys, right? What do you think we were doing?"

Dumb fuck that he is, his dad pauses. Blinks a long, slow sort of blink. "Clearly I don't know, son. That's why I am asking you."

Tweek can feel his cheeks burning and shifts back and forth on his feet, stuck somewhere between
amazement at his dad's ignorance as to what he's implying, and outright horror that he's even considering using an excuse like this just to avoid further questions. "Oh God. Do I really have to spell it out for you?" He maybe whines a little, because his short temper has just dumped him into a situation so cringeworthy, he wants to crawl out of his own skin.

"Yes," his dad says, painfully blunt. "You do. Right now, young man, before I lose my temper."

"Sweet baby Jesus," he says, rubbing his face with one hand. Takes one more look at his father's raised brows and his stupid, expectant staring, and he's blurring it all out. "Augh. Craig and I were— were messing around. Y'know, like teenage boys do. Holy shit, you're still not getting any of this are you? We were fucking, dad." He makes a garbled noise of distress, and his famous inability to stop babbling kicks in. "It tends to involves mouths and—and penises and—there's penetration and generally a lot of bodily fluids—"

"Okay, okay," Richard cuts in loudly, face the color of a fried tomato and hands held up in front of him like that might fend off the scarring visuals. Tweek feels just as horrified as his dad looks. If he hadn't been interrupted, he's pretty sure that he would have ended up explaining in awful detail what gay sex entails. (Not that he has all that much experience, but even so.) His dad, seeming quite intent on ending that thread of the discussion there for good, twists his mouth into a grimace. "I— get the picture, thank you."

(Oh God, he'd mentioned penises. Fucking ew. Had he really just admitted he and Craig were skipping class to bone each other to his freakish gossip of a father, just so he wouldn't have to listen to a half-hour lecture on the importance of a good high school education? What is wrong with him? Now everyone in South Park'll know about his and Craig's sex life.)

Whimpering and hiding his burning face in his hands, Tweek tries desperately not to pay any mind to the fact that the clattering around in the kitchen has stopped. There's a muffled choking noise, not unlike his mom is smothering her laughter. That just makes everything worse.

"Nrrgh. I did try and warn you, but you wouldn't fucking listen, as per usual."

Taking a deep sigh and rubbing his temples, his dad very pointedly does not look him in the eyes. (Which is fine with Tweek, since he kinda just wants the floor to rise up and swallow him whole right now.)

After an agonising silence in which Tweek begins to slowly back up towards the hallway door and his dad presumably struggles with the dilemma of having a kid with an active sex life in a relationship that he's fully supported for the last eight years, and the need to somehow reprimand him for it infringing upon his education, it's finally broken by Mrs Tweak entering the room with two large, steaming mugs.

"Really, you boys," she says in a tone that says she's unimpressed, though the way her lips keep twitching up at the corners suggests she's finding it hard not to crack up. "You're both being ridiculous."

Tweek glares at her as she sets one mug down on the coffee table by his dad's elbow, but accepts the hot drink that she pushes into his beat-up hands. Both he and his dad mumble their thanks, however begrudgingly.

"I made it with your special grinder, dear," she says as she leans down and lands a brief peck to the top of his father's head. "Since you never did bother to put it back in the attic." Withdrawing, she gives her husband a long, narrow-eyed look. "No sugar or milk for you, dear. The last thing that you need on top of a bad leg is a dodgy stomach or high blood sugar levels."
That said, she wanders back into the kitchen, satisfied with her display of passive-aggressiveness. Tweek turns a grimace down on his undoubtedly gross drink (okay, so it looks like he is being punished by her, at least in part), holding it a little further away from him than necessary. At least his has milk in it, if nothing else. Still, he's unlikely to take so much as a sip of it, since he's positive it'll taste of rusting metal.

Quite to the contrary, Richard Tweak perks up a little at the mention of his Contraption from Hell, and reaches right for his cup.

There's another long pause as his mom starts humming her nameless tune from the kitchen and his dad takes a loud slurp from his drink. (Stops. Pulls back and makes a face like someone's just tried to poison him. It'd be amusing, if only Tweek wasn't contemplating all the various ways to brain himself right about then.)

For his part, he just stands awkwardly in the doorway burning his fingers on the side of the mug, until he finally gets sick of waiting for something to happen and blurts out, "Eurgh. Jesus wept, can I just go upstairs already? I've got shit to do, a-and quite frankly I'd rather be anywhere but down here."

