You and David have been close friends for the past few months and in this short time, you developed a huge crush on him. But, with summer approaching, you were sad to know your friend would be going away to camp. That is until you find out the camp needs a new counselor! Nervous and excited to find yourself able to spend the summer with David, you had no idea what you were getting yourself into. But, it couldn't be that crazy.

Right?

Updates Sundays and Thursdays

Check out the Somewhere blog! https://somewherefanfic.tumblr.com/

Written before most of season 3

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
I Won't Say I'm in Love

Just a few more paragraphs and I'm done, you thought as you were putting the finishing touches on your research essay. What kind of professor gives a twelve page paper a week before finals anyway? Sitting in the library, you lean back and take in your surroundings- students trying to make a mad dash in their studies to ensure they pass their classes, frazzled looking freshmen, seniors who looked like black coffee incarnate, a few tutoring sessions here and there, the usual dead week scene. Taking a deep breath, you smell the pages of the old books that rest on the shelves in front of you as you tried to focus on your work. The comfortable lighting allowed for the passage of time to seem unmoving as you continue typing away, fueled by a mixture caffeine and contempt for your professor.

As you were putting on the final touches, you felt two familiar hands come up and cover your eyes. “Guess who?” A cheerful voice asks.

“Hey David,” you say gesturing at the empty seat next to you. He releases your eyes and takes a seat, his infectious grin ever present on his face. As he sits, you can’t help but look him over: Auburn hair in a small fohawk helps frame his face, leading to his ocean green eyes. A small nose which appeared to be perpetually pink from the sun, not that he seemed to mind. Long, slender limbs whose elbows and knees almost matched the color of his nose. At a little over six feet, he stood over you. He liked to dress very comfortably, opting for a tan jacket which he had slung over his back, button up shirt and jeans. One thing that was a constant in any outfit he wore, though, was a yellow t-shirt he kept around his neck like a handkerchief. He had mentioned in the past that it was from the summer camp he used to go to as a kid and where he now works as a counselor.

“Research paper?” He asked, giving you a sympathetic smile.

“Yep.”

“Paul’s Class?”

“Yes.” You take another swig of tea from your water bottle before returning to your work. David patiently waits for a few minutes until you come back to the conversation. “Thankfully,” you say, writing the last few words, “It is done.” Feeling happy with yourself you save your work before closing your laptop, only to see David giving you a very smug side-eye smirk. Suspicious, you squint your eyes and peer at him.

“Alright David, what are you up to?”

“I know it’s not your birthday, and it isn’t mine either,” you state matter-of-factly, “and the stress-relief therapy dogs are tomorrow.” He can’t contain himself any longer. Excited as hell, he grabs the sides of your face with eyes sparkling and says ”It’s taco Tuesday,” handing you the flyer promising a campus sponsored all-you-can-eat taco buffet. You had been looking forward to it since it was announced a few weeks ago.

Your eyes go wide with the revelation he has brought you. In disbelief that you could have forgotten what should be a national holiday, you shove your laptop and water bottle in your bag, grab his arm, and make it to the cafeteria in record time. David, seemingly winded, asked “What
was that all about?” He let out a small laugh as he caught his breath. You turned to face him.

“David. You and I both know there is no way in hell I’d miss taco Tuesday.”

“Hey... Language.” He said with a small frown.

“Fuck that.”

“You know, if you were one of my campers, you would be in serious trouble right now.” he said with what you can only describe as his ‘counselor voice.’ He tends to use it when he thinks he needs to be stern, but you just think it sounds kind of cute. You just smile and roll your eyes before turning back around.

You and David had known each other for about eight months now. You were 21 and in your third year of college, while he was 24 and in his sixth. He was working on his masters degrees in both Botany and Wildlife (you secretly wondered how the man ever slept), while you were working towards your bachelors in natural resources. But, despite the numerous similar classes you have, your paths didn’t cross until you signed up for a dance class.

You had just started your third year of college and needed an art credit, so you decided to learn how to dance due to the fact that you had never had the opportunity in the past. You were kind of shy, as you didn’t know anyone there, so you just let the instructor choose your partner. You were nervous at first to meet David, but after quickly learning that there were four left feet between you, you became fast friends all while laughing with each other trying to get the steps right. Any nervousness you felt had melted away after that.

You exchanged numbers and immediately began talking. Since then you’ve celebrated each others birthdays, had heart to hearts, became study buddies, and planned on being roommates next year. You were going to move in and ‘hold down the fort’, as he put it, while he went away to his summer camp job. The only reason you hadn’t moved in sooner was because you didn’t want to go through the hassle of breaking the lease on your own apartment. You doubt it would be much different than now, though considering that each of you practically lived at the others house between studying, movie nights, board games, video games, and whatever else the two of you could come up with. You were never bored when David was around.

You were also head over heels for him.

David was one of the most passionate people you had ever met. If he was talking about something, he got really into it. You would often just listen to him talk about bugs, bears, bees, camp, plants- whatever crossed his mind for hours on end, and you were happy to do so. He was a bit naive and had an innocence to him which you found adorable. Whenever he realized he had made an innuendo of some sorts, he would blush as you giggled at him, making you fall for him more and more each time. He was a cinnamon roll and you had a serious sweet tooth.

Those weren’t the things you liked about him most, though. You loved his kindness. He was always willing to go completely out of the way for someone, just out of the goodness of his heart. Even if it was just a smile, he could brighten the day of anyone who walked by. He was also incredibly intelligent and empathetic. He claims that working at camp had taught him a lot about people and how the world worked, and that the kids he supervised taught him just as much as he taught them.

Grabbing your tacos, you and David headed toward your usual spot, traversing through the packed space. The round tables were brimming with students all talking amongst themselves. The large windows that made up three of the walls let in the sunlight, illuminating the room with delicate
sunbeams. Luckily, despite the overcrowdedness of the place, your spot was available. It was a small, two person table in the corner of the cafeteria where two bay windows met, giving those who sat there a full view of the forest bordering campus. The two of you would count the various animals you saw as you sat and ate. Then, you would lose yourself in David’s voice as he told you about the different species you had spotted. It was your favorite pastime.

Today, though, he had camp on the brain. With the first day only being a month away, he was beginning to get stars in his eyes.

“Oh I’m just so excited,” he said, closing his eyes and smiling, “I can’t wait to see all the campers, and Gwen, and the Quartermaster. It will be so wonderful.” You grinned as you watched him hug himself out of pure joy. He had told you all about Camp Campbell in the time you’d known him. You felt like you already knew the campers and could practically smell the smores in the way he described the place. You were so happy he was able to do something he loved, though you couldn’t help but be a bit sad knowing that your friend wasn’t going to be there this summer, and a bit envious as he would be spending it with a girl named Gwen. But, you didn’t show it and only reflected his excitement.

After gorging yourselves on tacos and not regretting it in the slightest, you went to David’s house. It wasn’t far, only about five minutes from campus, but was enough time to comfortably walk off the meal. Once you arrived, David checked his mail while you let yourself inside. It was a small, two bedroom house with an open living room and kitchen. The interior walls were a cream color with a brown carpet covering the floors. The living room had a long black couch facing an entertainment center. It housed a television, dvd player, a gamecube, and a wii. The kitchen had a small table off to the side of the counter while a small, middle section divided kitchen into two parts with the sink on the right and a stove on the left, allowing for quick movement for filling pots with water, or transferring chopped vegetables into a pan. Down the hall were two rooms, David’s room and the guest room where you would occasionally stay the night. You had familiarized yourself with the place a while back, so you threw your backpack on the couch and plopped yourself down next to it. David came in shortly after with his mail, bouncing up and down with excitement.

“Alright Davey, spill. What has you so excited?”

“I got mail from Gwen! It must be her official Camp Campbell Camp Counselor Campplicatio- er, application.” He gave a nervous laugh before opening the letter. You watched him as he scanned the letter- his face going from excited, to confused, to sad. He seemed on the verge of tears.

“David? What’s wrong?” You were concerned for your friend, it wasn’t like him to change so drastically.

He set the letter down and rubbed his arm. “Gwen… can’t make it this summer. She got a new job, which is great for her! But, without a female counselor, Camp Campbell isn’t legally allowed to operate. And, with everything that happened last year, I doubt that we would be given any leniency.” You remember the story David had told you of the founder, Mr. Campbell, being taken to Super Guantanamo last summer, and how most of the responsibility had fallen on his shoulders. Hell, the only reason the camp wasn’t shut down completely was because the agent’s daughter enjoyed her time there.

Looking up at him, you can’t remember ever seeing him so defeated. He was holding onto his arms which he had crossed in front of him, hair fallen in front of his face blinking back tears. “I, uh, better go notify the parents.” As he began to walk towards his phone, you jumped up. “David wait.” He looked at you, an unreadable expression on his face. “What if I took Gwen’s place at
camp?” You had no idea how to run a summer camp, but it broke your heart to see David like this. You couldn’t just sit idly by and let him be devastated.

“Would you really be willing to do it? I mean, I know we planned to have you move in here and everything, and I don’t want to get in the way of your summer. But…” He looked hopeful.

“Are you kidding? Getting paid to go camping with my best friend all summer? Sounds like a great deal to me-” You get cut off by David picking you up and spinning you around the room in his arms.

“Oh thank you thank you thank you!” He squealed as he swung you around the living room. You pulled him into a hug as he set you down. You blushed a bit as he pulled away, though you don’t think he noticed because immediately after, he went into a myriad of details pertaining to being a counselor and how much you were going to love it. He handed you a copy of the application and screamed “You’re hired!” as soon as you completed it.

Looks like the two of you were headed to Camp Campbell.
The end of the semester came as quickly as ever, so David and you quickly made your preparations to get to camp. You managed to get moved into his place with relative ease, as much of what you needed furniture wise was already in your room. You had all of your possessions there but had no time to decorate, because as soon as you were in it was time to pack for camp. David helped by giving you tips and guidelines on what to and not to pack. You ended up with a lot of cargo shorts, (which was fine by you considering any pants that had pockets were a miracle) and t-shirts. You also packed hiking boots, sneakers, sandals, and flip flops as David described the camp having everything from archery to scuba diving to weight lifting. It was a pretty impressive list of activities, though you’re not quite sure how qualified you were to handle all of them. You had a scuba license but had no idea how to walk a tightrope. But, if the kids were willing to learn, then so were you.

When the day finally arrived to leave for camp, David insisted on listening to the Farmer’s Almanac all the way there. He argued that it was educational, but you wondered how good outdated information about the weather could be. The two of you eventually compromised with him letting you choose the year. You settled on 1999 as you assumed there could be something entertaining about Y2K in there. Plus, you had to admit, you were kind of interested in the horoscopes.

The six hour drive was filled with the sound of you and David talking about camp with the occasional pause for particularly “interesting” parts in the almanac. David told you everything you needed to know about the camp and each of the campers. But you were confused.

“David,” you pondered, “won’t there be new campers this year? I mean, the old campers sound great, but shouldn’t we really prepare for a new batch along with those who were here last?”

“Well, normally yes but because of last summer’s… antics, we had to pull all advertising from the shelves until we could make new ones. We only just released them about a week ago, so the only people that signed their kids up before the deadline were the ones who were here last year. But that isn’t going to stop us from having a great time! In fact, it will be even better because everyone already knows each other so well!” David’s endless optimism put you at ease. If he was confident about the ordeal, then you suppose you shouldn’t worry too much.

Once you arrived at the camp, you took in your surroundings. There were large patches of land where you assumed tents would go, a mess hall, a small pier that jutted out onto the lake, the counselors cabin, an amphitheatre, and a number of small, run down outposts with hand-painted signs that said “theater camp”, “hiking”, “science camp” and others. You weren’t quite sure what to make of the place. The way David had described it, you thought it was going to be state of the art everything, not some random assortment of not even half put together tables.

Despite this, you couldn’t deny the beauty of the place. The clear blue sky above you gave its center stage to the warm sun. Its blinding light shining off the water of Lake Lilac made it sparkle
in a magical way. The slight breeze carried the scent of the pines from the forest right to your nose, greeting you to their ancient home. You could hear bird song coming from the surrounding trees and watched as buzzards circled overhead, bathing themselves in the heat of the sun. And of course, the sea of green trees that surrounded the camp was undeniably the most amazing part of it all.

“Beautiful isn’t it?” David hopped out of the car and stood next to you. He had a look of pure adoration on his face as he gazed at the camp. You couldn’t help but smile. “Yeah, it really is.”

The two of you sat in silence for a bit, just admiring the place before David finally spoke again.

“Time to set up.”

Tearing his eyes away from camp, he headed to the back of his car and began to unload. Handing you your bags, he lead you to the counselors cabin. “This is where we’ll be staying, feel free to decorate your room however you like. I know I will!” He had his signature cheesy grin on his face before he entered the building. Inside, there was a common area with a few couches and an old green and yellow striped chair. An old television sat opposite a window that looked out into the forest. A table and chairs sat in the corner of the room, under a second window that gave a better view of the campground. Passing that, you saw a small bathroom down at the end of the hall. Across from it were two wooden doors.

David paused in front of the first one. “This is your room,” he said as he gestured to the door. “I think you’re going to like it.” He put the key in the lock and opened it for you. Stepping into the room, you got your first look at where you would be staying for the next few months. A small twin bed sat in the middle of the room with a few pillows and a green Camp Campbell comforter. A desk sat to your right with a cork board above it. A window was above the bed with two green musty looking curtains hanging in front of it. Above the window was a small, dusty shelf. An empty wardrobe was to your left, waiting to be filled with clothes after months of being empty.

“I know it’s not much,” David began, “but I promise you it will warm right up as soon as you decorate and get moved in.”

“It’s perfect,” you say as you walk into your new home. David gives you a warm smile. “I’ll give you some time to get settled, we have a lot to do today so I’ll come get you in about an hour, ok? If you need anything, let me know!” With that, he left you to your new room.

As you began to unpack, you couldn’t help but let your mind wander back to David. You were both excited and incredibly nervous to be spending the summer with him. You had a massive crush on him and were worried that you may do something stupid to let it slip. You didn’t want to make him feel awkward or ruin your friendship with him, but something told you that even if he did find out, he wouldn’t do either of those things. Still, you would rather just keep your feelings to yourself about this.

Continuing in your endeavor to put everything where you wanted it, you came across the journal you purchased before summer began. You had decided to write about what you would do this summer, as it would be fun to look back on everything after it was over. It was also a place where you could reveal your feelings about David without worry of judgement or consequence. You placed it on your nightstand and made a mental note to begin your habit tonight.

The last thing you placed down was your ukulele. You had grabbed it after you learned David was bringing his guitar to camp. Figuring you could teach each other how to play, or at the very least play simple duets, you made a last-minute decision to grab it. You loved it when David played- he was a wonderful musician with a voice to match his beautiful soul. You and he would sing together
on the way to school sometimes. Or on car rides. Sometimes just in the middle of your apartment. But no matter where it was, you couldn’t help but be entranced by him. He was your muse as well as the person you adored the most.

Looking around the room, you were satisfied. You had filled the shelf with a number of your favorite books that you had brought from home, stuffed the wardrobe with your clothes, and set out a few sheets of paper and pencils on the desk. You had refrained from bringing any posters or wall decorations out of fear that they would get ruined, but the wood walls made up for the lack of coverings with the unique design that spiraled over each plank.

No sooner had you finished did David walk in. “Oh my gosh!” he said, “everything looks wonderful!” He had changed into his camp uniform: A green t-shirt with a tree on the front, brown vest, cargo shorts, white tube socks, and hiking boots. The yellow t-shirt was ever present around his neck.

You let out a small giggle, “Thanks David. So, what do we need to do today?”

He listed off a number of chores that needed to be done before the campers got there. Setting up the tents, stocking the kitchen, setting out the tables in the mess hall, making sure that anything that could be blown up was safely locked away (you kind of stared at David in disbelief at this one, but he assured you that the campers knew the difference between a baseball and a grenade after last year), set up the boats, stock the camp with food, as well as other various housekeeping things like who was staying together in what tent. Luckily, you had about three days before they showed up, so you could take your time.

Grabbing the cloth and rope from storage, you and David headed toward the empty area of camp in order to set up the tents. He assured you that it wouldn’t take too long, but you had never set up a tent from scratch before. Luckily, David had mastered the project, so you just handed him things when he needed them. The tents were set up in record time, so you moved onto the next task and by the end of the day, you had completed most of the manual work around camp. David was ecstatic. “I’ve never gotten everything done so quickly! I think we make a great team, don’t you?”

You blushed and rubbed the back your neck, “Y-yeah, I suppose we do.”

“I think that we’ve earned the rest of the day off. Is there anything you want to do?” Immediately, you look toward the lake, its clear blue water turning gold in the setting of the early summer sun.

“Wanna swim?”

“Well that’s a wonderful idea! I thought you would never ask!” He grabbed your arm and began hauling you back toward the cabin so that you could change. You couldn’t help but remember a similar situation just a few weeks ago. You laughed the whole way back.

Once back, you changed into your swimsuit. It was a simple black one-piece suit with your favorite color lining the sides. You slipped a pair of short black trunks over the bottom, grabbed your towel and headed out of your room. You found David waiting in the common room in a pair of bright red board shorts and flip flops. You couldn’t take your eyes off his shirtless form. Though they weren’t super prominent, you could see his pecs stick out just a bit. A tight stomach had no washboard abs, but was the look of someone who had a lot of exercise. He had a few small scars here and there, you assumed from years of working in the outdoors. Even though his frame was slender, you could see the muscles in his arms and legs shattering the illusion of a frail man.

_Damnit he’s hot_.

Your thoughts were soon interrupted when he noticed you walking down the hall. “Ready to go?”
he asked as you walked to the front door. He held it open for you before you broke into a dead sprint.

“Last one there is a rotten egg!” you called out as you ran as hard as you could toward the docks.

“No fair! You got a head start!” David began to chase after you in the late afternoon glow. You had too much of a head start and made it to the dock long before him. Throwing your towel on the wooden planks, you dove right in. The cold water was a shock at first, but as you stayed under, you got more and more used to it. You delayed coming up for air as long as possible- being underwater was one of the most freeing experiences for you. The weightlessness, the quiet, the freedom to move how and where you wanted to. You weren’t confined in the water, and you loved it. Eventually, the need to breathe became too much, and you surfaced just in time to witness David yell “Cannonball!” and land in the water next to you. Once he came up, you began to sniff the air.

“Smell that?”

“No?” he responded confused.

“I smell a rotten egg.”

He smirked and splashed you. “Well excuse me for trying to be nice by holding the door open,” he said in a mock-offended tone, “I’ll just have to refrain in the future.” You snickered at his attitude and he laughed along with you.

The two of you swam for about an hour before the shadows overtook the lake. The water got too cold to stay in, so you decided to sit on the dock and watch the sunset. With your feet still in the water, you and David sat in silence and watched the majesty of the sunset unfold. The late afternoon sky had gone from a golden orange to a light blush as you watched the sun disappear behind the trees. You looked at David who had a peaceful expression on his face. Eyes half lidded, he looked at you and gave you a small smile. Your cheeks took inspiration from the sky in color before you turned back to it.

Soon, the first stars of the night began to twinkle overhead, so you and David decided to head back to the cabin. He stood and offered his hand to you, which you graciously accepted. You could have sworn you felt him linger before letting your hand go, but you didn’t want to entertain a rather dangerous train of thought. As you walked back, he put out the idea of having a campfire to celebrate your first night at camp. You thought it was a wonderful idea, so after you got dressed, you helped gather firewood and set it up. David, like a true woodsman, lit it with flint and steel. He came to sit by you once it was stable enough to burn without assistance.

“So,” he began, “how was your first day at camp?”

“I don’t think it could have been any better. I think I’m really going to like it here.”

He gave you a small smile, “I’m really glad to hear that. Most people who come through here… don’t appreciate it as much. They can’t see past the surface of the camp to get to the heart of it. Sure, we don’t have the world best facilities, but gosh darn it, we have the most heart.” He emphasized his point by pointing his finger up into the air. Soon after though, he looked a bit embarrassed. “Sorry, I just get kind of passionate about this place I guess.”

You took his hand and looked him in the eyes. “David, don’t ever apologize for being excited about something. It makes me happy that I’ll be able to share with you a place that you love so much. It’s a huge part of your past and I can’t wait to make it part of my present.”
Small tears began to form in the corners of his eyes as he pulled you into a tight hug. “Thank you.” Pulling away, he wiped a tear from his eye. “Alright, enough mushy stuff. I have a surprise for you!” He leaned over the log you were sitting on and grabbed a small green and white cooler, roasting sticks, and Champagne flutes. “I thought that in order to celebrate your first night, we could have the full campfire experience!” Opening the cooler, he revealed hotdogs, buns, marshmallows, and apple juice. Putting a hot dog onto each of the sticks, he handed you yours before pouring the apple juice in the glasses. “You know I’m not really a drinker, so I thought we could just pretend.” He gave you kind of an embarrassed smile as he handed you your flute. Clinking them together, you say “To Camp Campbell!” and take a drink, prompting David to do the same.

You two sat around the fire for a while laughing, talking, singing and just enjoying each other's company. Eventually, he pulled out his guitar and you lost yourself in a song he had written about the constellations. As the fire died down, and the last of David’s singing filled the air, you felt completely at peace.

Yeah you think to yourself I’m going to like it here.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! I hope you enjoyed chapter 2!
The next few days were all about getting camp ready. David had taken you into town in order to stock up on a few things. The town (which you learned was called Sleepy Peak) was...plain to put it nicely. There was a general store, a boutique that looked like it should belong to a wild-west themed amusement park, an electronics store that probably didn't have anything newer than an old 70’s boombox if you were lucky, a bar that seemed to double as a restaurant, a hardware store, and what looked like a strip club called “muffin tops.” You suppose you could appreciate the humor in the name, though the thought of it made you uncomfortable.

You and David went to the grocery store and hardware store to pick up a weeks worth of food and supplies for camp. After you packed it all into the car and began unloading it into the kitchen, David got a phone call. You assured him that you could finish putting things away so that he could take the call in good conscience. As you began to put things away, you began to feel as if something was off. Unable to shake the feeling, you doubled down on stacking cans in order to try and distract yourself from the pit in your stomach. You felt like prey being watched by an unseen predator and it was starting to get to you. Stopping for a moment, you try and take deep breaths to ground yourself and stop the way your heart was pounding in your chest.

Turning around, you quickly realized why you felt the way you did. A man with a gray beard and a hook for a hand was standing in the doorway staring at you.

You screamed and fell on your ass trying to back yourself as far away from his possible. David, hearing your scream, ran into the kitchen. “Oh my Gosh! Are you ok?”

You needed to warn him about the man with the hook, but no words were able to escape your lips, just a terrified look towards the direction he was in. David, following your gaze looked towards the man, who seemed pretty passive about the whole situation. “Oh! I see you’ve met the Quartermaster,” David said with a small chuckle.

“Wait, that’s the Quartermaster?” As David pulled you to your feet, you looked again at the man who looked like the stereotypical lovers lane killer.

“You!” David said, waving his hand in a dismissive way, “He acts like that to everyone new. I remember the first time he threatened me.” He looked up with a fondness in his eyes.

David cut you off without seeming to notice your discomfort. Even though it bothered you, you wrote it off as David just being excited (though if it continued, you would not hesitate to call him out on it) and let it go.
With the kitchen stocked and your introduction to the Quartermaster over, you and David began going over the campers and their activities. You had heard stories of the kids and how different they all were, but you figured you could manage at least some of them (and from the sound of it, that’s about as good as David and Gwen did last summer). David had paired up the campers based on how they interacted the year before in order to ‘maximize the amount of friendship.’ You double checked the list to make sure that everything was in order, when you realized there was a girl in one of the boys tents.

“David, you put Nikki in Neil and Max’s tent.”

“Yeah! Those three are the best of friends! I'm so glad that they're coming back to camp!” He clasped his hands together and put them next to his face which was adorned by a massive smile.

“Isn't she a girl though?”

“Yeah, but she sleeps in the trees most of the time anyway. We tried to keep her out of them but…” He looked off in the distance with the thousand yard stare before shaking his head. “Anyway, just be careful, she bites.”

“...Noted.”

Going over all of their activities didn't take too long. Preston was back for theater camp, Neil for science, Nikki for adventure, etc. The only ones who had changed were Nurf, who was now signed up for art class with Dolph, and Max who was signed up for music camp. David actually began to break down a bit when you mentioned it. Composing himself, he finally spoke, “I wasn't sure he would come back.”

“Why not?”

With a sad smile, he looked at the paper fondly, “Because of his parents. Max doesn’t have the best home life and his parents didn't seem to care much about him, opting to send him away to where he couldn't be bothersome for a few months. They hadn’t even signed him up for an activity last year. He's just a little boy mad at a world that he thinks doesn't care about him, which is why I try to make sure he knows that isn't the case. And well, considering the fact he's back makes me think that something got through to him.”

You felt tears welling up in your eyes as you listened to David speak. No child should have to go through that, and you were determined to make sure Max knew you were on his side too.

Later that evening after you and David had said your good nights, you pulled out your journal and began to write about the last two days. You wrote about the car ride and how much David liked the almanac. You wrote about setting up camp and how you and David went swimming. You let your mind drift back to the thought of him in the water, gliding through it effortlessly- he seemed to enjoy it as much as you did. Without realizing it, you had written everything down about the last two days, so you decided to call it a night.
“GOOOOD MORNING CO-COUNSELOR!” David kicked open your door, greeting you with an overly enthusiastic tone of voice for the time of day it was.

“Jesus fucking Christ!” You fell out of bed and onto the floor, startled at the sudden awakening. Checking your watch you saw it was about 6am, too early to function properly. You looked up and saw David standing there with his hands on his hips and his ever present smile still on his face. “Aren't you excited to start your first day as being a camp counselor? I know I am! Oh wait! I almost forgot!” And with that he left you in your room alone, on the floor, confused and wondering what the fuck was going on. You blinked and rubbed your eyes a bit before you stood up and threw your blanket back on the bed. David returned with a small gift in his hands. “Quick! Open it!” You did so and found that it was a t-shirt identical to David’s, save for it being a woman’s fit. The forest green background with the dark green tree in the center was pleasant to look at. It certainly reminded you of the camp (and David a voice in your head told you) and you were grateful to have it.

“Now everyone will be able to see that you're a Campbell counselor too!” He emphasized his excitement by swinging his bent arms side to side.

“Thanks David,” you said groggily, still trying to wake yourself up.

“Put it on! I'm sure you're going to look great!”

“Sure, give me just a sec.” You turned to your wardrobe to grab undergarments only to see David still standing there. “Uhh…?"

He hesitated a moment before realizing why you were looking at him funny. “I'll uh, wait outside.” He chuckled nervously before stepping outside and closing your door.

You put on a sports bra with your new shirt over the top. Throwing on a random pair of underwear and cargo shorts, all that was left was your shoes. You decided on sneakers as the first day wasn't going to be super strenuous- mostly introductions and orientation. You put your hair back and, upon deciding you looked as presentable as you were going to get, stepped out of the room.

David took one look at you and lit up like a Christmas tree. Gasping, his cheeks puffed up and his eyes got shiny. He tried to cover his enormous smile with his hands, but they didn't reach quite far enough to do so. “Oh my gosh! You look perfect!” He gave you a big side hug, trapping your arms to your sides. You felt your face heat up a bit but managed to squeak out a thank you.

Once he released you he began to rattle off everything that passed through his mind about the day. Before he could get too far, though, you placed a finger to his lips and simply said, “Coffee.”

“Of course! The Quartermaster makes great coffee. Come on, let's get to the mess hall.”

You weren't exactly excited to see the Quartermaster again, but coffee is coffee, so you would tough it out. Arriving to the mess hall, David held the door as you stepped inside. It smelled like fresh ground coffee was being brewed or, to your groggy ass, heaven.

“Now, getting the Quartermaster to get your order right is a bit tricky. Luckily, I am a master at it,
so I'll go first and show you how it's done.” David struck a confident pose before heading to the counter where the Quartermaster stood. He made a grunting noise at David and David began to list off what he wanted. The QM looked at him for a moment before handing him black coffee. David thanked him and walked back over to you. “See? He got me coffee, that's a success!”

“Isn't it nothing like what you wanted though?”

“Yeah but it's coffee!” He took a sip, before grimacing at the bitter taste. “Yep. That's, wow, that's strong.” He set the mug down before returning to you. “Ok, now you try.” You made your way over to the QM and he gave you a grunt. Immediately, you knew what David had done wrong.

*The Q.M isn't a morning person either.* Luckily, you were fluent in morning grunt speak. He grunted again.

*Morning*

You grunted back.

*Morning, got coffee?*

*Yeah, whatcha want.*

*Whatever is here with a bit of milk and sugar.*

He poured you your coffee and handed it to you with his hook. *Tell the red one that I ain’t dealin' with no little shits this year. They want coffee they're gonna make it themselves.*

You turned to David, “He says he ain’t dealin' with no little shits this year and if they want coffee they're going to have to make it themselves.”

Startled, David simply responded, “Okay?”

You returned your attention back to the quartermaster who now was looking at you dead in the eyes. In coherent speech he said, “You have begun to earn my trust. Continue to do so and I may decide to spare you some day.” You nodded and went your separate ways. Sipping on your mug, you took a seat at the table nearest to David, and he took a seat across from you.

“How did you-”

“You're a morning person, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then you will never understand the ways of the grunt.” You took another sip from your coffee, admiring its taste. “This coffee is good though, I'll give you that.”

“Yep, sure is,” David said nervously before dumping his into a potted plant. You swear to you heard a wheeze before the thing died. “Anyway, are you ready to meet the campers?”

You actually couldn't wait to meet everyone- they all seemed so interesting but, another part of you was incredibly nervous to do so. You sighed, “I just hope they like me.” As you swirled the coffee in your mug, you felt David put a hand on your shoulder. “Hey, I’m sure that they're going to love you. I mean, what's not to like?” He gave you a bashful smile before returning his hand to his side.

“Thanks,” you say, trying to process what just happened.
“Any time. Ready to start the day?”

You downed the rest of your coffee. “Let's do it.”

The next few hours were some of the longest and shortest of your life. You and David went around to double check all the tents and set out all of the things needed for the day’s activities. The work was slightly tedious, but before long, it was noon. You and David stood at the entrance of the camp, waiting for the bus to show up any minute. He was bouncing up and down in his place, unable to contain his excitement.

“Geez Davey, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you so excited.”

“I can't help it,” he said laughing, “I can't wait for everyone to get here. It's going to be so wonderful!” He spun around on one foot and spread his arms open wide. You giggled at him before turning back to the road. There it was, the old yellow school bus that was holding your summer in its deteriorating seats. Meanwhile, David was bouncing in a circle standing next to you. When the bus was about a hundred feet away, he started running towards it. “Welcome back to Camp Camp-,” he got cut off by his own scream as he was hit by the large yellow vehicle. You ran over to make sure he was okay, when the doors opened.

“Kids ‘re here,” said the Quartermaster. He stepped out of the bus as you helped David off the ground when the first of the kids appeared. He was dressed in a performance tux complete with a small top hat.

“Harrison!” David cried, “Welcome back!”

“Hey David,” replied Harrison, “It’s nice to see you again. Care for some rice?” As he said it, a small bag of rice appeared in his hand, “Or dice?” He did it again and two red dice were now where the bag was, “No, I know, you need ice!” Once more, with a swish of his hand, the dice were gone and an icepack was in its place. Harrison handed it to David before hopping off the bus and heading toward the mess hall.

“Thank you Harrison!” He called as he put the ice pack to his head.

“Oh please,” came a second voice, “If you wanted to be healed so bad, I could have just cast healing word on you.” A girl with a pointed wizards hat and cape came next. She had fake ears attached to her real ones, giving them a pointed look.

“You must be Nerris!” You said.

“Yes, that is my common name, but my full title is Lady Nerris the Cute.”

“Well, please excuse my ignorance Lady Nerris,” you say with a small curtsy, “If it would please her, may I join her in her court sometime?”

“I think we might be able to- wait, what edition do you play?”

“5e.”

“It would please the court then if you would join us.”

She hopped off the bus an was headed towards the mess hall before looking over her shoulder, “I was worried you were gonna say 3.5.”

“Pfft, as if.”
“Like, totally right?” Another voice joined the fray, this one belonging to a girl who seemed a few years older than the rest. She blew a bubble with the gum she was chewing before flipping her hair out of her face. “The name’s Ered.”

“Like the desert?”

“Totally. Are you like, the new counselor?”

“She sure is!” David chimed in, “We’ll get to more formal introductions in a bit. Right now, go ahead and meet with the others in the mess hall.”

“Cool.” She grabbed her skateboard and kicked off towards the others.

“A new counselor?” Piped a fourth voice, this one being a bit posh. “Excellent! Another body to add to my adoring public.”

“More like fresh meat,” came a fifth.

“Nurf, I will not having you ruin this for me, first impressions are everything!” As he stood before you, you noticed he was very Shakespearean looking. It was mainly the hair and ruffled collar.

“What’s up Prisston,” said the other boy, finally coming into view. He was larger with red hair and freckles covering his face. “Just stay out of my way.”

“Now boys,” said David, trying to keep the peace, “let's not start this summer off on the wrong foot. Nurf, I think you owe Preston an apology.”

The larger boy sighed before turning to the brunette, “Preston, I’m sorry I made fun of your name. I was just working out the fact that I'm nervous to meet a new person in a way that was unhealthy and unfair to you.”

“It's quite alright Nurf, I know you're working through your issues.” He hopped off the bus and produced a single rose, “I hope to see you in the audience miss. I assure you that my love for the theater will capture your heart as much as it does mine. Adieu.”

You swore you heard him say ‘nailed it’ as he walked away. The larger boy still stood in the frame of the bus. “You're Nurf right? It's nice to meet you. I'm looking forward to seeing what you can do this summer.”

Before he could respond, a voice from the back of the bus piped up. “NURF. MOVE YOUR FAT ASS. THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE ON THIS BUS WHO WANT TO GET OFF.” Nurf looked like he was going to yell, but instead he took a few deep breaths before stepping off. “It's nice to meet you too. I'm working on a few things right now so if I get upset, please don't take it personally, even if I make it sound like it is.”

David wiped away a tear. “Nurf. You've come so far. I'm so proud of you.”

“WHATEVER BUTT MUNCH.” He yelled with a sinister smile before heading towards the camp.

“Vhat vas zee holdup,” said the next voice. You couldn't quite believe what you were seeing. He looked just like a young A- “Dolph. Nice to meet you. I’m looking forward to vurking vith you zis summer. I've always found that a camp like this helps mine concentration. Don’t you?”

Stunned, you just nodded.
“Dolph! Welcome back to camp!”

“Gutentag David, it is nice to see you again.” As he waved, you couldn't help but notice that the angle of his hand was just a bit to perfect for your comfort.

“Why don't you head to the hall with the others, we'll be there shortly.”

As Dolph got off the bus, a teal haired girl jumped off and came flying at you. You ducked as she sailed over where your head would have been.

“Nikki! I told you not to do that!”

“You can't control me Neil! I'm a free bird! The lone wolf in sheep’s clothing! Arooooo!” You watched as the girl howled into the air. She seemed almost as excited as David to be outside. Keeping your eye on her, you turned towards the boy.

“You're Neil, right? Science camp?”

“Pfft, if you can call it that. I'm only here to get away from my Dad for the summer.”

“Aww come on Neil. You know you missed us.” She turned her attention towards you, “Hi, I'm Nikki. Survivalist, outdoorsman, wolf communicator, and wilderness explorer extraordinaire.”

“Hey Nikki. I'd shake your hand but I've heard that you bite.”

She shrugged, “I'm just glad to know my reputation precedes me. See ya round.” She gave you a mock salute and walked off. Neil followed her, trying to keep up.

You chuckled as you watched them go. The next child to make an appearance was quite...unique. He was dressed in a full, homemade space suit and saluted you and David. “Greetings fellow Earthlings, I come in peace.”

“Welcome back Space Kid. Thanks again for talking your uncle into not suing us.”

“My pleasure, I just can't wait to get back into the great beyond!” He pulled out a toy rocket and began flying it around, making the noises with his voice.

“Space Kid?” You asked David.

“Technically, Neil Armstrong Jr., but we call him Space Kid.”

“Oh so he was named after Neil Armstrong.”

“Yeah, his great-grandfather.”

“Wait. Then who’s his uncle?”

“Buzz Aldrin.”

You stared at David for a second, in shock. “You met Buzz Aldrin?”

“Well, technically yes. He kind of punched me in the face.”

“What? Why?”

“Probably because he was being a fucking idiot, as per usual.” Turning back to the bus, you saw
the last child. Standing in his blue hoodie, was Max.

“Max,” David scolded, “language.”

Max just rolled his eyes before turning his attention to you. “So, how many sorry-ass jobs did you have to turn down for this fucking paradise?”

“I... volunteered?”

“That's tragic. Is he holding you hostage? Blink twice if you need help.”

“Max, I assure you I'm not holding anyone hostage. She's the new counselor for the year. Gwen couldn't come this summer.” David explained.