Apparently just as eager to get the conversation over with as he is, his dad waves him off and says distractedly as he reaches for the TV remote, "Go on, then. But don't for a second think that this is over, young man. We'll speak about this more later, once I've decided a fitting punishment for you. Is that clear?"

"Whatever." Tweek grunts and gets out of there, face still sizzling. He somehow manages to retrieve all of his belongings from the bottom of the stairs and struggles up in one go, clutching at the bannister rail with one hand and spilling half his potentially spiked coffee down Craig's jumper with the other. He swears and stumbles, wrinkling his nose as he shoves inside his room. Setting the drink down on his nightstand with a clunk and a slosh, he dumps the rest of his junk on the nearest pile of clothing, schoolbooks and receipts.

Slamming the door behind him brings only so much satisfaction.

After that, he's left standing in the shithole of his bedroom, his phone unresponsive in his pocket, his socks uncomfortably damp, and humiliation burning through his stomach.

To distract himself, he fights his way out of Craig's borrowed jumper and digs through a mound of clothes by his dresser, until he withdraws an oversized grey tee with the words, 'I will start working when my coffee does' in bold letters across the front, accompanied by a silhouetted mug. Next he finds a potentially clean pair of fleecy green sweatpants to change into and a couple of odd, thick socks to tug onto his frozen feet.

Dressed in something dry and comfortable for the first time since two days ago, he grabs his laptop, flops down into his desk chair and tugs open the screen.

The files that he was reading prior to leaving the night before last are still up when he logs in. October 5th is spread across the screen in all its glory: colorful stars, glitter glue milky ways, fading pencil sketches of rocket ships and spacemen and all. The description of the shack stands out vividly to him now, and the passage about his birthday is such a bright spot that he rereads it a few times to help him calm back down again. It's fine, he thinks. The parts in his journals that he doesn't remember properly, he can always replace with new memories of him and Craig. New memories of Hello Kitty cushions, lurid orange bed sheets and blowjobs in the shower. A smile spreads across his pink face by slow increments, until his cheeks ache and there's embarrassed, happy laughter lodged somewhere in the back of his throat.
Once he's gotten over his reminiscing, he scrolls down and realizes that he's reached the end of that years journal. After saving it down onto his Mac, he exits the document and clicks into the folder containing the extra photos, pictures, poems and songs from his eleven-year-old self's life. There's a larger array in that year's selection than the previous, and going through the various odd bits makes his chest ache.

There's a group photo of him, Clyde, Craig and Jimmy outside of one of Jimmy's charity comedy shows, faces shiny and eyes bright; a shot of him riding with Craig on a fancy-assed merry-go-round; one with the two of them curled together in a blanket forte they must have built, limbs akimbo.

Doodles of Super Craig and Wonder Tweek on loungers on a beech, with sunglasses and palm trees, and a vibrant, blobby acrylic painting of two faces crushed close together, huge and smiley - he assumes from the blue and green blob eyes that it's meant to be of him and his boyfriend.

A song about Craig being part giraffe, and a poem about their small friendship group fighting off dinosaur chickens, of all things.

One picture stands out to him above all others, though, simply because it... doesn't fit.

It's a photo clearly taken in the elementary school library, camera held up wonkily and tilted just so that it captures Craig and Wendy Testaburger bent over their notes, faces partially hidden, Tweek with his eyes wide and mouth stuck somewhere between a smile and a grimace, and Butters. Butters with a big, white-toothed grin, holding up a sheet they must have worked on together as part of a group project. Aside from the oddity of the three of them being sat together, something about the picture is... off. His eyes rove over it, tracing smile lines and messy hair, a jumble of pens and two sets of eyes peering up into the camera. One pair a tired, familiar green, and the other—

Mismatching. At first glance, he thinks it must me the lighting, but the more he looks...

Butters' left eye is a pale, milky blue like it's been damaged. There's a sort of jagged line running through his eyebrow, over his eyelid, and down onto his cheekbone - puckered and shiny white. An old scar.