“Wow, so she escaped this hell-hole? Wish I could say the same. But here I am again back in my fucking nightmare of a summer camp for the next three months.” He threw his arms over his head, trying to encompass all of the camp. “Listen,” he said looking at you, “I don't know you, but if you're anything like him, I guarantee I'm not going to like you. So just stay out my way or I'll make life very difficult.” With that he headed off towards the mess hall.

“I think that went great.” David said.

What the hell have you gotten yourself into?

Chapter End Notes

Double upload woo!
Concerned at what had just transpired, you look to David for help. "Is he always like that?"

"Oh no, usually he would insult me much more. I think Max has gotten a lot better! This is going to be the best summer ever!"

Still a bit unnerved by the now eleven year old, you decided that in the end, what's the worst he could do? Spider in your underwear? A snake in the bathroom? You figured you could handle what he was going to throw at you, after all, he was just a kid.

"Well, I think it's time we formally introduce you to everyone! Come on! I'm sure they're all dying to meet you!" He gently placed his hand on your back before leading you toward the mess hall where the kids were waiting. Seeing as how most of the other first impressions went well, you figured that this wouldn't be so bad. Plus, having David at your side made you relax a lot more.

He handed you a clipboard with everyones names on it just in case you forgot who was who, as well as what activities they were in. Taking a deep breath, you stepped inside to find the kids talking amongst themselves. Some conversations were about the school year, others were chatting about what shenanigans would happen this summer. You saw Max quietly talking with Nikki and Neil in the back corner of the room. You kept your eyes on them until David clapped his hands together, grabbing the attention of the kids.

"Alrighty campers! I'd like to formally introduce you to _____! She's our newest counselor and my best friend from back home! Say hello _____!" He seemed even more animated than usual, and you weren't sure if it was because of camp itself or for the sake of the kids.

"Uh, hey," you began unsure of what exactly what to say, "I'm _____ and I'm excited to get to work with you all this summer. Like David said, we met back home and became really fast friends. So, when I heard that the camp needed a new counselor, I decided to volunteer. I'll be taking over a few of the activities in Gwen's absence, more specifically I'll be in charge of," you looked at your sheet, "magic camp, the dice kind," you added, "theater camp, science camp, and scuba camp."

The kids perked up a bit at the last mention.

"You know how to scuba dive!?" Nikki asked, eyes shining in wonder and excitement.

"Uh, yeah. I have my license and stuff so I should be able to teach the basics, I can't promise that you'll all be perfect by the end of the summer, though."

"That's pretty cool," said Ered, flipping her hair back out of her face. "Can't wait to start."
"Ja! Ja! I want to learn too!" Said Dolph.

"Ok kids," David interjected, "I know that you're all excited to have our new counselor here, but let's not jump the gun too fast. After all, we have a new camp to add to our program this year!"

The kids looked confused so David explained, "We found a way to add a music camp to the curriculum, so we all get to learn the basics! Isn't that exciting?"

They looked less than impressed.

"Who wants to learn about music anyway? It's just an excuse to make people seem more "well-rounded" when in reality all that's gonna happen is you're gonna give us shitty recorders and make us play hot crossed buns for hours on end." Max wasn't exactly thrilled to learn about the new curriculum.

"Well Max, I'm sorry you feel that way, considering you're signed up for music camp this summer." David said, genuinely sounding a bit down, "But, I'm sure by the end of it, you'll be a great musician! All you kids will be!" He had perked back up, you assume imagining the kids at the end of camp singing their goodbyes.

"No. No no no no no no no no no. Hell fucking no." Max said. "I'm not here to sit and sing with your overly cheery ass all day. Not gonna happen."

"Of course not Max, you know that it's isn't every day! Each day we focus on a different child. Remember?" He flashed his signature grin.

"That's another thing, stop calling us kids. I think we've been through enough trauma to be considered young adults."

"Yeah!" Agreed Nerris, "We're eleven now, practically adults." She had crossed her arms and closed her eyes in an I'm-not-going-to-hear-anything-else kind of pose. You're mind immediately flashed to 'I'm eleven, so shut the fuck up' and you let slip a slight laugh.

Max's eyes darted to you, "What's so funny newbie?"

"Oh nothing, you just remind me of something I saw a while back."

Less than impressed, Max jumped up onto the nearest table and began to address the other campers. "Fellow men and women of Camp Campbell. Are we just going to sit here and let these two dictate what we're going to do this summer for the second year in a row?"

"Max," Neil began, "If you're proposing that we try to take over camp again, I want to remind you how well that went last year."

"Yeah but that was your idea and Cameron isn't exactly here this summer, now is he?"

"Fair enough, carry on."

You looked at David, "Did he just say take over the camp?"

"Heh, yeah. It's kind of a tradition at this point."
"What the hell does that me-"

"I say we rebel against our captors and make our own rules! Make Camp Campbell a place we can enjoy and not just mindlessly follow orders like sheeple. It's time to wake up and take back what it rightfully ours- summertime!"

The kids cheered and began to advance on you and David. He began to sweat a bit out of nervousness, "Alright c-campers. That's enough. I think we should all calm down and get to our tents!" There was a very pregnant pause before the kids piled onto you and David, causing you both to scream.

And that's how you found yourself tied to the flagpole on your very first day as counselor. You watched in horror as the campers began to trash the place by lighting fires, throwing food, knocking over tables, and generally acting like savages. You had to think of an idea to get out of this.

"Don't worry co-counselor!" David said from behind you, "As soon as I free myself, we can get this place back in order, and everything will return back to normal."

"David, what even is normal here?"

He was about to answer before you heard an explosion coming from the direction of the stage. You heard Preston scream "Oh the humanity!" in the distance.

*Humanity*? You thought to yourself, before an idea slapped you square in the face.

"David! I have an idea! Try to get someone's attention!"

"Kids! Hey! Can someone please come talk to us for a second? I think we need to discuss the current state of the camp!"

"No! You have to think like them! If you act like a counselor, there's no way that they'll get us down. And I am NOT staying the night tied to the fucking flagpole!"

"Language!"

You let out a frustrated sigh before peering around the camp. Kids were beginning to give each other war paint and already a fight club had started. You had to get this under control before it went full Mad Max on you. Scanning the grounds, you spotted Nikki about to shoot an apple off of the head of a very nervous Space Kid. You called to her.

"Yes newbie?" She let the arrow fly and it stuck into the tree right next to Space Kid's head.

"Come here, I have a bit of a favor to ask you."

Squinting her eyes at you, she began to walk over. "And what's in it for me?"

"I'll give you double dessert for the week." She was suddenly in front of you.

"Nikki, at your service!" She said as she gave you the camp salute.

"I need you to go get Max and bring him here. I need to speak with him, adult to adult."
She was gone in a flash. David tried to ask you what your plan was, but you couldn't tell him. You knew he would oppose immediately, and for this to work, you needed him to work with you. All you could do was tell him to trust you.

"Well well well, breaking already?" Max strutted up to you smugly. "Gwen lasted a whole 24 hours you know."

You sighed before speaking. "Max, you're right. We should treat you more like adults. David told me about what happened here last year and after what you all went through, it's not fair to see you as 'just kids'."

"Uh-huh, glad we had this ta-"

"But if you think this is how adults would act in a situation like this, you're more juvenile than you look."

He stopped walking. "What the hell does that mean?"

David piped up, "She doesn't mean it! She-"

"Shut up David." Max demanded as he turned his attention back to you.

"All I'm saying is that if you were really adults, you would act like them. All this is doing is proving that you can't be trusted to be alone for more than a few minutes without destroying something. You're not even acting your ages, you're acting like toddlers. Which is why I have a proposition for you."

"I'm listening."

"I propose a card game. David and I vs the rest of camp. Whoever wins gets to do with Camp Campbell what they will, and the others have to abide by it. Since it's so many vs just the two of us, I get to choose the game."

He pondered for a moment. "Sure, why not? I have nothing better to do." Reaching into his hair, he pulled out a pocket knife and cut you down.

You managed to land you your feet, though you stumbled a bit, before going to help David.

"What game did you have in mind anyway?" Max asked. "Blackjack? BS? Strip poker?"

"No, it's called Cards Against Humanity. It's an adult party game."

David nearly choked when he heard that. "We can't play that with them! They're just kids! It could really mess them up!"

"Hey man, they're adults now. Remember? Might as well introduce them to our games."

"Yeah David. What? Can't handle a little card game?" Max sneered.

"Max you don't understand."
"The only thing I understand, David, is that we've got a camp to keep. See you in the mess hall."
Max walked off waving dismissively behind him. As he left, you managed to undo the last of the
ropes holding up David. He looked frantic and upset as he grabbed your shoulders.

"We really can't play this with them. It'll warp them too bad. You know some of that stuff makes
even me uncomfortable. I don't think I can do this."

You grabbed his hands and brought them down in between the two of you. "I know it will. But
they have to learn that being an adult isn't all sunshine and rainbows."

"It can be if you just ignore everything else!"

"But what happens when you do that!" You gripped his hands tighter. "This may be the only
chance we get. I need you to at least pretend to be on board until we start. You know our house
rules always give a cop-out. Please, David."

He closed his eyes and sighed before looking up at you, unhappy with the situation.

"Okay."

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! In honor of season 3, I decided to do an early upload, along with a few
announcements.

1. Starting next week, I'm going to switch my upload schedule from once a week to
twice a week, adding Wednesday to it.
2. I'll be adding links to the songs used as titles and in chapters near the chapter notes
like you see today.

Here are the last few songs:
I won't say I'm in Love - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIoDMTlwLw4
One Summer's Day - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEtJxfhxRh8
9 to 5 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-gqMpZroy8
Kids - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fe4EK4HSPkI

I also want to thank you all for the support this is getting. I'm really enjoying writing
this, and I hope you are all having fun reading it.

Campe Diem!
Heading off to your room with David in tow, you weren’t quite sure how this would turn out. You knew that you were going to handle the game just fine, but David? He was a bit more squeamish. Even just amongst your friends he tried his best to play, but ultimately had to stop due to discomfort. It didn't bother you, the game wasn't exactly built for every type of person in mind, but it made you nervous to think you would have to go 10 v 1 to a bunch of preteens. You just hoped that it made them as uncomfortable as it did David. You were counting on it, actually.

Upon reaching your room, you were grateful to have found it untouched. Unlocking the door and stepping inside, you immediately reached under the bed to find your hidden prize. The sleek, glossy box had a little dust from not being used in a while, but it was still the same, terrible game you loved dearly. You turned to face David who was still looking very apprehensive.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” He asked, hoping you would change your mind on this.

“No. In fact, I know it’s a horrible idea. But someone’s gotta teach these little shits a lesson.”

“You sound a lot like Gwen.”

You smiled a little. “I’m sure we’d get along just fine then.” Leaving your room with David close behind, you set off back towards the mess hall.

The kids all turned to face you once you and David stepped inside. They had arranged the tables into one long one with two empty seats near the end. At the opposite side was Max. The rest of the campers lined the sides, reminiscent of a king and his court. You placed the box in the center of the table and opened it, revealing its cards neatly stacked together.

“Alright, here’s how this is gonna work. Each player gets seven white cards,” you say as you begin making stacks, “and you try and make the best, worst, or funniest match to the black cards.” You set out another few stacks of them, allowing for easy reach between all players. “The judge, or Czar, decides who wins the black card. First to ten cards wins.”

“That doesn’t sound very hard,” Neil said suspiciously.

“Yeah, it’s almost like you’re trying to lose.” Harrison added.

“Well players,” you began, “with all things in life, there is a catch. One that you will learn about soon enough. But, I’m merciful, so here’s what’s gonna go down.

“For the first round, don’t look at your cards until I tell you. If you don’t know what a card means, you have to look it up and read the definition aloud- no exceptions. If you feel so uncomfortable that you can’t play, you drop out and wait outside. If it’s one of you, that means you accept the fact that you’re a kid and will be treated as such. The team who either has someone get to ten cards first
or has the most players remaining by the end, wins.”

“Sounds easy to me,” Max said confidently rubbing his hands together. “Let’s play.”

One by one, the kids started drawing their cards. You almost felt bad, knowing that they had no idea what was about to befall them. You grabbed your own and placed them face down on the table with David following suit. He still looked wildly uncomfortable with everything that was going on, and you didn’t blame him. You weren’t exactly excited to be playing such a mature game with minors, but you also weren’t excited about the idea of bending at the knee to an eleven year old, either. You gave David a reassuring smile, which he returned before looking like he was about to face his death sentence.

“Max,” you asked, "since you seem to be in charge, how about you be the first Czar?’’

He seemed pleased by the opportunity, and grabbed a card off the top. His confidence slipped momentarily as he read the card aloud, “Daddy? Why is mommy crying?”

“Time to grab your cards, everyone.”

You watched as the campers picked up their cards and watched the mix of reactions they gave. Some were confused, others horrified. Nerris looked like she was going to puke, and Space kid didn’t even say a word before getting up and leaving the table. You smiled sweetly at those before you.

“Let the game begin.”

David didn’t even last past the first round, not that you’d expected him to. You were going to win this on your own, or die trying. Once all the cards were in, and the kids all looked at each other uneasily, Max began to read.

“Exactly what you’d expect, a pyramid of severed heads, daddy issues, revenge fucking, a home video of Oprah sobbing into a Lean Cuisine, two midgets shitting into a bucket, a gassy antelope, historical revisionism, and dying of dis...disentry?”

“Dysentery, Max. And now you have to look it up.” You said as you tossed him your phone.

He grabbed it before typing it into the search bar. “Infection of the intestines which results in- oh my God.” He threw your phone back at you, unable to finish, so you did it. The campers looked much more uneasy now then they were at the beginning. Your plan was working perfectly.

Preston was the next to drop followed by Nerris. By the time you had gone all the way around the table, there were eight players left: Max, Neil, Nikki, Harrison, Ered, Nurf, Dolph, and yourself. You only had one black card but you didn’t care. You were in this for the long haul rather than going for a win the traditional way. Max seemed nervous to pick up another black card. “What’s wrong Max?” You asked, mimicking his tone of voice from earlier in the day, “Can’t handle a little card game?” He glared at you before grabbing the next card.

A few rounds went by before Neil left after receiving the Auschwitz card, which was played by exactly who you’d expect. Nikki had to leave after being subjected to the horror of the Pacman card, and having to look up what a certain word meant. She looked like she was going to have war flashbacks from this night. Ered dipped after being unable to read ‘my vagina’ out loud in front of so many people, and Harrison couldn’t take any of it anymore, opting to run out of the building screaming and crying. After the second rotation, it was you, Max, Dolph, and Nurf.

“I don’t really get why they’re so upset.” Nurf said.
"Ja, zis game is kinda boring once ze shock value vears off."

"Well then," you sneered. "How about we make it more interesting?" You grabbed some of the blank cards from the box and handed each kid a dry erase marker. "Use your imagination. Get creative and see what you can come up with." Getting these kids to quit was going to be much more difficult than you realized. But you could probably get by with the black cards at this point. You had won seven, more than any of the other three, but with numbers of players slimming, so did your chance of winning.

A few rounds of original cards worked. One of the others made a crack about Nurf’s anger issues, causing him to get upset.

"OH, SO YOU’RE SAYING I HAVE ISSUES HUH? THAT I’M SOME FREAK THAT CAN’T CONTROL HIS EMOTIONS? WELL HOW ABOUT THIS? IS THIS CALM AND COLLECTED? OR IS THIS THE PRODUCT OF SOMEONE BEING PUSHED TO HIS LIMITS." He flipped one of the empty tables sending cards flying and causing Dolph to escape the building out of self-preservation. "THIS GAME IS STUPID AND I HATE IT." Nurf slammed the door on his way out. Leaving you and Max alone at the table.

"Well, we don’t have enough people to continue, so we’d better clean up." Max just kind of nodded along with what you said as you left the table to gather up the cards that were flung. You didn’t want to push him too much, so you were able to fix the table yourself. Once everything had been cleaned and returned to its place, you patted the seat next to you, prompting Max to come sit with you. "What do you want from us, Max?"

“I don’t know. I thought I had wanted to break David last summer, but once I did, I actually felt kind of guilty about it? Like, whatever situation I was put in, I wanted to make things as difficult as possible. Part of me still wants too, but understanding David better now, I don’t know why I should even bother trying with anything since I’m just gonna suck at it and have him either be overly joyful about me ‘trying’ or some shit, or disappoint him.” He put his knees up to his chest and rested his chin on them. “I don’t even know why I’m telling you this. You’re just gonna run and tell him anyway.”

“I have an absolutely massive crush on David.” You confided.

“Umm, why are you telling me this?”

“Because,” you smiled and ruffled his hair, “now we each have something we shouldn't tell David. I won’t tell him about what you told me here tonight, as long as you don’t tell him what I told you. What we talk about stays between us. No matter what.” You held your pinkie out, “Promise?”

He gave you a weak smile, but locked his pinkie with yours. “Promise. But I should warn you, I heard David beat a woman at a bar once. I think her name was Shirley Temple or something? Bartender said he hit her pretty hard.”

“Max, a shirley temple is a non-alcoholic drink.”

He blinked a few times. “Man, I don’t know what’s sadder. The fact that David went to a bar for a non-alcoholic drink or the fact that I thought he actually had it in him to beat a woman.”

“Yeah, David is pretty nonviolent.”

“I literally watched him beat a man with a chair for dating his ex.”

Now it was your turn to blink. “He did what now?”
“I mean, it was kind of our fault for putting him into the situation, but yeah. Totally busted a chair over the guy.”

*David what the fuck.* You thought to yourself.

“Anyway,” you continued, “I don’t expect you to want to talk about everything all the time. But if there’s a situation you need to talk about, just know that you can always come to me. I won’t tell anyone.”

“Thanks newbie.” He said lightly punching you in the arm. “But don’t you dare think I’ll be going easy on you. I have a reputation to keep up.”

“Ok Max,” you said, giving him a sympathetic smile.

Chapter End Notes

The whole Cards Against Humanity portion of the chapter was actually based on a dream I had one night and was the reason I decided to start writing this. Just a fun fact I guess.

Campe Diem!
Fix You

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Fix You by Coldplay. Check it out here!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4V3Mo61fJM

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You held the door open for Max as you exited the mess hall, stepping into the cool night air and taking in the damage. It seemed like most of the fires had been put out, though the rest of the camp still looked to be a disaster. This included the campers. You saw Harrison shivering on the ground in fetal position slowly rocking back and forth. Nerris had a bucket next to her, looking a bit green in color. Neil stood rubbing his arm uncomfortably stealing a glance at Dolph. Nikki was sitting stock still on the ground, eyes unmoving and mouth slightly ajar. You thought you heard a faint ‘waka-waka’ coming from her but you weren’t sure. Ered was leaning against the flagpole, hair obscuring her face while Nurf was stabbing the nearest tree. Space kid seemed relatively ok, but you assumed that is was because he didn’t play. In the middle of them all was a very stern looking David, not glaring at you, but giving you a look that pierced your soul.