Tweek's brain does a weird, glitchy skip as he fails to connect this detail with the boy he knows. A— a scar? Does Butters—? He doesn't remember ever noticing it, or hearing about an accident that could have caused something like that. And besides all that, surely he'd remember—

Problem is, the longer he studies his classmate's face, the sharper the ache behind his eyes and the harder it gets to breathe. He clicks off of the photo as quickly as possible, bending over the desk and clutching his forehead in his hands. Focuses on his breathing patterns, and tries to ignore the stabbing pain.

Thoughts of scars – of puckered, pink welts and clean, bulging lines drag their way up to the surface of his head. His legs throb to the rapid beating of his heart.

(Apparently all it takes is looking at a close-up of Butters Stotch's eleven-year-old face, and he starts hyperventilating. Where the logic is in that, he doesn't know.)

After long moments of silent pain and trying to shove aside his confusion over the photo, he pulls himself up to his feet and staggers across the room to his tepid coffee – decides he doesn't give a fuck whether or not it tastes like shit, since he needs some caffeine in his system pronto.

A cautious sip... and the sweet, smooth notes of his mom's favorite Italian roast bloom across his tongue, creamy and rich. Not the faintest hint of scrap metal – just a full, balanced flavor that makes
his mouth water. God, his mom is a fucking queen.

He lowers himself onto the edge of his bed with shaky legs and gulps it down greedily between sharp, ragged breaths. Doesn't stop until he's finished a third of the divine (if slightly cold) drink. The realization that his mom isn't angry with him after all makes some of the tension ease out of him, even as his temples continue to throb and his hands shake. The sensations are akin to the preliminary signs that he's about to have an anxiety attack, except for the fact that he's not sinking into a spiral, and he's otherwise clearheaded, albeit a little confused.

He doesn't feel stressed the way he does pre-meltdown, which makes the whole situation that much weirder.

Over the course of about ten minutes, he sips at his drink and breathes past the discomfort. The headache doesn't dull, but he does find it easier to focus as time goes on.

Eventually he finishes the last of his huge drink and stands, brushing off the weird thoughts surrounding the picture with unusual ease. (He'll think on it another time, he tells himself. When his head hurts less and he doesn't have other, more important things to figure out.)

Walking back to his desk, he sinks down into the swivel chair and backspaces into the main folder. Moves onto the document titled 'Tweek's Journal no.3 (12y/o)', and begins reading through the rest of October.

It's easy to get sucked back into it.

Largely, it's the happiest month that Tweek thinks that he's read so far. His younger self mentions going on a double date with Token and Nichole to Whistlin' Willies the first weekend of the month. They both hang out with Clyde, Timmy and Jimmy in the newly remodelled mall one day after school, between scooter races on the streets and games of soccer at recess. On the seventeenth, he stays up half the night to play Super Mario and Smash Bros with Craig, and the next day Mrs Tucker takes them out for lunch. In his free time, Tweek seems to do a lot of writing and singing, often with or about Craig which is, y'know… kinda cute in a creepy sort of way.

The most notable entry, though, is one towards the end of the month.

27 October
Craig's at his gran's again so I was alon eagain to day. But dad made me goout and get some fresh air and I ended up running into Kenny and Butters in the park in the swings. So I hanged out with them all day and even though I was abit worried becuase Kenny and Craig get into fights alot it was okay. It was nice. Butters was making Kenny and his baby sister (Karen I think) freindship bracelets and he asked me if I wanted one too. I told him that we aren't really freinds and he said "well we can be". Kenny made a couple jokes that were'nt gross and some of them were actully funny too which was nice. We even got some take away from City Wok becuase that's were Kenny works. They said we could hang out when ever Craig goes away if I want. I think I would like that. My bracelet is green and blue. I bet Craig will want one too.

Here, Tweek stops a while.

It's not like he hadn't believed Craig when he'd mentioned how Tweek had hung around the other two boys when they were younger, but... it's just odd. Unsettling that they'd been close enough to spend entire days at a time together. Seeing the evidence of them hanging out is bizarre, but weirder still is the way he'd been so easily drawn to them, when he knows from personal experience that it takes him a long time to acclimatize to new people.
But then he'd found it so natural to fall in with them recently, hadn't he? Kenny might unnerve him at times, but he's okay in a gross, corny sort of way. Butters on the other hand is so warm that it's hard not to be drawn in.