“Are you satisfied?” He asked. Not giving you time to answer, he turned and walked off toward the counselors cabin.

Shit.

Max looked to you and watched as you drew a shaky breath, trying to steady yourself. Maybe this had gone too far, the poor kids looked shell shocked. You felt awful, all you wanted was to get the camp back and even though you knew there was going to be some fallout, you had no idea it was going to be this bad. And to put the cherry on the on the top of this shit show of a sunday, David was upset with you.

Shit shit SHIT. You had no idea how you were going to fix this, so you just started talking.

“Guys, I...I’m really sorry. I shouldn’t have put you through that. It went too far.” All eyes were on you now. “But I need you guys to understand something. Being an adult kinda sucks. A lot of what you guys read on the cards we as adults have to face and live with every day and it’s the fucking worst. Sure, we do our best to laugh at it, but the truth is is that no one knows what they’re doing in this bat-shit crazy world. All we can do is try and push forward and hope we didn’t get too fucked up by the last thing to face the next.”

Pausing for a moment, you blinked back tears and composed yourself. “I guess what I’m trying to say is that you shouldn’t try to grow up so fast. Enjoy the time you have as a kid because it’s the only chance you’ll get to do so. Then once you’re an adult you have to make fun of the horrible shit in the world just to be able to cope.” The kids gave weak chuckles, seeming to come out of their dazed states. Nikki walked over before wrapping her arms around your legs. Soon enough the rest of the kids followed suit and you were just a mass of stupid giggles and hugs.

Feeling your face get wet, you reached up and found that you were crying. Sniffling, you wiped away your tears as the kids released you. You helped walk them to their tents and got them settled before heading back to to your room. With each step, the pit in your stomach began to weigh you
down more and more. You knew you had to talk to David, but you were worried to do so. You tried to reassure yourself that he would forgive you, and that he was probably incapable of hating anyone, but still your stomach continued to tie itself in knots. You reached his door and hesitated a moment before knocking. You heard a shuffling noise before it opened, the redhead standing before you. He looked tired, though not from lack of sleep.

“David, I-”

“It’s late _____, you should get some sleep. We can talk tomorrow.” He closed the door on you, leaving you staring at the wood in silence, the only sound being that of the bugs buzzing outside. Defeated, you turned and walked into your room kicking off your shoes and crawling into bed. You don’t bother changing into pajamas, you were too exhausted. Figuring you should try and vent a bit, you picked up your journal and began to write about your first day as a counselor.

_You traumatized the campers and pissed off your best friend. Great job._ You shook your head trying to clear your mind of David.

_But you also got to meet all of the campers and put a stop to a revolution. That’s a plus. And you might have taught them a very poignant lesson? Maybe?_ Stopping to think back at what you said, you hope that at least a little of it would stick with them. You meant every word.

_Max is interesting. We have a small pact with each other now. I think he’s gonna turn out ok though. _You smiled when you thought of your brief conversation, then added hastily, _Don’t ever underestimate that one. He has more tricks up his sleeve than Harrison._

You wrote for a bit longer, and it did end up making you feel a little better. Reflecting on how the kids reacted to you after gave you hope for your future here. They didn’t hate you, and maybe all of you can come to better understand each other over the summer.

_As for David you wrote I have no idea how to make it up to him. I don’t think I’d ever seen him so upset. He says we’re going to talk, but I don’t know if that makes me more or less nervous. _Sighing, you add the last of your thoughts to the page. _At least we can talk it out. Ignoring the issue would only make thing worse._

Placing the journal on the nightstand next to you, you flick out the light and head to sleep, exhausted from the day’s events.

Chapter End Notes

_A bit of a shorter chapter, but the next one will be back to a normal length.

Campe Diem!_
Sing it All Away

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Sing it All Away by Walk Off the Earth, Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XU8xYDTg2MA

Sleep didn’t come to you that night. You tossed and turned most the night trying to force the damn sandman to bring you a dream, but he never showed up. Eventually you gave up and decided to get ready for the day, grabbing what clothes you would need and stepping into the bathroom to shower. The water pressure sucked but at least it was warm. You delayed getting out the warm embrace of the shower as long as possible, but eventually, the water began to turn cold. Turning off the flow, you stepped out and got dressed, brushed your teeth and braided back your hair.

You left the sanctity of the bathroom with your things, half expecting to see David sitting outside waiting. When he wasn’t, you were both equal parts sad and relieved. The time in your room was a flurry of emotions you weren’t quite sure how to deal with, and bile had begun to make its way up your throat. You forced it back down- vomiting was the last thing you needed right now.

After throwing on your hiking shoes, you made the journey to the mess hall figuring you were going to need some strong ass coffee to get you through today and praying that the Quartermaster could fix you up. The handle on the door to the hall was cold against your skin as you pulled it open. Once inside, you found that the tables had been moved back to their original places and there in the corner sat David, sipping of a mug of coffee and browsing his phone. He looked up at you as you stepped inside and lifted his mug in acknowledgement before returning to his device.

Going through the routine once more with the Q.M, you got black coffee and sat down across the table from David. Each of you were silent for a moment before you spoke at the same time.

“I want to apologize- wait what?” You looked at each other confused.

“David why are you apologizing?”

“Because your plan worked and I was a huge jerk about it! I left you alone at night and closed the door in your face!”

“But I practically traumatized the entire camp with that stupid game! You have every right to be upset at me! I fucked everything up on my first day of counselor.” Tears you didn’t know you had left began flooding your eyes. David gently took your chin and turned it up towards him, wiping away the tears as they came.

“Hey now. You didn’t mess anything up. While yes, there could have been a better way to go about things, I doubt they would have been as effective.”

“But-”

“No buts. You did just fine by using what you had at your disposal. It was actually quite brilliant, you know aside from the whole trauma thing.”
You chuckled a bit, and wiped your own eyes. “That still doesn’t make it so that you need to apologize, though. You didn’t do anything wrong. If anything, your reaction was totally reasonable! You didn’t even yell. That’s more than I can say if I had been in your shoes.” You swirled the mug around in your cup before taking a swig. Tasting something way off, you spit it out immediately. “What the fuck? It’s salty!”

David guiltily pulled a salt shaker from under the table. “Well, since you won’t let me apologize for last night, I can be sorry about that.”

“You asshole,” you laughed as you gently punched him in the arm. “Going to comfort me while you put salt in my cup is a dick move.” You gave him a small smile to let him know you were only joking. You both knew you deserved it.

You leaned your head on your arm and yawned, the lack of sleep and caffeine already getting to you, and you couldn’t stop your thoughts from wandering to the kids. David, noticing your melancholy state, pulled up a song on his phone. As it began to play, he stood up and offered you his hand to dance. You immediately recognized it- ‘Put on a Happy Face’ by Dick Van Dyke. It was the first swing chart the two of you ever choreographed a dance to.

“Gray skies are gonna clear up. Put on a happy face. Brush off the clouds and cheer up. Put on a happy face,” David sang prompting you to join him. You took his hand and began to dance around the room as he continued to sing. “Take of the gloomy mask of tragedy. It’s not your style,” he sang, punctuating the lyric by gently grabbing your chin between is thumb and forefinger, “you’ll look so good that you’ll be glad you decided to smile.

“Pick out a pleasant outlook. Stick out that noble chin. Wipe off that full-of-doubt look. Slap on a happy grin. And spread sunshine all over the place ,” he spun you out and back into his chest, “just put on a happy face .” The two of you swug all around the room singing and enjoying the movement of the music. You adored dancing with David. He usually lead, but it was never forceful- always gentle nudges in the right direction. His hands never strayed to far up or down your hip, always keeping it at a respectful middle ground. You helped keep him in step by moving your hips in tempo to the rhythm. Holding onto your hands, he spun you so that he was behind you, your arms crossed at your waist as you and he moved side to side, “I knew a girl so gloomy she’d never laugh or sing. She wouldn’t listen to me, now she’s a mean old thing .”

You unraveled and were now spinning in a circle, each of your arms outstretched above your head. “So spread sunshine all over the place, just put on a happy face .”

Coming back to him, you continued your routine, a smile ever growing on each of your faces. You were both so enthralled by the music, you didn’t notice the growing audience entering the building. The campers all watched as you two sang and swung around the mess hall each having a different mixture of excitement or joy spread on their face. A few of them even tried to follow your steps by pairing up and doing their own modified versions of a swing dance. As the song ended and your routine finished in a dip, you were slightly startled by the sudden cheering that came from the entrance. David helped you back up to your feet and the pair of you bowed.

“Good morning campers!” David gushed cheerfully. “I’m glad you enjoyed that because today is the first day of dance camp! We’re going to learn the basics of partner dancing today! Doesn’t that sound great?” The kids look genuinely excited to learn how to dance.

As they got in line for breakfast, Max walked into the hall, late. He noticed that there was much more chatter than usual and watched you and David making plans for the day. Making his way to the line, he came up behind Neil who was talking with Preston.
“I agree,” Neil stated, “there certainly does seem to be something there.”

“What are you guys talking about?” Max questioned.

“Oh Max! You missed it!” Preston exclaimed. “Our very own counselors dancing around the room wrapped in a passionate embrace, completely lost in each other’s eyes. It was like a modern day fairy tale. They were fantastic!” He punctuated his last statement by slamming his elbows down to his sides, hands clenched into fists.

“Dancing?”

“Yeah!” Nikki had appeared from in front of Preston. Gasping, she asked in a hushed tone, “Do you think they, you know, like each other?” She put one hand over her mouth and let out a small giggle. All four of them looked towards where you and David were sitting and chatting. He had said something that made you snicker, his smile widening as you laughed.

“It would appear that they do, but we can’t be certain until we run some tests.” Neil placed his fist into his open palm for emphasis.

“Tests?” Nikki asked

“Yes! Tests so that they can prove their true love to each other! It’s the perfect plan.” Preston looked excited.

“Welp, while you morons waste your time on that, I’m gonna get breakfast.” Max began to walk ahead when Nikki grabbed him by the hood of his jacket.

“Aww come on Max, you’re our greatest schemer! We need your help!”

Look back towards you, Max watched as you and David excitedly chatted away about the day’s plans. Even he had to admit, there seemed to be something between you two. He sighed out of frustration. “Fine, but only to get you idiots off my back. Here’s what we’ll do.”

As Max explained his plan, word of it quickly spread to the other campers. By the time everyone had gotten their food, the conversation died to hushed whispers about you and David, who were both completely oblivious to the world around you. Putting phase one into action, Max, Nikki, and Neil walked over to you and David. The rest of the camp tried their best to hide their excitement, though they weren’t doing a very good job. Each of them were going to have a chance throughout the day to get the two of you together. But first, it was up to these three to set everything into motion.

“Hey David?” Nikki asked sweetly. “Can we sit here with you guys?”

“I don’t see why not! Please join us!”

You and David made room at the table as Nikki sat beside him and Neil and Max took their places beside you.

“Morning guys,” you say, "how are you feeling? You seem...ok?”

“Yeah, we’re fine,” Neil said. “It’s a lot harder to traumatize kids these days. Last night was nothing compared to watching the world crumble to pieces in front of us,” he explained nonchalantly.

I guess that’s a relief. I think?
“So,” he continued, “You’re going to be in charge of science this summer? Tell me, how to you feel about chemistry?”

As you and he talked about science, Nikki started a conversation with David.

“So, how did you guys meet?”

“Actually, we met in a dance class! Which is kind of a funny story really. We have really similar studies, so I’m surprised our classes didn’t overlap earlier. But I’m so glad we met! She’s my best friend.”

“You guys have a lot in common then eh?”

“I guess you could say that. We seem to get along pretty well.”

She gasped, an idea popping into her head. “David! We should take her on a night hike to the Sleepy Peak Lookout! I’ll bet she’d love it up there!”

“Well that’s a great idea Nikki! I’ll make the arrangements later. But spread the word during the day! The night hike is on!”

Max, having stayed silent during this time finally spoke up. “So newbie. You got a boyfriend?”

You were caught slightly off guard by his question. “Uh, no? Why?” You smirked, “You interested or something?”

“Naw, I’m not exactly into cougars, thanks though.” He sipped his coffee casually and you lost your shit laughing.

“Well played Max,” you say as you ruffled his hair. He swatted at you trying to get you to stop.

Chapter End Notes

The song you and David danced to is Put on a Happy Face by Dick Van Dyke. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmvFK739E_w

Also, 500 READERS OH MY GOD. Thank you all so much! I’m glad people seem to be enjoying this! I’m having a blast writing it!
Do Ya Thing

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Do Ya Thing by Gorillaz. Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nOGy52xygY

You finished breakfast but continued conversing with David and the others about the day. You were really excited to go on a night hike - David had told you that the silhouette of Sleepy Peak was absolutely stunning at night.

As everyone left the mess hall and walked towards the activity field for their morning activities, Nikki spread the word about the night hike and gave the news she learned during breakfast about you and David. The fact that you were both single and had some history between you spread among the campers quickly. They were sly about it, telling each other in passing or quickly meeting in secret at each of the booths. It was Neil’s turn first in the unofficially titled “plan to get our counselors to date” plan. You sat and watched as he worked on making something he said was a surprise.

“Oh come on Neil, I’m dying to know what you’re doing over there!”

“It’s almost done I promise! Just a few...more..” He added the finishing touches before turning and presenting you with what looked like homemade chocolate? “Synthetic chocolate,” he said proudly. “The world’s answer to the shrinking coco problem.” He handed you a piece, “Try it!”

You took a bite and immediately the chocolate flooded your sense. It was a perfect mix of sweet and tart, melting in your mouth. “Neil, this is amazing! How did you make it?”

“A great magician never reveals his secrets. Good thing I’m a scientist!” He pulled up the chalkboard and showed you the equation he had come up with on his own, explaining when gaps in you knowledge popped up. You were thoroughly impressed.

“Here,” he said handing you a bit of what was left over, “I’ll bet David would want some too."

You thanked him before walking off towards Nerris’s cardboard castle. As soon as you were out of sight, Neil pulled out a walkie-talkie and paged Nerris, “Target inbound Lady Nerris, prepare your forces.”

“Noted.” She said, placing her walkie-talkie behind her DM screen.

“Lady Nerris!” you called to her, “May I join your court for the morning?”

“You have been granted access, please enter the drawbridge.” She popped her head over the side of the castle and whisper shouted, “I just drew it today.” Chuckling, you ascended the stairs to the top. It was surprisingly sturdy for cardboard. You bowed deeply as you made your way into the center of the “hall.”

“Welcome to my kingdom, weary traveler. Do you want to play Dungeons and Dragons?” She dropped the formality as her eyes lit up, producing a bag full of different kinds of dice.
“I’d love to, but I’ll need to create a new character.”

As you and Nerris worked out the details of your character, David was in the middle of a guitar lesson with Max near the amphitheater.

“Alright Max,” he strummed a chord. “Now this one is a C chord and is the base of a lot of songs. See where my fingers lie? You can easily switch between C and G by-”

“Yeah yeah yeah, whatever,” Max said impatiently, “I wanna know about you and our new counselor.” He wiggled his eyebrows.

“Oh, I have no idea what you’re talking about Max.” His words were quick and tight while he avoided eye contact. “Let’s get back to the guitar.”

“You two dating or something? Come on David, spill.”

“Max, I really think we should get back to the less-”

“Do you like her?”

“Max that’s-”

“Have you kissed?”

“What! No! We-”

“Oh, so is it like a friends with benefits kinda thing?”

“MAX! That’s enough. How do you even know what that is?”

David stood up, flustered. “I think that’s enough for today’s lesson. Just practice what I showed you today so that we can move onto the next chords sooner than later.” Heading towards the activity field, he looked over his shoulder, “I don’t know what you’re up to, but I would have hoped you would have learned after last year not to mess with people’s relationships.” As he was walking away, Max called out, “Yeah but that relationship was over! You still have a chance with this one!”

David pretended not to hear him.

Back at the castle, you had completed your character sheet. You were now Serpia, the dragonborn sorcerer. You had asked Nerris for advice on flaws to try and flesh her out a bit and she suggested one that wasn’t on the list of possible choices: Boy crazy. You thought it was unique, so you ran with it.

“Alright. I’ll ask you some questions to get an idea of what you- SHE’S into for guys. First question: Ideal body type?”

As the questions went on, you started to mix your feelings in with that of your character’s. You didn’t want her to be a completely separate entity from you, as you wanted to make a character that was roughly halfway between your reality and your fantasy. Glancing down at your watch, you realized you were going to be late to help Preston.

“Nerris, I hate to cut it short, but I have to get to the stage. Preston needs me!”
“Wait!” She cried as you left, “We still need to go over a backstory!”

As you rushed towards the stage, you saw David walking towards Dolph and Nurf. You gave him a quick wave before continuing onwards towards Preston.

“Hello art camp!” David cheered excitedly.

“Please David, not so loud. Artvurk takes patience and a quiet vurkspace.” Dolph scolded.

“Yeah,” Nurf continued, “I need a place where I can really let my mind take over for me.” He turned toward his canvas before screaming and slashing at it with his knife. “That’s for never being at my birthdays!” He bellowed.

“Oh, Nurf,” David began hesitantly, “While I’m all for freedom of expression and creation, maybe use a paintbrush instead of a knife?”

“No, what, are you trying to stifle my creativity David? Because I don’t appreciate it.” He pointed his knife towards David. David put his hands up by his head.

“Of course not Nurf, I’m just saying that—”

“So now you’re trying to tell me how to make my art? Well how about I make an art piece out of you!” He came at David, who screamed and began to run away. He wasn’t quite fast enough, though, as Nurf caught him and tied his arms and legs together with rope. “Hope you can swim,” he said as he took David to the edge of the docks and tossed him in.

Hearing David scream and then a large splash, you look over to the dock were Nurf was standing alone. Putting two and two together, you dropped the set piece you were making with Preston and hauled ass over to the docks. Seeing bubbles still coming up, you dove in and made you way to the bottom, where you found David struggling to try and get back to the surface. You grabbed him under his arm before kicking off the bottom, giving yourself extra momentum. Breaking the surface, you looked at David: his eyes were almost closed and his tongue was hanging out of his mouth slightly. You dragged him over to the shore and undid the ropes. After he was freed, he rolled onto his hands and knees, coughing up water. You placed your hand on his back to help steady him and he let out a shuddering breath before rolling onto his back, breathing in deeply.

“David, are you ok?”