As he reads through November, he notices that his two blonde friends make more small appearances in his day-to-day life. A part of him stings, thinking about what he'd lost when his brain had butchered itself all those years ago. Worse than that, though, is the fact that Butters and Kenny didn't stick through it with him. They hadn't reached out to him for years, and had acted like nothing more than classmates until only recently. That hurts. Especially since they must both remember Tweek, and the way they had all once gotten on.

(But then he recalls what Craig had said, about Kenny always hovering around and trying to talk to him, and that sharp itch is back again, pressing in behind his eyes. Maybe... maybe they had tried.)

Thinking too hard on it just aggravates his already sore head, so instead he side-lines those thoughts too and keeps on reading.

The only entry that he pauses at for any length of time throughout the rest of November is one that makes him grimace in sympathy of his younger self's plight.

26 November

oh god OH JESUS WHAT AM I SPOSED TO DO dad caught Criag sleepin in by bed with me and so we got introuble. he RUINED THANKSGIVIN BECUAS EHE GAVE IS THE SEX TALK. it was even worse than that time with PC Principa lbecause he talked about REALLY DETAILED SEX STUFF EVEN KENNY DOSENT TALK ABOUT!he said that i could BLEED TO DEATH FROM MY BUTT OR FGET PILESOR HERNIAS OR DISEESES IF WRE NOT CAREFULL! CRAIG TOLD HIM 'YESIR WE WILL BE SMART WE WONT DO STUFF LIKETHAT WE JUST SLEPT WE RPIMISE' BUT DAD JUST KETP GOIN GIT WAS THE WORST! and then Craig throw up in moms FAVORITE PLANT ANDHIS MOM HHAD TO COMETAEK HIM HOME I HATE DAD I HATE HIM THEY AER THE WORST PAERTNS EVER!

Jesus Christ. Turns out that there are some memories that he's not sad to have lost after all. (Well... mostly, at least. The idea of Craig throwing up turkey, cranberry sauce and stuffing all over the back yard is kinda hilarious. These days rather than being concerned, he'd probably roll his eyes and laugh at the guy for being too greedy or squeamish. But that's just because he's turned into more of a dick as he's grown up.)

Somewhere towards the end of December, the tone of his journal entries shifts again. He mentions about how he spends almost the entire week Craig's away in Denver with McCormick and Stotch, and it's... not what he would've expected.

('Butters told me when Ken was out the room getting more chocolates that he like-likes Ken. I thought so before but I didnt know he knew it.I said I think may be Ken likes him back to but Butters just said no and he was okay with it.')

('I got really sad cos Craig did'nt text all day but Ken let me borrow his favrite teddy Major Boobage to squeeze and Butters gave me a hug and we watched Finding Dory together under a big blanket in my room."

('I put up the painting we did up on my wall over my bed. It is'nt vary good becuase Ken wanted to draw himself as a princessat first and he gave himself really big boobies and he cant draw very well. Then Butters painted him self as Profesor Chaos and Ken gave himself a Mysterion cloak and mask over the girl cloths becuase he said theyre a team. I was in the middle and I drew me with Stripe in this cape i wanna make him. The hole picture has rainbows on it and stars so I can think of Craig
wehn i'm on my own and pretend to star gaze. Butters said we should put our hand prints on it too so when we get bigger we can see how much we've grown."

A week. An entire week without Craig – with almost no mention of the other boy, and Tweek hadn't been terrified or upset. He'd spent it happy, coherent, out in the world. He'd let Kenny – 'Ken', he thinks – and Butters into his house, and he'd shared his art with them. He'd let them touch him, had let them comfort him, and he'd seemed grateful for it.

Tweek thinks that their friendship clearly went beyond just schoolyard playmates – they're his people. His people. In a way that Clyde, Token and Jimmy were Craig's, and they never quite managed to be for Tweek.

The final entry before Craig returns home is shorter than the others. His heart beats against his ribcage and his breath hitches as he reads it.

29 December
Ken called us a team today and said we could all be best friends if I wanted. We have a group chat now too just for us to use in secret wehn I'm sad or scared. I was so happy it made me cry. ❤

Best friends—

They were best friends, once. Even just for a short while.

(The thought aches so much that the thing living in his chest stirs and the pain behind his eyes drags right down over his skull to the nape of his neck.)

For a few minutes, Tweek has to stop. He leans back in his chair and presses his shaking hands into his eyes until the ache of tears subsides. He'd always been so alone in his head (or at least, he'd thought that he had been) that the existence of this lost friendship group feels simultaneously like the best and worst discovery he could have ever made.

Growing up, though he'd had Token to lean on, Clyde to vent to and Jimmy to make him smile, Craig was the only person that he had trusted enough to open his heart up to, and even then...

Even Craig had felt so off-limits, once he'd recognized his romantic feelings for the other boy. It seems a cruel fucking joke that all along, there had been two more boys he'd cared for, who had given him a place to go when Craig wasn't there.

Pulling his hands away and breathing out a long, slow breath, Tweek straightens up in his seat and peers back at the screen. Perhaps he's being over the top – fuck knows it isn't the first time.

Realistically speaking, a week of companionship doesn't mean anything, to most children. Maybe they'd drifted apart once Craig had returned. It'd explain the distance between them now...

With a new determination steeling over him, and an anxious crooning in the back of his head that pleads for him to be wrong – for his childhood friendships to be something more than just something fleeting – he pulls his feet up onto the seat and reads slowly through the following entries.

(It isn't hard to get lost in them.)

8 January
I thinkCraig's mad at me. When hewent over to chat with Clyde in his room this morning I chated with Butters and Ken and we just talked abut what we did over new year and when I saied about me and Craig staying up late and falling a sleep on the couch Ken made a rude joke. I guess craig
doesn't like me laughing at stuff like that because he heard it and he got angry. It's like that time with the fan fic story Ken wrote all over again. Why can't they get on?

Tweek reads and he hurt like he thinks he must have as a child, the first time around. He can only imagine how upsetting having two of the only people that he'd considered precious to him not seeing eye-to-eye must have been. Especially since he was never a particularly popular kid. Any friends he'd had that kind of connection with, he would have wanted to hold on to through thick and thin.

**20 January**

All us boys went to see the re-release of Asses of Fire in the movie theatre to day and it was AMAZIGN even thought Butters said he thinks the movie is 'dated' or some thing. Cartman heard it and he got really mad and started shoutign and ended up getting in a fight with Ken after he hit Butters. I was worried after because the Fatass fell RIGHT ON TOP of Ken and that ALOT of weight so i skipped goig to Raisins after and helped take Ken home with Butters. he has bruises all over his ribs and he was bleeding real bad what if its internal? he said he was okay but i dont know I'm worried.

His face twists into a smile when he thinks on how Kenny's been protecting Butters for years, whether the sassy blonde needs it or not. He pictures scrawny little Kenny's bust up nose leaking all over his parker, and Butters' podgy face flushed red as he shouts at the Fatass, right there in the dim movie theatre. Imagines himself right alongside them both, ready to stand up and fight for his friends.

(He can't help wondering what Craig had made of it? Had he been hurt? Had he been angry? The thought lingers even as he moves onto newer passages.)

And then he reaches an entry that stands out from the rest. Handwritten in thick, messy black lines, the page is full of ink splotches and angry scribbles. Some of the words are written with such haste that they smudge together, almost indecipherable from the emotion that he'd poured out into them.

Tweek reads it over, and he draws back. Feels his brain stuttering over the problem like it had earlier with the photograph, even as a new question begins to force its way through to the forefront of his mind.

**14 February**

Can you beleive Ken got Butters a hair clip for Valentines day with money he saved up from City Wok? Butters made him these small little chocolate hearts and Ken gave me one to try even though they were all specially for him. It should of made me happy but i got sad thinking that they act more like they are dating even through they are'nt and me and Craig are meant to be GOIGN STEADY and all i got was a ugly store card with hardly a word in it. Its stupid but i didnt want to speak to Craig after school so i made up that i felt sick. I know its mean but for some reason i was so angry and sad I couldn't even look at him in the eye. I still want tio cry. :'(((

When, exactly, had he actually started loving Craig Tucker? And why the hell had it taken him so goddamn long to work it out?

Chapter End Notes

you guys experiencing any crazy weather? is it just me? i genuinely have no idea how i'm gonna get to work in one piece tomorrow if the snow gets much deeper :Y

**ALSO!!**
i bet you guys are sick of announcements from me by now, but i’ve started a new South Park mini-series on the side called pros and cons which you could have the chance to be involved with!! if you're interested, please consider giving it a quick look for the details, and please feel free to send me an ask or a pm on my tumblr :D

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!