“I am thanks to you.” He coughed again, spitting out what was hopefully the last of the water from his system. You grabbed his hand and pulled him to his feet and noticed all the kids had gathered around you from the commotion. David checked his watch. “Oh man! It’s lunch time! I’m sure you kids are hungry!” He spoke with the confidence of a man who didn’t just have a near death experience. He looked toward you, “Do you mind rounding up the campers and getting them to lunch? I have a few things I think I need to talk about with Nurf here.”

Trying to keep your emotions level, you spoke cooly, “Actually David, I would like to speak with Nurf first, if it’s all the same.”

“Uh, sure. Come on kids, let’s get to the mess hall.”

As they made their way inside the building, they grabbed their food and began to congregate.

“So,” Max began, “what have we learned today.”

“Well, we saw that she was willing to save his life. I’d say that’s pretty telling.” Nikki said.
“I don’t know about that,” contested Neil. “It was kinda just the right thing to do?”

“Oh please, we all saw how they looked at each other on the beach,” she replied.

“Like people who just went through something horrible?”

“Jesus, ok, anyone else?” Max asked.

“I got the kind of guy she’s into!” Nerris piped up.

“Excellent. Tell us.”

“Ok, but it’s more towards what her character likes so I don’t know how much of it is super accurate.”

“Nerris!”

“Hey, I don’t see any of you coming up with anything great, either!”

As they spoke, you and Nurf walked in. He looked a bit shaken up as he came to sit with the others.

“Gentlemen, and ladies,” Nurf spoke, “If hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, then I don’t even wanna know where the new counselor’s anger comes from.”

They just stared at him.

“O-kay then. Did anyone else find anything useful?” Max probed. The kids all shook their heads.

“What about you, Max? Did you get any info out of David?” Nikki questioned.

“Not any solid confessions, but I think he likes her. He got real closed off when I asked him about her.”

It was the best lead they had so far. No one else had solid proof of anything, just hints and gossip.

You had taken your seat with David in the mess hall. He looked a little bit worse for wear but was still smiling.

“How did it go?”

“Well, I think Nurf now understands why pushing people into a lake is a bad idea.” You say, rubbing your temples. “Also, he’s agreed to switch to wood carving rather than painting. It’s a better alternative for him I think. But, are you ok? I mean you almost just drowned!”

“I’m fine, honest! Last year they tried to roast me alive, this year they tried to drown me. Who knows, maybe in a few years, I’ll be the avatar of near-death experiences!” His positive attitude really could not be beat. You didn’t know anyone else who could walk off something like that but, you suppose that’s David- never one to stop moving forward. It didn’t stop you from being concerned about him, though.

“Just...promise me to be careful? I don’t know what I’d do if you got seriously hurt.”

“I’ll be careful,” he said as he leaned forward to grab your shoulder. “I promise.”

Suddenly remembering you had chocolate in your pocket, you pulled it out and offered it to David.

“Here. Neil wanted me to give you this. He made it himself! It’s completely synthetic.” Taking the
chocolate, David snapped it in half and offered you some. You tried to deny it, but your protests were cut short as he put the end of it in your mouth, forcing you to begrudgingly accept.

“Bingo,” Neil said, rubbing his hands together.

“What has you so worked up all of a sudden?” Max asked.

“My chocolate. They ate it.”

“Congratulations, you’re going to give them a cavity?”

“No! Chocolate is a natural aphrodisiac. And since this is of my own creation, I was able to tweak the recipe just a bit to make it more potent.”

“English please.”

Neil sighed. “The same part of the brain that’s triggered by romantic feelings is also triggered by chocolate. My chocolate doubles that feeling from normal chocolate.”

Nikki gasped, “Neil, you made a love potion!”

“I mean, I guess you could say that. But keep it down, we don’t need them finding out about it.”

“Nice going Neil,” Max said as he gave Neil a pat on the back.

“I guess we’ll just have to see how this all plays out.”

Chapter End Notes

This was fun to write.

Campe Diem!
Lunch finished and everyone was headed back out towards the amphitheater for dance camp. You and David walked together at the front of the pack, oblivious to the eyes glued to your every interaction. You felt closer to him, though you assumed it was because you had just saved his life. You wanted to try and ignore it, but you couldn’t help but notice that he seemed to be sneaking glances at you, causing you to blush. You prayed that he thought you were just sunburned.

Upon reaching the amphitheater, you and David helped pair kids up with each other. Some were less enthusiastic about who they were with than others, but everyone eventually sucked it up. As you and David began to teach the class, you suddenly became very aware of how close you were to him. You could feel your heart rate pick up as you continued and were certain that you were blushing like crazy, but when you were able to look up, you noticed his cheeks were tinged a bit pink as well. This did not help.

Near the end of the session, you gave up on trying to hide anything and let him take control. You placed your head on his chest and felt him put his chin on top of it. In that moment, nothing else was around you. You would have been perfectly content to have stayed in that moment for the rest of time. Moving to a melody only the two of you could hear, David lifted his head, prompting you to do the same. Gazing into each other’s eyes, you continued to sway across the stage. You could barely meet his gaze, though gentle it may be, as it gave way to thoughts that may have been similar to your own. Slowly, you stopped dancing and just held each other at arm's length. You wrapped your arms around his neck and he around your waist as you steadily got closer and closer to each other.

David suddenly stopped, eyes wide. Coming back to your senses, you looked out over the sea of faces anxiously anticipating what would have come next. You and David jumped back from each other, suddenly very aware of your proximity.

A groan came from the campers as you parted. David pulled on his shirt, red in the face. “I th-think that’s enough for today. Great job everyone!” Disappointed in the result of their efforts, the campers grumbled as they walked away, leaving you and David alone on stage. “S-sorry about all of that,” he apologized, “I guess I got kind of carried away there near the end.”

“Heh, I guess I did too. Sorry.” You both stood there awkwardly for a moment, trying your best to avoid the others eyes. “W-well, what happened today? Like, what was so different about this time? We’ve danced hundreds of times before but it’s never gotten so...intense?” You wracked your minds for a solution, going back through the day and what each of you did.

“...and then right before this, we ate lunch,” David finished. Still confused as to what it could have been, you tried to recall what you ate. It was just a normal lunch except for-

“The chocolate,” you said as the realization struck you.
“Yes the chocolate was delicious, but what does it have to do with anything?”

“David, chocolate is a natural aphrodisiac.”

“Oh. OH.” He turned red again, causing you to do so as well. Thinking back on the day, some things started falling into place. The talk at breakfast about relationships, Nerris asking you about your tastes, the chocolate.

“David I think the kids were trying to set us up.”

He really turned red at that revelation. “W-well, that would explain some of what Max asked me today,” he admitted as he rubbed the back of his head nervously, unable to look you in the eyes.

“Like what?” *If Max told him he is fucking dead.*

“Just incredibly personal questions about myself I’d really rather not repeat.” The awkward silence returned before you broke out into laughter. David began to laugh along with you, though he wasn’t sure what he was laughing at.

“Man,” you say wiping a tear from your eye, “I’ll give it to them. They’re slick.”

“I guess I should be grateful they’re looking out for us? I mean, I suppose all they wanted was to make us happy in the end.”

“Either that or blackmail,” you chortled.

Now David really laughed aloud. You thought it was the most beautiful sound in the world, and wished it would last forever. At this point you weren’t sure if your infatuation was from the chocolate or from your own head. You didn’t really care either.

David composed himself and hopped off the stage, offering a hand to help you down. You took it and stepped next to him. “So,” he asks, “what now?”

You thought for a moment. “Let’s get them back.”

And so, you and David put a plan into motion. Tonight on the hike, he would walk you over to a ledge where you would ‘fall off’ when in reality you would land on the shelf below and hide. Then, you would throw on some white powder and pretend to be a ghost hopefully freaking the kids out. He took you out to where the hike ended and you rehearsed, minus putting on the makeup.

You didn’t notice the eyes that were watching you two disappear into the woods. Nikki had laid in wait hoping she would catch a glimpse of you guys holding hands, a peck on the cheek if she was really lucky. She was disappointed to not have seen either, but as soon as you two disappeared, she raced down the trunk and reported back to the others. She reached the camp, panting and out of breath both from the exercise and from hyperventilating over what she had seen. Harrison noticed her first.

“Nikki? Is everything alri-”

“JUSTSAWTHEMGOINGINTOTHEWOODSBYTHEMSELVES,” she released all at once as she grabbed his shoulders and shook him violently.

“Woah, calm down. Try again, slower.” By now the others had gathered around her, eager to hear the news. She recounted how she had chased a squirrel up a tree and decided to keep a lookout for
the two of you while there. She claimed to have seen you and David walking deeper into the woods.

“So David is making his move huh? Didn’t think he had it in him.” Max said.

“And it’s all thanks to my chocolate.” Neil proclaimed.

“As if,” Max countered. “It was thanks to me that David was able to admit to himself he liked her.”

“Umm, I think the fact that Serpia was able to get her feelings down on paper is what really helped unlock their true potential.” Nerris said.

“Who the fuck is Serpia?”

“_____’s DnD character! God!”

“You’re all wrong,” Nurf said. “It was obviously the fact that she had to rescue him that brought them closer together.”

“Yeah sure,” Max said. “Because they would have a great relationship if he was dead.”

“I would have gone in after him if I needed to!”

The campers all began to argue amongst themselves about whose contribution was the most effective and why. They were so enthralled with their discussion that they didn’t notice you and David approaching.

“So, what are we arguing about?” You ask. The campers freeze and turn towards the pair of you standing there, arms crossed, knowing smiles on your faces. “No, please continue, I’m curious to hear what’s got everyone so heated.” They awkwardly stand around looking to each other for an answer, but too much time had already passed.

“Well, if you’re all finished working out your differences,” David said, “head to the mess hall for dinner and then get ready for a night hike! We’re heading to the Sleepy Peak Lookout!”

Dinner came and went and soon enough it was dark outside. With the campers all geared up with flashlights, the lot of you headed out into the woods. You and David had spread out with him leading the pack and you bringing up the rear. Max had hung around with you.

“So how was it?” He questioned.

“How was what?”

“Don’t play dumb with me. Nikki told us all about how you and David snuck off into the woods today. Alone. Just the two of you.”

“If you’re insinuating what I think you are, we didn’t sleep together.”

“Alright then, makeout sesh. Did he cop a feel?”

“No, Max. We didn’t make out with each other, either.”

“Not even a-”

“Dude, why are you so invested in this? You know how I feel. What’s your end-game?”
“I don’t have one, I just like screwin’ with people.” He dropped his voice. “Though I’m sure there’s someone you wouldn’t mind screwing with.”

“Aaaaaand this conversation is over.”

He shrugged and walked a bit ahead, leaving you a flustered mess. You were suddenly very grateful to be at the end of the line.

“Come on campers! We’re almost there!” David’s voice broke through the sound of leaves crunching underfoot as your group traversed through the trees. The moon was but a sliver in the inky blackness of the sky, giving up its pearly spotlight to the stars behind it. You reached the lookout in seemingly no time at all, lining yourselves up to look at the silhouette of Sleepy Peak outlined by the white dots in the sky behind it. You had to admit, it was stunning. You never imagined a mountain could be so beautiful at night. You began to sit and admire the sky— the milky way living up to its name as it spilled across the heavens above you. Planets twinkled how a glockenspiel sounded, and you could almost hear their delicate melody. David came and sat beside you, looking up at the infinite abyss of light and darkness that would never be fully explored by man. You rested your head onto his shoulder and sighed contentedly, allowing yourself to lean into him a bit. You stayed like that for some time, enjoying the stars, silence, and company.

“So,” David began, breaking the silence, “who here knows their constellations?”

Space Kid’s hand shot up. “I do! I do!”

“Then maybe you can help me with this song?” David pulled out his guitar and began to strum a familiar melody. It was the same one from your first night here.

“When you look up at night and see the stars shining bright
Do you know that they tell stories?
Their luminescent beams move around the world it seems
To tell people of their glories.
Oh, they know that they shine down.
And oh, they know when to make their rounds.
Ursa Major and Ursa Minor the big and little bears.
There’s Leo and Taurus whom at you can’t help but stare
Orion and his famous belt shines down for all to see
Cassiopeia sits on her chair stuck by the nymphs of sea
The starlight stories told through time help remind us of
Those who have come before us and to look up above
So next time you are outside on a cloudless night
Look up to the heavens above and bask in their light.”

He ended his song and the kids clapped politely. “It’s getting late,” he said when they finished,
“we should head back to camp.” As the kids began standing up, he took you by the hand and lead you to the spot where you would ‘fall’ to your death. The makeup was stashed below and you should have just enough time to apply it and run around the edge. Taking a deep breath, you let go of his hand, fell, and screamed bloody murder.

The kids flipped. Some screamed and tried to rush over the the edge, but you were far enough underneath to where they wouldn’t be able to see you. Finding a large rock, you shoved it over the side, making it sound like you landed with a thud in the foliage below.

“Holy fucking shit!” Neil screamed, “She’s dead!”

“David what the fuck!” Max exclaimed.

“I don’t know! I was helping her stand up and she fell off the ledge!”

You listened as you patted yourself down with the white powder, trying your hardest not to sneeze. Slowly, you crept your way back up the side of the cliff waiting for the perfect moment to pop out.

“We have to do something!” Max cried. “She’s probably already dead but we can’t just leave her out here!”

Putting on your best creepy voice, you made your move. “It is too late for me now.” You say as you step out from behind David. He jumps back in fear, screaming before giving you a wink. You begin to slowly walk forward towards the campers. They scream and back up closer to the edge. Continuing your slow crawl towards the terrified group, you asked David, ”Why did you push me? I thought we were a team.”

Horrified, the kids looked to David. “W-what are you talking about. It was an accident! I swear.”

Stopping in front of him, the little moonlight there was gave you an ethereal glow. As the wind blew your hair back slightly, you couldn’t believe how perfect everything was going. “Well I hope you know that now we’ll just have to be counselors forever.” You gave him a wink before gently pushing him off the edge. He gave a very theatrical fall before he disappeared from the campers view. They screamed again.

All except for Max who walked over to you and began punching you in the leg. Repeatedly.

“I. Thought. You. Were. Dead.” He accentuated each word with another punch. Stopping his attacks, you bend down and flick his nose.

“Gotcha.” You say before you laugh. David walks up from the ledge and gives you a high-five, both of you cheering at the successful prank. Slowly, the campers realize they’d been had.

“What the hell you guys! Not cool!” Ered says as she crosses her arms.

“What the fuck was that all about?” Neil asked, furious.

“We figured out your little plan for us,” you say, “so we figured we would hatch one ourselves.”

David was still laughing, “Oh man, we got you guys good. That’s classic.”

The kids were a mixture of ashamed and aggravated. They knew they had been found out, but that didn’t stop them from being upset about the situation. David eventually calmed down.

“But on a more serious note, you guys really shouldn’t be messing with people’s relationships. I
thought we would have been over this after last summer, but apparently not. You can’t force something to happen, no matter how much you want it to blossom into something more. It just will end terribly for both people and in the end, no one wants that. If it isn’t meant to be, you have to just live and let live and be grateful for what you do have."

The kids were silent for a moment before Max spoke up. “Fuck you guys, I’m going back to camp.”

The others followed so you and David shrugged, bringing up the rear.

Chapter End Notes

Don’t you love a little second hand embarrassment?

Campe Diem!
As you returned to the campground, you and David made sure all the campers got back to their tents safely. Satisfied that they were all accounted for, you said your goodnights and retreated to your own rooms. As soon as you were inside, you mad a mad dash to your journal, spilling the contents of the day onto the page. Recounting the day made you both incredibly embarrassed and twitterpated, but you pushed through taking a moment to scream into your pillow when you thought about the dance lesson.

He almost fucking kissed me. You write, laughing hysterically to yourself. I feel like I’m 15 again, gushing over my crush with my friends during a sleepover. But in reality, you were 22 gushing over your crush with your journal at a summer camp.

It’s practically the same thing, you add.

There was one thing David said that I’ve been thinking about though. He said ‘you can’t force something to happen, no matter how much you want it to blossom into something more.’ Could he have been talking about us? The thought was almost too much for you to handle. That is, until another thought crossed your mind.

Or was he just referencing his ex again?

You finished your thoughts and recounts of the day, deciding that you didn’t care if what David had said was about you or his ex before putting your journal to rest. You followed suit soon after, a dopey smile on your face.

The next few days passed without much incident. Monday was dedicated to Harrison’s magic camp, where he showed off his illusions. He ended the show by producing a goldfish swimming in its bowl from his hat, only to have it disappear again. Tuesday was Ered’s turn to show off her cliff diving skills at the lake. She offered to take you up to the very top, but you decided to stick to the lower ledges. Nikki’s adventure camp was Wednesday, and she taught everyone how to properly climb a tree. You actually had a knack for it, which was a good thing considering you and David had to rescue Preston from a particularly thick bunch of branches. It wouldn’t have been so difficult if he had just let you grab him, but he kept fussing about his collar. Luckily for him though, Thursday was the day he was able to rehearse his new play. You and David helped build set pieces as the kids worked on their lines for ‘Franklin the Musical.’
“Founding fathers are so in right now,” he told you.

Finally on Friday, you and David began teaching the campers the basics of music. You started off simple with note names and patterns, along with basic rhythm structure. You heard a few of them drumming beats at dinner that night and couldn’t help but smile. They reminded you of yourself—always having some sort of beat or song driving you forward.

Soon, they managed to keep a steady rhythm going, so you grabbed your utensils and improvised over the top. You started simple enough by hitting the onbeats in your left hand and making a one-two-one pattern in your right. Eventually, you got into it even more and began clinking your glass and hitting the side of your plate to make different sounds. Getting your feet in on the action, you used them to keep a steady beat. In a short amount of time, you managed to turn your table into a makeshift drum kit as you and the kids all jammed out using your plates, spoons, cups, and whatever else you could find. David, wanting to get in on the action made a drumroll on the table with his hands before using his palms and fists to play it like a conga. You matched his rhythm as he began to have his own little solo.

You all continued on for a while longer before it died off, everyone laughing as it did so. Looking around, you saw the kids all getting along and complimenting each other on their rhythms. Even Max looked like he was enjoying himself.

With it being a Friday night, it was time for a campfire and s’mores. You and David gathered the supplies and walked with the campers to the pit who were eagerly awaiting their sugary treats. As the night grew darker, Nikki made the suggestion to tell scary stories. David volunteered to go first and told a rather weak story about why you should always brush your teeth before bed. You rolled your eyes good-naturedly; his heart was in the right place, but scary stories didn’t seem to be his forte.

Ered went next telling the story of a horrific monster that escaped its containment at a lab not far from Sleepy Peak—it’s claws perpetually bloody from the victims it rips to shreds every night.

“Some say,” she said as she was wrapping up her story, “it still hunts down lone campers to this day, waiting for the perfect time to strike.” Just as she finished, a huge beast ran out of the forest shrieking as it made its way towards the bonfire. You all screamed. Well, except Max

“Guys it’s just Nurf. Look.” He reached up and pulled off the wooden mask revealing that it was indeed Nurf underneath. He took his spot next to Ered and the two high-fived; their scheme had worked just as planned.

“Nurf, did you make that mask?” David asked.

“Yeah. I found that carving my emotions into masks is both a good outlet and poetic metaphor for how people live their lives. Constrained by the unchanging mask they keep on to hid their real emotions.”

“Wow Nurf, that’s really quite amazing.”

“Yeah, but still not very scary,” Neil said

“YOU SURE DIDN’T SEEM TO THINK THAT WHEN YOU WERE SCREAMING LIKE A GIRL TWO MINUTES AGO.”

“Oh please. Everyone knows monsters don’t exist.”

“Maybe not,” you say steering their eyes towards yourself, “but people are. Gather ‘round kids and
let me tell you about Boxes the cat.”

You began the story of the boy and his friend who set off to find his missing cat. As you wove the tale of the crawlspace and walkie talkies, the campers listened with baited breath. Nearing the climax, you saw Preston and Nikki holding onto each other- eyes wide and teeth bared in tight frowns. Space Kid gasped out of fear and put his hands to his mouth, eyes darting around for some unseen assailant that could be listening..

“Boxes never came home.” You said with a small dip in your voice. Everyone sat in silence for a while after you finished, just staring deeply into the fire. Even David seemed a bit freaked out by your story.

“So much for trying to sleep tonight,” Neil said.

“Speaking of sleep, let’s get you campers to bed. It’s kind of late.” David pointed to his watch as proof.

Gathering what little they had brought, the campers retreated to their tents by twos, unwilling to go anywhere by themselves. As you and David headed back to the counselors cabin, he was incredibly on edge. An owl screeched and swooped overhead, prompting David to full-on scooby doo style jump into your arms. His eyes were pinheads darting in every direction. “H-hey, would you mind staying in my room tonight?” He asked, his voice an octave higher than normal.

“No problem Davey,” you chuckled setting him back on his feet. He clung to your arm the whole way to his room, where you left him momentarily to swap your shorts for some pajama bottoms. Upon returning, you found that he had done the same, changing into a matching set of blue striped pajamas complete with a nightcap. Stepping inside, you realized you hadn’t been in David’s room before. It was set up similarly to yours in terms of furniture, but he had decorated his walls a bit. A calendar of ‘werewolf of the month’ hung on one side of the door, while the top of what looked to be a broken totem pole was nailed to the other. On his corkboard he had multiple pictures pinned up with the word “memories” above it. Some were of him as a counselor, one was of a hamster. Many were of a group of kids you didn’t recognize standing at Camp Campbell with a man you had never seen before. “Hey David? Who are these kids?”

He walked over to the board, a fondness in his eyes. “That was my first year at camp. Look! There I am!” He pointed to a young red haired child standing and waving to the camera. “And there’s Gregg and Darla,” pointing to the counselors, “and...Jasper.” He grew very solemn at the last name.

“Jasper?”

“He was a camper here, like me but…” He trailed off, not wanting to continue.

“I’m so sorry.”

“It’s alright, it... happened a long time ago.” Turning his attention elsewhere, he pointed to a picture of the two of you. It was a selfie he had taken during the school year. “Remember this?”

“How could I forget?”

You had just had a rough day of classes. Two brutal lab exams and a take home exam due two days later had just finished gracing you with their presence when you tripped and fell face first into the only puddle on campus. Just when you thought things couldn’t get worse, one of the straps on your backpack ripped, leaving a hole at the bottom of your bag and forcing you to carry it awkwardly
against your chest. Pissed, soaked, and trying not to have all your crap fall out of your bag, you didn’t look where you were going and ran headfirst into David. As you fell, your stuff went everywhere scattering along the ground. You watched in horror as your exam fluttered away in the breeze, before getting stuck up in a tree.

Woah, are you ok? He had asked.

You just started sobbing right there on the sidewalk. Your day had been shit and you needed a good cry to get it all out.

Hey now. It’s gonna be alright. Hang on a sec. You continued to cry as David scaled the tree that had snagged your paper. He managed to climb out onto the branch that it was stuck to before dropping safely back to the ground. Here. He handed you the paper and offered you his hand. You took it and pulled him into a hug as you got to your feet, still crying. He patted your back gently as you held him. I think someone needs a break.

And so, he took you back to his house where he made you a small dinner. It wasn’t anything fancy, just mac and cheese and hotdogs, but it made you feel a lot better knowing he cared enough to do anything. You played a few rounds of Mario Kart before putting on comedy movie the two of you enjoyed.

Hey he said as he pulled out his phone. You looked towards him as he was lining up the shot. Putting his arm around you, he said smile.

You were still smiling at the memory now. Only David could have turned your day around that quickly. You glanced over at him and he seemed to be reliving the memory as well, a thoughtful smile on his face.

“Well, I guess it’s pretty late. We should get some rest.” He pulled out a sleeping bag from under the bed and began to lay it out on the floor.

“Uh David? What are you doing?”

“Oh well I figured you would want the bed, seeing as you’re my guest and all.”

“No way dude, it’s your room. You take it.”

“But I insist!”

You decided you were too tired to play these games, so you walked over and picked David up bridal style before laying him in the bed. You climbed in on the opposite side with your only explanation to his shocked expression being, “Sharing is caring.”

He chuckled softly as he eased up a bit, “I suppose it is.”

“Goodnight David,” you say as your eyelids begin to droop. Touching the top of his forehead to yours, he sleepily gave his reply.

“Goodnight ______.”

Chapter End Notes
Daww.

Early upload because I love you guys. Will resume regular schedule with another chapter tomorrow!

Campe Diem!
Welcome to the Jungle

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Welcome to the Jungle by Guns and Roses. Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1tj2zJ2Wvg

Warning! Kidnapping happens in this chapter. It's not violent, but it happens.

You figured you got a solid three hours of sleep before the screaming outside caused you and David to shoot up in bed. Scrambling to the door, you raced outside only to find the camp in total chaos. Tents had been crushed, fires started, and kids were running in terror away from whatever had caused all of this. Space Kid came sprinting towards you, screaming, “It’s a raid! It’s a raid!”

“Woah, Space Kid! Calm down What is going on?” You knelt down to his level. Before he had a chance to answer, he was hit in the helmet by a plunger on a rope.

“It’s too late for me!” He cried as he was dragged back. “Save yourselves!” You looked to David who seemed as flabbergasted as you. Gritting your teeth, you pulled your mouth into a determined frown and with an unspoken agreement, you and David, who was now matching your intensity, nodded before running towards the center of camp, determined to find out what was messing with it. With your faces illuminated by firelight and silhouettes moving through the chaos like shadows of unwavering vigilance, you found what, or who rather, had caused this. There, standing in the middle of all the pandemonium were three very militant looking boys. The largest one was currently taunting Nerris by holding her dice bag just out of reach, holding it high enough for her to miss when she jumped for it. The shortest one currently had Max in a serious headlock, which he was struggling to get out of. Between them stood who you could only assume to be their leader, dressed in a uniform with numerous badges covering a sash he wore across his body.

“Petrol,” he commanded. The larger one immediately stopped teasing Nerris and turned towards him. “I think we’ve successfully staken our claim. Let’s start phase two.” Petrol nodded and walked off towards the mess hall, still clutching Nerris’s dice.

“Billy,” Max said, still struggling, “you are taking this shit way too fucking serious.”

“Quiet prisoner,” the one clutching Max said as he tightened his choke hold. “And I told you to call me Snake.”

David marched up to the one who calls himself Snake and pried Max from his clutches.

“David! Oh thank God! These fascist, power-hungry, dickweeds are trying to take over the camp! Again!”

“Now Max,” David said, “I’m sure this is all some sort of big misunderstanding. I’m sure once we talk everything out we can get to the bottom of it.”

“LOOK AROUND THE CAMP YOU FUCKING IDIOT!”

“Well well well. If it isn’t the Camp Campbell counselor David. Pray tell, where is my sweet
Gwendolyn?” The leader asked as he touched the tips of his fingers together and held them in front of his chest.

“She couldn’t make it,” you say stepping into view- your eyes reflecting the fires burning around you. As you did, you couldn’t help but notice the little twerp not so subtly giving you a once over. You cross your arms in front of your chest in a manner you hope seems intimidating rather than uncomfortable. “Who are you?”

“Cedar scout, first class, Edward Pikeman. And who are you my lovely new specimen?” As he walked closer to you, you got your first good look at him: his hair came to two points near the front of his hairline as his yellow, beady little snake eyes stared intently at you. His face was covered in pimples and you could see his braces visible when he spoke.

“______. Don’t call me a specimen.” You glared at the teen in front of you.

“Ooh, you’re a feisty one.” He placed his arm around your hip and made a very unnerving humming noise as he bored his eyes into your midsection. You were not having any of it and made a move to grab him.

“Ah ah ah!” He teased by wiggling his finger at you. “I’d wouldn’t if I were you. We wouldn’t want any child abuse and endangerment lawsuits on our hands now would we?” Scowling, you backed off. David rushed to your side, chastising you for even attempting to lay your hands on a child.

“I’m so sorry Ed,” David apologized, “she’s new.”

“It’s no matter David. What’s important is why we’re here. You see, since the founder has been incarcerated and had no official heir to whom to leave the camp to, the land is going to be given to the highest bidder, or those who can prove they can use it the most effectively at the end of the summer. And because the Woodscouts obviously run the tightest ship on Lake Lilac, we are here for the deed.”

Like magic, Petrol appeared with a small iron safe under his arm.

Max had heard enough. “That isn’t how this works you fucking idiot! You can’t just take the deed and claim you own something. There’s legal processes and all kinds of other shit you have to deal with! You can’t just waltz in, steal a deed, and own something like in the Wild fucking West!”

“Of course not Max, which is why we’ll be taking collateral until the current caretaker signs over the camp.” He smirked as he looked to David. “Petrol,” he snapped his fingers, “the girl.”

Pikeman turned and began to walk away laughing maniacally as he did so. Before you could even react, Petrol had thrown you over his shoulder and was hustling towards the dock.

“______!” David cried running to catch up.

“Put me down!” You kicked and struggled, but the large teen had an iron grip on you leaving you unable to maneuver away. Soon you, Petrol, Pikeman and Snake were boating away from Camp Campbell as Pikeman called towards the shore, “We’ll see how your sad little camp progresses without your counselor.”

David dropped to his knees as he sat on the dock watching your boat get smaller and smaller on the water. The rest of the camp eventually made their way to where he was. David still had a look of shock on his face as Max tried to snap him out of it.
“David. David!” Max snapped his fingers in front of David’s face to no avail. “He’s frozen. Great. Now we have one kidnapped counselor and one who’s more useless than normal!”

“Let me take a crack at it,” Nikki said before walking in front of David. “David? Wake up!” She smacked him across the face forcing him to snap out of his daze.

“Huh? What happened? Kids?”

“Newbie just got fucking kidnapped by the Woodscouts! They spewed some bullshit about the deed and the camp and took her!” Max shouted.

“We gotta get her back!” Nerris cried.

David was silent for a few moments as he got off his knees. Taking a deep breath he finally spoke, still looking at the lake. “We’ll get her back, but it won’t be tonight. And staying here isn’t going to make it happen any faster.” He turned to face the campers, “I’ll need all of your help tomorrow, but for tonight, you all need your rest.”

“You’re just going to abandon her with the Woodscouts!?” Harrison cried, shocked.

“Of course not. Now bed, all of you.” David said. The campers rarely saw David this serious, so they complied. Before he left though, Max turned back towards David.

“Do you even have a plan?”

“Yes.” He hesitated a bit. “But I need someone else.”

Meanwhile, you were currently watching as Camp Campbell got smaller the farther away you got from it. The last thing you saw was David dropping to his knees helplessly as you were taken away.

“Well now, let’s get a better look at our newest addition to the Woodscouts.” Pikeman felt your biceps before you could do anything. “Hmm, strong. Tell me recruit, how are you at hand-to-hand combat?”

“If you don’t take me back right now you’re going to find out.”

“My my, so fierce.” He squinted as his voice dropped into a loud whisper, “I like it.” You shuddered as he got in your face, but you were not going to be intimidated by Pizza Face Mcgee. “She’s no Gwen, but she’ll do,” he said as his voice returned to normal. Turning away from you, he put his foot on the bow of the ship. “Think about it gentlemen. All of Camp Campbell’s land ours for the taking. It’s in the prime location for a new ropes course and is the perfect distance from peak popcorn buyers. With that land, we will be able to take over all of Lake Lilac, forcing those Flowerscouts out with our might!” As he laughed, you figured this was your chance. Taking a deep breath, you scrambled to the edge of the boat, but before you could jump, you were tackled and held with your arms behind your back by Petrol.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Snake said as he held a sharpened candy cane up to you.

You sighed in frustration as you accepted the fact you weren’t getting out of this so easily. The four of you sat in silence as the boat puttered across the lake and as the sky got more cloudy, you saw where they were taking you.

The place looked more like bootcamp than summer camp. A huge cement wall topped with barbed wires surrounded rows of tents. Searchlights illuminated the gray skies above it, and muddy
grounds threatened trench foot to any who walked on it. In the center of camp sat a huge orange tent with “Camp Woodscouts” in black lettering printed on the front.

Reaching the shore, Petrol picked you up again as Pikeman lead the group to a tent near the back of camp. Once you were inside, you were set down on the cot that served as a bed.

“These are your quarters for the time being, recruit. As you prove your worth, you’ll be able to move up in ranks to gain more privileges. If you are caught trying to escape, it will result in a demerit which means you get those privileges taken away. And we wouldn’t want that, now would we?” He gave you a sinister smile. “You know it kills me to treat a lady this way, but it’s unfortunately not up to me.”

“The hell are you talking about? If you didn’t order this. Who did?”

“The Scoutmaster of course, who else? He oversees all of our camp to ensure it stays as efficient as possible. He’s what you and David could only dream of being.”

“If he’s so great, why isn’t he here now, overseeing this?” You ask.

“All questions will be answered in due time, recruit,” he said as he patted your head condescendingly. “Now don’t do anything I wouldn’t do, you may not like the results.”

The three boys left you alone in your tent allowing you to gather your thoughts.

If you were being completely honest with yourself, you were scared. You had no idea as to where you were aside from the fact that you were in a different camp. What this place was like you could only think the worst about as so far your only interaction with its inhabitants was being kidnapped and seeing them trash your camp. You shook on the cot slightly- this was bad. Really bad. The rational part of you was trying to tell you that you could just leave if you wanted to- you were an adult after all. But your fear was taking over, not just for yourself, but for camp. Max was right, they needed to go through all kinds of processes to actually get it, but you assumed that they’d do just about anything to do so.

You shuddered at the thought of what might happen if you don’t get out soon and did your best to fall into a restless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Ok so full disclosure- I wrote this chapter (and the next few) before the release of season 3. When I saw that the literal first episode was about the camp shutting down my reaction was kind of like this:

*pterodactyl screeching* YOU'VE GOTTA BE SHITTING ME

I had this weird feeling of, well, I'm not really sure what I would call it. Disappointment? I'd wanted to make this story at least somewhat original, borrowing from the show here and there for references and whatnot, but ultimately working it into it's own little universe. But I eventually got over it and realized hey- I guess I called it? Kinda? So, while that plot point certainly shares similarities with the show, I'll do my best to deviate it a little. Make it stand out a bit I guess.
Anyway, thank you all so much for the love and feedback! I appreciate every hit, kudos, and comment I receive. And don't worry, I'll be writing this thing to the end, even if other ideas happen to cross over.

Campe Diem!
Feel it Still

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Feel it Still by Portugal. The Man. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBkHHoOIIn8

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gwen walked out of her room, ready to start her day off right with a cup of coffee. Walking into the kitchen of her small apartment, she was in the middle of pouring herself a mug when her phone rang. Seeing that it was David, she let it ring for a moment. She hadn’t heard from him in about a week, and the last time the two texted was when David was freaking out about you traumatizing the camp with Cards Against Humanity.

- Honestly? That’s hilarious. I wish I had thought of that when they did it to us.

- Gwen, that doesn’t help! I don’t know what to do. I know she’s trying her best but this seems way out of line. Hang on, someone is at the door.

About a minute passed before his next text came in.

- That was her. I told her we would talk tomorrow before I closed the door on her. Now I feel awful. She seemed to want to apologize! What should I do?

- Dude you closed the door on her? Dick move. I think you should apologize before things escalate. You guys seem close and I don’t think either of you want this to come between you.

- I guess you’re right Gwen. I’ll talk to her in the morning. Thanks.

- No problem.

Remembering the last conversation they had, Gwen was secretly pretty happy to be able to hear his voice again. It had been a while and even though she didn’t exactly miss camp itself, like, at all, David was a good guy and she was glad they kept in touch. She picked up her phone.

“Hey David.”
“Gwen! Oh thank goodness you’re there!” His usual cheery self seemed a bit frantic.

“What’s up?”

“Oh you know, just the usual. Kids being kids and all. How ar- ow!” It sounded like he had just been hit by something.

“David? You ok?”

“Never better,” he said, his voice a bit strained.

“So what’s this all about anyway? It’s eight o’clock. I would’ve thought that phones would be basically illegal by now.” She chuckled a bit before sipping her coffee.

David sighed, sending Gwen’s stomach straight through the floor. He never sighs, what the hell is going on?

“Gwen, there’s... a bit of a situation. We need your help.” He explained about the raid, the deed being stolen, and about how you were kidnapped. He filled her in on how she fit into the plan.

“Ok, let me get this straight,” she said as she rubbed the bridge of her nose. “You want me to drive down to camp on my day off, go to the Woodscouts, attempt to seduce Pikeman, find your friend, and get her back?”

“...Please?”

She sighed and finished her coffee. “You know what? Fine. But you owe me big time.” Hanging up the phone, she called her doctor.

“Hey doc? I’m gonna need a refill on my prescription.”

At Camp Campbell, the kids did their best to try and go through their morning activities, but everyone was still on edge from the raid. David was especially nervous, taking to pacing in front of camp anxiously awaiting Gwen’s arrival. The campers eventually abandoned their activities and peered around the edge of the mess hall, watching him.

“Man,” Neil said, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen him like this.”

“Yeah,” Nikki agreed. “It’s kind of weird to see him so serious. What do you think his plan is?”

“He’ll probably rely on my mastery of illusion to create a disguise so that he could sneak in,” Harrison said.

“No vey. He’s going to send me in as a spy. I’m obviously ze least suspect person here,” Dolph countered. Everyone peered at him. “What?”

“Guys, please. Let’s be real here. I’m the one he’ll send to get her back, seeing as I’ve got the best attitude,” Ered said.

They argued a bit longer until they noticed a car coming up the dirt road leading to camp, and as it did so, David finally stopped pacing. The campers watched as a very familiar face stepped out of the car and greeted David casually. Nikki tore across the distance separating them and latched herself onto Gwen’s legs. “Gwen! You came back!”

Gwen laughed slightly before returning Nikki’s hug. “It’s nice to see you too, kid. Are the others here?” One by one the kids came out and gave welcomed her back to camp. Max was reluctant to
show any display of personal affection, so Gwen picked him up and gave him a noogie, much to his displeasure.

“Augh, put me down you monster! I will murder you!”

“Good to see you too Max,” Gwen said as she put him back on the ground.

“So, wait,” Harrison began, “if you’re here, does that mean we’re not going to get our other counselor?”

“On the contrary Harrison,” David said, “Gwen is essential to getting her back. Now, I’ll need all of your help with this, so here’s the plan.”

David assigned each camper a different task to prepare Gwen. Neil made smoke bombs for a quick getaway if things went south. Gwen didn’t think she would really need them, but hey, extra cover is always nice.

*What the hell am I thinking?* Her inner voice told her.

Nerris helped her go over possible scenarios within the camp, and helped Gwen get into character. “It’s just like LARPing! But instead of fighting paper and imagination, you’ll be actually going undercover!”

Nikki was next, who taught her how to run in heels. She was surprisingly good at it. Noticing Gwen’s confusing, Nikki said, “Yeah, when I was a Flowerscout we had to learn how to do this. Never thought it would ever come in handy though. But check this out!” She pulled off her shoe and impaled the heel into a nearby tree. “It works great as a weapon too!”

Harrison was after, though he didn’t have much. He handed her a small velvet bag. “That bag will only work once, so only open it when you absolutely need it. It’ll give you an item you really need.”

Ered’s roll was to teach Gwen how to use the gadgets she had swiped from her dads. “I got this one while they were away in Russia. It’s a two-way radio disguised as earrings. One is a speaker and the other is a microphone, so you can talk back and forth with us. We should be able to hear you through this.” Ered held up a large walkie-talkie before attaching the small devices into Gwen’s ears and testing it out.

“How Gwen, can you hear me?” The sentence was echoed through the small device.

“Uh, copy?” She said, and the signal was carried to the walkie-talkie.

“Perfect.”

“Ered this is really cool and all, but is this stuff even legal to own?”

“Nope,” she replied giving Gwen finger guns. “Also, those earrings double as a self destruct mechanism, so try not to go around saying ‘fire in the hole’ a bunch. You’ll be fine,” she said placing her hand on Gwen’s shoulder, “Well, probably anyway.”

With her anxiety through the roof, Gwen went to Nurf, who gave her exercises to keep her emotions manageable.

“But if that still doesn’t work,” he said as he finished up the last exercise, “JUST PUNCH SOMETHING REALLY HARD.” He emphasized his point by punching a small tree, snapping its
trunk. “That always makes me feel better.”

Space kid gave advice on how to navigate by using the stars. “Just in case you get lost on your way back. You know how it is.” She shrugged and nodded, not understanding what he meant at all.

Preston was on costume and hair duty, teaming up with Dolph who did make-up.

“Honey, you are in good hands! Don’t worry about a thing. When we’re done with you, you’re going to be fabulous.”

“Ja! How hard could it be? Your face is just as much a canvas as mine own paintings.”

When they were finished, Gwen got a good look at herself. They had dressed her in a replica WWII style female officer uniform. The army green color contrasted with the brass buttons running down the front of the blazer. Her pencil skirt matched the color of the blazer, reaching just below the knee. A belt cinched her waist which showed off a bit more curve than she was used to, but she had to admit, it looked great. Her hair had been done up into victory curls, mimicking those of women who had worn them in the 1940’s, and atop her head sat a triangular hat, completing the look. Her makeup was subtle, but emphasized her cheekbones and lips, making them pop just a bit. She looked absolutely perfect. Thanking them, she headed to her last stop: Max.

Stepping into the mess hall, Gwen found it dark save for a single light illuminating the kid at the other end of the room. She took a seat across from him, a serious expression on her face.

“So,” he said, “you think you’re ready to take on the Woodscouts?” He asked, arms folded across his chest.

She took a deep breath before staring him deep in the eyes. “I am.”

“No you’re not. Look how nervous you are. You’re shaking in those shitty heals your wearing. They’ll chew you up and spit you out over there.”

Taken aback, Gwen tried to respond but was cut off. “Listen Gwen, it doesn’t matter how ready you think you are, there’s no way you can face those guys. They’re either going to figure it out or be drooling over you the whole time making this whole thing pointless. Even though it already is because there’s no way they’re just going to hand the shit they stole back. Oh yeah, did no one tell you? You need to bring back the deed too, or else they’ll just keep coming back.”

Gwen was confused, she didn’t know she also had to actually get the deed to the camp back along with you. David hadn’t told her that. “What’s your game here, Max?”

“Don’t have one. I’m just trying to be the only fucking realist in this fucking camp. I thought you would have been able to see through this bullshit, but I guess you’ve gone soft on me Gwen. You can’t do this.”

Gwen had heard enough. Picking Max up but the collar of his hoodie, she forced him to look her in the eyes. “I didn’t come down here on my day off the be insulted by some little shit with a superiority complex. I’m going to go into that camp, getting our shit back and leaving by any means necessary. I’ll burn down their whole fucking camp if I have to.”

Max smiled confidently, “Now that’s someone who’s ready to take down the Woodscouts.” The lights flashed on, making Gwen shield her eyes momentarily. Once she revealed them, she realized she was surrounded by the rest of the camp, hopeful smiles on their faces. They all seemed confident that Gwen was going to get their counselor back along with the rights to their camp.
David walked to her, holding out his hand. “You ready?”

She grasped it. “Let’s fucking do this.”

Chapter End Notes

YA GIRL GWEN'S HERE.

Also, happy Father's Day everyone! Have a double upload!

Campe Diem!
You woke up that morning momentarily forgetting where you were. Taking a moment to adjust to your surroundings, you stared at the cotton cloth in front of you as the memory of the past day came back. You were stuck in the Woodscout’s camp after being kidnapped. You had decided to play nice for however long you needed to, mainly out of self-preservation and fear of the unknown, but you refused to be beaten by some teenage punks who thought they could control you. You would just have to hide your fear under a few layers of anger topped with fake pep.

“Good morning my new recruit. How did you sleep?”

_Speak of the devil. You thought. Here goes nothing._

Jumping to your feet, you salute Pikeman with a ready expression on your face. “I slept well, sir. What does today bring?”

Pikeman smirked. “Had a change of heart have we? Good to see. I was going to have to escort you this morning with your hands tied. I’m glad that doesn’t seem to be the case.” He seemed pleased with your cooperation. Throwing some clothes at you he said, “Get dressed. You won’t be needing those old things any more. You have five minutes.” He clicked a stopwatch and headed outside.

You quickly got changed and looked down at what you were wearing. It was a uniform identical to that of the rest of the Woodscouts. The tan button-up fit slightly awkwardly as it was made for a man, and you prayed no buttons would pop open. The right lapel had the patch of a seed on it, while the left had a pocket. The green shorts fit decently, though you wished they were a bit longer. Finally, you clicked the brown belt into place and braced yourself before stepping out of the tent.

“4:38, not bad for a newbie.” He looked you up and down again, pausing much too long on your legs. Regaining his composure, he spoke. “Come, I have someone who I need to introduce you to.” He began to walk toward one of the larger tents on the opposite side of camp, so you hustled to catch up.

“So, Pikeman. What does this mean?” You pointed to the patch on your shirt.

“Ah yes, the ranking system. You see, the farther you get in the Woodscouts, the more you are able to grow. Your patch shows you’re a seedling, and considering you’re new, it makes sense. But if you apply yourself, you’ll be able to move through the ranks gaining the glory of the Woodscouts!”

“What are some of the ranks then?”

“It starts with seedling and sapling. After you move through your first few ranks, you’re able to
gain the names based on what badges you earn. For example, Petrol is an Oak scout based on the
fact that most of his badges come from strength related activities. Snake is a Maple scout, as his
expertise comes from survival related activities. As for me, I’m a Cedar scout as I’ve shown
exceptional promise in leadership, if I do say so myself.” He paused, waiting for your praise. When
it didn’t come, he continued. “The highest honor a scout can achieve is to reach the rank of
Redwood. It’s a way to show that a scout has shown mastery in multiple aspects and has flourished
into a mighty giant, much like that of the Coastal Redwood which towers over all the rest.”

“That sounds kind of authoritarian?”

“Oh whatever. I don’t see Camp Crampbell over there coming up with anything cool,” he huffed.
The conversation was over and you walked in silence as you reached your destination.

“Look sharp recruit, you’re about to introduced to the Scoutmaster.” He paused in front of the tent,
holding the flap open. Inside, you found that it was furnished slightly. There was a metal filing
cabinet at the back of the tent and next to it was a wooden desk. In front of it was a single wooden
chair. Behind the desk sat a figure who had their back to you, features hidden by shadows. Taking
a seat in the chair in front of you, you listened as the person finally spoke.

“So.” A deep voice matched the silhouette you could make out. “You’re our new recruit. Welcome
to the Woodscouts.” As he turned, you took in the sight of the Scoutmaster. He was a large man,
taller than David. His chest was large both in width and depth due to the muscles that made
themselves known. You could see the outline of his pecks struggling against his shirt, and his arms
and legs were tree trunks compared to your own branches. Orange hair had been buzzed short, save
for a small tuff at the top of his head. Yellow eyes seemed shocked as he viewed you.

“Wait, you’re a girl? Oh gosh dang it, that boy was supposed to bring the other one.” He covered
his eyes with his hand in frustration. Groaning, he looked at you again. “I guess you’ll have to do.
Listen, I want your land, and you’re going to give it to me. It’s too precious to be in the hands of
you and your boyfriend across the lake. None of you have any idea what you’re doing over there!”
He stood up to look down at you. “Do you have any idea how frustrating it is to be stuck over here
watching you idiots mess everything up?”

Aggravated, you straighten your back off the back of the chair and sat on the edge of your seat.
“First off, David isn’t my boyfriend. Secondly, was this your plan all along? To intimidate us into
signing over Camp Campbell? Because it isn’t going to work. I don’t care how long I have to hold
out here for, you can’t make me do anything. I refuse to sign over the land.”

“You can’t even sign it. David has to, seeing as he is the primary caretaker. You’re just a small
pawn in this game we’re playing. You’re now the key we need to get David here, you see? He’ll
break sooner than later, and then your land will be ours.”

You used what little courage you could muster to roll your eyes at him. “David wouldn’t sign over
that camp if his life depended on it.”

“No?” He said pulling out the deed from his filing cabinet. “We’ll see about that. Without this deed
you’ll have nothing. I have half a mind to just burn the thing right now.”

You did your best to hide your anxiety, and spoke up again. “You need that as much as we do if
you want any shot at all for the land. Pikeman told us that it either goes to the highest bidder or
those who can use it best. And well, this isn’t exactly a five star resort.” You threw your hand out
to gesture to the camp. “So how about you keep your shitty intimidation tactics to yourself.”

You slammed your way out of the tent shaking slightly, only to find Snake waiting for you. “Boss
wants you on the ropes course. Let’s move.”

Following him across camp, you tried your hand at some questions. “So, the Scoutmaster. Are he and Pikeman related?”

“Father and son. Ed’s gonna inherit the camp once his dad retires.”

“Oh.”

You didn’t bother asking anything else. You were too preoccupied with your own thoughts.

How am I going to get him away from that deed? I could try and create a distraction but then I would just get recaptured. Not to mention, I don’t know my way around this place and swimming is too far without my gear. Plus, there would be no way to keep the deed dry, even if I was able to get it away from the Scoutmaster.

Without realizing it, you had reached the ropes course. It was an old, rickety mess with loose ropes and unstable foundations everywhere. The thought of it made you nervous—heights were not exactly your thing after a nasty fall when you were little had left you hesitant to climb very high, but you figured if you were going to get dragged up anyway, you would prefer to do it on your own accord. As you climbed to the top, you took in your surroundings. In the daylight, you could see over the lake: To your left was a dense forest, blocking any visibility from penetrating its lush secrets. To your right was another camp, though not one you recognized. You remembered Pikeman saying something about Flowerscouts. Maybe it was theirs?

Lastly, on the far side of the lake was Camp Campbell. You were hit with a massive sense of homesickness, despite not even having been gone a day. Getting a good look at it, you realized why it was so desirable: It was the perfect size for a summer camp. Small enough to be walkable but large enough for various activities. It had the best shore on the lake—its sandy terrain wasn’t course or rocky, but soft and fine. The longer you gazed, the more guilty you felt.

The kids must be worried. They were terrified of the Woodscouts. And David…

Your train of thought became derailed as Snake snapped his fingers next to you. “Hey, time to move.”

Oh I’ll move alright. Looking around, you noticed a rope swinging on its last threads off to the side of the course. Pulling on it with all your might, you managed to snap it from its fragile constraints.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Snake asked. You chuckled darkly before pulling the rope taut in your hands.

“You boys fucked with the wrong counselor.”

You managed to get Snake bound and tied to the side of the platform before you began your descent down the ladder. As the top of your head disappeared from his view, Snake called out, “You’ll never get away with this! The Woodscouts will get that camp and then you’ll have nothing!” He tried to get out of his bindings but to no avail.

Don’t look down don’t look down don’t look down don’t look down you think as you slowly make your way towards the ground. Once your feet hit the dirt, you rushed off in the direction of your tent, hoping that your old clothes were still there. Luckily, it seemed that they had been untouched since you left. You were about to change, when Pikeman walked in.

“Recruit? You’re supposed to be at the ropes course. Explain yourself!” He crossed his arms and
squinted his eyes, suspicious.

“Uh, one of the ropes snapped and made the course too dangerous so Snake sent me here for laundry duty.” You hold up your clothes as ‘proof.’

“Hmm, very well. It’s all the better that you’re here. There is another lovely lady who I’d like to introduce you to. Come.” You followed him to the front of camp where another young woman stood. She was dressed in what looked like WWII era clothes, fitting right into the militant theme the camp had going on.

“Recruit, I’d like to introduce you to my sweet Gwendolyn.”

Chapter End Notes

Campe Diem!
You stood in shock. This was Gwen? The Gwen David had told you about? You assumed that she wouldn’t be associated with the Woodscouts at all, considering how much David told you she seemed to despise them, yet here she was hanging off Pikeman’s arm like a damn ornament.

“Pikeman, you were saying something about showing me my quarters? Something about staying with the other girl?” Gwen asked, slowly blinking her eyes.

“Of course my dear. But you know I am a busy man, and have duties to attend to. So our newest recruit will show you the way.” He looked at you, suddenly very stern, “Won’t she?”

You gave a nervous smile and saluted him, “Of course I will! Gwen if you would please follow me.”

She held out her arm in a way reminiscent of the bride walking down the aisle, so you linked your arm through hers and began walking toward your tent. As you walked, she started whispering.

“I’m here to help you get out of here.”

“Why should I trust you? You’re dressed just like them!”

“I know. Preston made the costume as a disguise. Listen, I’ll explain everything once we get to the tent. I promise I’m here to help.”

Upon reaching the tent, Gwen dropped onto the cot and started hyperventilating with her head in her hands. Concerned, you made a move you comfort her but she held up her hand. “I’m ok. Just give me a moment.” You watched as she was able to slow down her breathing and gain control of herself once more. She stood and faced you, holding out her hand. “Well, I’ve had weirder introductions. I’m Gwen and I fucking hate the Woodscouts.”

That sounded more like the Gwen David had told you about. “I’m _____ and that makes two of us,” you say as you shake her hand. “Listen, if you’re really here to help, we don’t have much time. I kind of tied Snake to the ropes course and they’re going to notice any minute that he’s missing.”

“You tied him to the ropes course?”

“...Yes?”

“Nice.” She snickered at the thought. “But you’re right, we need to get out of here. I’m not sure if I can take much of that greasy mouth-breather drooling all over me. Do you know where the deed is?”

“The Scoutmaster keeps it in his tent. If you can distract him, I can sneak in and grab it. Then we
can make a mad dash to the entrance. You can drive us out of here and-

“I didn’t take my own car here. Pikeman drove me in from town. Had to make it seem convincing.”

“...Wanna steal a boat?”

“I like the way you think.”

“Gwen? Gwen can you hear me?” David’s voice came through one of her earrings. She put her hand up the her other ear, turning on the speaker.

“I can hear you David. What’s up?”

“What’s going on, we can’t hear anything! Did you find her?”

“Got her right in front of me. Listen for yourself.” She motioned for you to talk into her ear. Confused, you did as she suggested.

“Uh, David? Can you hear me?”

“_____! He cried right into Gwen’s other ear, making her wince a bit. Are you ok? What happened? Are you-”

“David, we’ll save the reunion for when I’m back. It’s kind of weird talking to Gwen’s ear.”

“Right. Sorry. Just... be careful, both of you. The kids and I would be devastated if anything were to happen to either of you. See you soon.”

You heard a click and you stepped away from Gwen as she stuck her finger in her ear. “Never got any quieter, did he?”

“Heh, nope.”

Alright. I’ve got an idea on how to distract the Scoutmaster. I can buy a little time so that you can get in and get out with the deed. Just be fast. And take some of these.” She handed you little black capsules. “Smoke bombs, courtesy of Neil. You know, for little shits, those campers are damn good at what they do. Remind me to tell you the story about the Camporee.” She mentally prepared herself before sticking out her arm again. “Ready?”

You took it. “Always.”

Making your way out of the tent, you lead her back to Pikeman. You suggested that he should introduce her to the Scoutmaster.

“An excellent idea, recruit. After all, one should get to know their future in-laws. Come Gwendolyn, it’s time I introduce you to my father!” They headed off in the direction of the Scoutmaster’s tent. You followed at a distance, trying your hardest to look inconspicuous. You hoped Gwen would be able to get the Scoutmaster out of the tent, but you could always just throw a smoke bomb and get the job done just as well. Scoping out the area, you saw that Gwen had convinced the Scoutmaster to speak outside, allowing you to sneak around the back of his tent, slip under the cloth, and find yourself back in his makeshift office. You reached for the filing cabinet and found it to be unlocked, much to your surprise. You grabbed the deed only to be tackled by an unknown assailant a moment later. Struggling, you rolled onto your back to find you had been pinned by Snake. He had a wild look in his eye as he held up his sharpened candy cane to your
“Remember me?” He brought the cane down but you grabbed his arm at the last second, stopping the peppermint spike before it could reach you.

“Of course I do. You’re the only fucker here I could reasonably drop kick.”

“Heh, still such the wild card. You know, I might have appreciated that had you not left me to die up there.”

“You were there for what? An hour? Quit whining you big baby.”

“YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT ISOLATION DOES TO A MAN!”

Upon hearing the commotion, the trio outside stepped in to find the filing cabinet open and Snake pinning you to the ground.

“What is the meaning of this?” commanded the Scoutmaster.

“Caught this one trying to get the deed. Seems like she was gonna make a break for it.”

Gwen cringed a bit at the sight of you on the floor. You didn’t blame her. Nothing could ever be easy, could it? You pushed Snake off and got to your feet, the Scoutmaster already in front of you.

“Well well well, little pawn. I see you were trying to get kinged?”

“That’s checkers and you’re an idiot.”

“Shame you feel that way, because now I believe it’s time for you to realize your actions have consequences.” He grabbed you and placed you next to Gwen before pulling out a lighter.

Smirking, he opened the drawer only to find the deed missing. Wide-eyed, he looked to you as you held it up.

“Looking for this little thing?” you tease, waving it tantalizingly in front of you.

He rushed at you, causing you to fall back onto the ground. Gwen pulled you to your feet. “Alright, it’s time to leave. See you never, assholes!” Throwing a smoke bomb on the ground, Gwen concealed the tent in a thick black cloud. The two of you backed out and made a break for the front entrance. Soon after you left though, a loud alarm was heard through the camp, signaling your escape attempt. Seeing hoards of scouts move to the exit, you figured that there was no way you were getting out through the front. The large cement walls surrounded you and Gwen as you hurried through the camp. Panicking, you looked around the to see if there was any other way out until your eyes fell on the ropes course.

“Follow me!” You cried as you grabbed Gwen’s arm. The two of you made haste to the old course. It’s high scaffolding towered over the pair of you, but it also towered over the wall. You spotted a taut rope tied to a hanging sandbag and by pulling on it, you discovered it lead all the way up to the top. With enough momentum, it could carry you and Gwen over the wall.

“Gwen, do you have anything that could cut this thing?”

“I think so!” She grabbed the small velvet bag from her pocket and reached into it, pulling out a small screwdriver. “Son of a bitch!” Thinking for a moment and with no other options, she handed you her shoes. “Try to chop it with the heels.” It’s all you had. Quickly, you got to work on the rope, slashing at it as best you could. It started to come apart more and more as you hacked away.
“Uh, _____? We’ve got company.” You turned around and saw a mass of scouts heading in your direction. You turned back and doubled down on the ferocity at which you were taking down this rope. It couldn’t end like this, not here. Not with them.

“We gotta go now! They’re gonna swarm us!” They were almost on you.

“Just a few more hits.” You say, still concentrated on your task. Seconds before scouts reached you, the rope snapped. You grabbed Gwen as it did so and the force of the sandbags pulled you up towards the sky. Nearing the end of the line, you let go and swung over the edge of the wall, landing hard in a tree on the other side.

“Holy shit!” Gwen exclaimed. “I can’t believed that actually fucking worked!”

“We’re not out of the woods yet. Come on, we gotta get to the dock.” Scrambling to get down out of the tree, you and Gwen started sprinting towards the dock. As soon as you did so, the Woodscouts exited their main entrance and started after you making it a race to the pier that you weren’t about to lose. Gaining on your target, you were suddenly confronted with another obstacle, because standing between you and your get away was Petrol, poised and ready to sprint. You couldn’t slow down and there was no time to get around him.

“Gwen, I need you to trust me. When I say jump, I need you to jump as high and as far as you can.”

Petrol started charging at you and Gwen. “We can’t go through him, we have to go around!”

“There’s no time! Just jump when I tell you too!”

Petrol picked up his pace.

“He’s going to lay us out! We can’t make it!” She was frantic.

“Trust me!”

Petrol was going at full speed now, a nasty smile on his face. Gwen kept running in horror, her eyes wide in fear of what was about to happen. Petrol poised his leg to tackle you.

“JUMP!” you yelled as he became airborne. As you called to her, time seemed to slow down. You watched as Gwen’s screaming figure sailed over Petrol while you baseball-slid underneath him. Gritting your teeth, you felt the ground scratching your arm, but you gave Petrol a wicked smile as you watched him fly over you.

As soon as you were in the clear, you got back on your feet and kept running, Gwen beside you once again. Looking back, you saw Petrol slam right into a group of scouts, taking them down like bowling pins. The two of you reached the dock and hopped into the nearest boat. You took the oars as Gwen did her best to get the motor started. She pulled and pulled, but the thing wouldn’t start.

“It’s. Not. Working!” She said as she continued to pull on the chord.

“Keep trying!” you said as you were rowing away. You watched as the scouts began to jump in their own boats, quickly catching up with you.

She looked over the motor but found no place to open it. Frustrated, she kicked it and turned to face the shore. The others were almost upon you again, but this time it seemed like there was no way out. Reaching up to turn on her radio, Gwen remembered what Ered had told her about the earrings.
“Hey, I’ve got an idea! Do you trust me?”

“I have so far!”

“Then drop the oars and hold onto your ass!” Tearing off the earrings, she threw them overboard calling out “fire in the hole!” as she did so. A few seconds after hitting the water, a massive explosion caused a huge wave to go in every direction propelling you and Gwen forward and the Woodscouts back.

A bit of debris flew out of the water towards your boat, destroying the handle of the motor. Without any way to control it, the boat was going to crash any second. You thought this was it, but remembering the screwdriver she had in the bag, Gwen pulled it out and jammed it into the place where the handle would be, giving her control of the boat and allowing you to ride the wave for as long as possible. Once it subsided, you were far out of the reach of the Woodscouts. Looking at each other, you both began hysterically laughing and cheering. Hugging each other tightly, you jumped as much as you could in the little boat without capsizing it.

“We fucking did it! We beat the Woodscouts!” You pumped your fist in the air with excitement.

“I can’t believe we’re even still alive after that. I hope I never have to see those fuckers again. That was absolute hell.”

“You’re telling me!”

The two of you gushed a bit longer over each other’s contributions and the unbelievable feats you had just pulled off. The adrenaline was still pumping through each of you. Eventually though, it wore off and both of you were exhausted. Gwen decided to give the motor one last attempt. Giving up the rest of her energy, she managed to get it running and soon you were puttering toward Camp Campbell.

You were going home.

Chapter End Notes

Never be afraid to kick some ass, everyone.

Campe Diem!
Nikki was the first to spot you and Gwen on the lake as you made your way towards the shore. Giving the signal to the rest of the campers, they all made their way to the docks, cheering as they did so. Gwen cut the motor and let the boat glide into place as you and she triumphantly stood in the vessel. As soon as you stepped onto the wooden planks, the kids crowded both of you, giving you three cheers for all. Gwen saw how much you adored these kids and couldn’t help but smile. She may not understand what David and now you see in this place, but she could at least appreciate the fact that it seemed to bring you joy.

As you all pulled away from each other, you looked over to see David standing patiently at the opposite end of the dock. Beginning to walk towards him, you couldn’t contain yourself and ran in his direction. He did the same and you wrapped each other into a tight embrace, meeting in the middle of the dock. You stayed there for some time, neither of you willing to let the other go.

As you two were preoccupied with each other, the campers looked on in excitement. Gwen crossed her arms and gave Max a half smile. “So, what’s up with those two?”

“They both like each other, but neither is willing to take the plunge and admit it.” Max shrugged and put his hands in his hoodie pocket. “At least they seem happy with each other.”

Gwen got a devious sparkle in her eye. “You know, if you wanted to we could probably—”

“Get them together? Already tried it. Didn’t work. They coordinated a counter plan which resulted in newbie faking her own death.”

“God damn it.”

After some time, David released you to look you in the eye. As he did so, his hand grazed where you had slid during your escape. Wincing, you sucked air in through your teeth.

“Oh my gosh!” David said, concerned. “I’m so sorry! You’re injured!” He gently took your arm in his hand and looked at the damage. There were several long cuts going down the length of your forearm, but nothing super deep. “I’ll help you get cleaned up, don’t worry!”

“I’m ok David. I just need some bandages and I’ll be back to normal.”

“But—”

“Alright you two, what’s going on over here?” Gwen walked up smacking both of you on the back.

“Gwen! I can’t even begin to thank you enough for what you’ve done! You really are a CBFL!” David grabbed her and pulled her into a big hug.
“Yeah, no problem big guy,” she said as she patted his back, unable to breathe properly. He released her and she took in a deep breath.

“So Gwen,” he continued, “What are you going to do next? It’s kind of late, do you think you want to drive all the way home?”

She looked at the sky, which was getting darker by the minute. Sighing, she allowed herself to drop her posture just a bit, closing her eyes before looking up again. “After the day I’ve had? No way. Can I stay the night if there’s an open tent?”

“You’re staying in the counselors cabin,” you said. “We can have a girls night! I think we’ve earned it after all the testosterone we just had to endure.”

“Honestly? That sounds amazing.”

“Then it’s settled. You two can take the cabin while I stay outdoors with the kids.” David declared. “But first,” he said as he looked at you, “I think we should tend to your injury.”

“Injury?” Gwen asked. You held up your arm so that she could see.

“Battle scars,” you say with confidence.

“Y-yes well, battle scars or not, we should get some disinfectant on them.” David replied.

“Go,” Gwen said, “I’ll take care of the kids. You go clean and dress the wounds.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure. It’s not like I don’t know how to handle them. Plus it’ll only be like what, fifteen minutes? I got it.”

You hugged her, “Thank you, Gwen.”

“Don’t mention it. Now go!” She pushed the two of you forward toward the counselors cabin.

As you walked, David listened intently the entire time as you told him about the experience. He was surprised to hear that the Scoutmaster was Edward’s father, but he realized in hindsight it made sense. They did look alike. His eyes were wide with worry and excitement as you recalled your daring escape, and he gasped when you told him about the explosion. He made a mental note to talk to Ered about potentially dangerous gadgets.

You talked right up until David had finished wrapping your arm in gauze. Hopping off the table, you inspected it. The disinfectant had stung a bit, but David’s gentle hands soothed whatever pain it was causing you. The expertly wrapped bandages went down the length of your forearm and was held in place by your thumb. You thought it looked cool.

“I’m gonna tell everyone I survived a bear attack!” You say jokingly.

“I feel like your escape is a story in and of itself, though,” David said, a gentle look on his face.

“Yeah, let me just tell all our friends that I got kidnapped by fucking fascist teenagers and had to escape their regime. That sounds totally believable.”

“Less so than a bear attack?”

You lightly punched him in the arm, laughing. Your laugh was suddenly cut short as David pulled
you into a tight hug. With your face now resting against his chest, you closed your eyes and wrapped your arms around him, feeling as he placed his chin on top of your head. You could hear his heartbeat against your ear- its pace mimicking the quick speed at which yours was beating. Breathing in deeply, you caught his scent of pine needles and campfire smoke- it was quintessentially David. Both of you stayed like that for some time, a bashful silence hanging in the air between you.

“I was...worried about you,” he said gently. “When I saw them grab you, I think I went into shock. I felt so helpless as I watched them take you away. The kids had to snap me out of it.” He paused a moment before continuing. “But I knew you would be ok. You’re one of the most resilient people I know. It’s something I really like about you.”

You didn’t think your face could get any darker than it was, as you were a mixture of embarrassment and gladness knowing you were pressed against him. On the one hand, he couldn’t see your face. On the other, you were currently pressed against your crush. Somehow, you found the courage to speak.

“I was scared, David. I thought I was going to be trapped there all summer. But there was no way I was dragging you or any of the kids into it, and there was also no way I was giving up. It was too important to all of us. Something tells me that it isn’t over though. With the camp essentially being foreclosed on, what are we going to do?”

“We’ll figure it out. But for now, we just have to enjoy the time we do have here. Together.” He pulled away still holding you at arms length and gently looked you in the eye, a wide blush spreading across his face. “I’m really glad you came to camp with me, ____. I don’t know what I’d be doing without you.”

“...David?”

“Hey do you guys know where the s’more stuff ended….up…” Neil had walked in, but quickly realized that he may have interrupted something. You and David still had your arms around each other as you both stared at him, eyes wide with surprised and embarrassed frowns on your faces. Neil quickly put his hands up and slowly backed out of the room, his face unabashedly giving way to the shock he felt.

Once he had left, you and David immediately released each other, both of your faces a bright red.

“So, s’mores!” you say, a little too loudly.

“Yes we sure should. Let’s go.”

Turning on his heel and walking away awkwardly, he got to the door and held it open, trying to avoid your gaze. He didn’t have to try though, as you couldn’t look him in the eye, either. Exiting the cabin, David walked next to you silently. No words had to be said, nor were there any to fill the silence. Both of you were trying your hardest to act nonchalant about everything that just happened, which in turn made it so much more awkward. Upon reaching the pantry, the two of you moved in silence, doing your best to avoid physical contact with each other. You wanted to say something that would maybe diffuse the situation, but nothing came to you.

The stuff for s’mores was gathered quickly and brought out to the fire pit where everyone was
waiting. Neil looked embarrassed, so you did your best to give him a smile that said it’s ok.

““You know,” Gwen said, “I haven’t had a s’more since I left camp.”

“What! That’s crazy!” You say, shocked. “S’mores are the best!”

You were eternally grateful that Gwen was there that night, as it gave you someone to talk to other than David. It helped take your mind off things as she told you about her experience at Camp Campbell in the year prior. You found that she was a bit of a pessimist, not that you minded, as you enjoyed the way she looked at life. It was a refreshing contrast to David’s constant upbeat nature. The group of campers all talked around the fire, eager to hear about yours and Gwen’s escape from the Woodscouts. You and she traded off on your accounts of what happened. She told them about how she had to infiltrate the camp and distract the scouts, as you snuck around getting the deed. You told them about how Gwen was the reason that you were able to get out at all, considering she had all the tools for the job. They listened excitedly as you told them about swinging over the wall and held up your arm when telling about the chase.

“Do you think it’ll scar?” Nikki asked, clearly hoping it would.

“Maybe,” you say, tussling her hair.

Continuing with the story, you and Gwen didn’t notice the conversation happening between Max and David just across the pit.

“Neil said that the two of you were getting a bit handsy in the counselors cabin. Didn’t think you had it in you.” Max nudged David with his elbow.

“We- I- It was nothing like that, Max,” David stuttered, clearly caught off guard.

“Oh come on. It’s painfully obvious that you two like each other. Just fuck already and get it over with.”

“MAX!” David said in a harsh whisper. “Don’t say those kinds of things!”

“Why? Because then you have to uncomfortably confront your complicated feelings over your friend and coworker? At least ask her out. It’s not that fucking difficult.”

“I can’t!”

“David, God. Just fucking do it! Why the hell not?”

“Because, well. Because...just because!” David stood up and walked off, a disgruntled, blushing mess.

Noticing David walk off, Gwen confronted Max. “What did you do now?”

“Oh nothing,” he sneered, “just had a little conversation with David about things around camp. You know, how it all sucks and blah blah blah.” He held out his hand and made it talk the ‘blahs.’

“It’s time for bed anyway,” you say, trying your best to hide your suspicion of Max. “Everyone to your tents.” The kids groaned but ultimately made their way to their tents. Once everyone was in place, you and Gwen headed to the cabin.

“Girls night?” You ask with a smile.

“Girls night.”
Chapter End Notes

A little fluff after the Woodscouts.

Also, Max is like 90% of us right now I think, but because this is a slow burn we all have to suffer and wait. (Mwehehehe)

Campe Diem!
Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

This chapter's title was inspired by Girls Just Wanna Have Fun by Cyndi Lauper.
Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIb6AZdTr-A

Stepping back into the counselors cabin was a dream come true. Everything was just as you had left it: the old couches, the TV, the bathroom with sub par plumbing - everything was just how it should be. Taking a moment to get to your room, you found that you were still wearing the Woodscouts uniform and realized your Campbell shirt had been lost in the fray. Saddened by your loss, you quickly changed out of the horrid tan button up and into your favorite pair of pajamas. Once you left your room, you found Gwen in the common area with supplies for facemasks, manicures, pedicures, and all other sorts of pampering.

“You ready for the best night of your life?” she asked.

“After everything that we just went through, is that even a fucking question?”

And so, you and Gwen spoiled yourselves. You brought out a secret stash of snacks you had hidden in your room, allowing you and Gwen to pig out while watching Wonder Woman.

“Kick his ass!” you both yell at the same time. You were enthralled by the movie, laughing and cheering along in excitement - it turned out that Gwen of you had very similar reactions to it. By the end of the movie, you were hyped as hell and felt like you could raid the Woodscouts all over again if you needed to.

After the movie, you and Gwen decided to paint your toenails. It wasn’t something you did often, but you still had fun nonetheless. Gwen’s turned out way better than yours and you assumed it was because she had more practice. The maroon color complimented her skin tone without it being too overbearing. As for you, you chose a sea green color. You tried to lie and tell yourself it was because you thought it was a nice color, but you knew deep down that you chose it because of David’s eyes. They turned out pretty ok. The coating was a bit wonky and there was a little left on the skin by your nails, but you didn’t care. Your toes were covered most of the time anyway.

After finishing your nails, Gwen suggested face masks. You were all for it. After slathering yourselves with the green concoction and placing cucumbers over your eyes, it was apparent that you probably should have put on some background noise.

“So Gwen,” you begin, trying to start a conversation, “why did you come back? You didn’t even know me. Don’t get me wrong I’m so glad you did but I’m curious as to what triggered you to come.”

“To be honest? I’m not a hundred percent sure. David seemed distraught when he called, which was so out of left field I wasn’t even sure it was him I was talking to. But, once he explained the situation, I guess I realized that the camp needed you. At the very least, David did.”

“What do you mean?”
“David had told me about you in the past. He was so excited when he called me and told me you were going with him. At first, I thought he was going to be upset that I couldn’t make it, but he was ecstatic that the camp had a new counselor, especially one he considered his best friend. He told me later about how well you guys worked together as team and everything. He even texted me when he was worried you had gone too far. The Cards Against Humanity thing was hilarious, by the way. Nice job.”

“Uh, thanks.” You laughed nervously. It was still a bit of a sore subject.

“Listen, it’s obvious you fit in here really well. Seeing you interact with David and the kids solidified that for me today and David really seems to care about you. He was right when he said you guys make a good team.”

Gwen’s words filled you with pride. You couldn’t even put into words the emotions you felt at the realization that David had spoken so highly of you. You had felt butterflies with David before, and hearing Gwen speak made them return full-force. Mix that with a little bit of captivation and adoration, you might be able to begin to explain how you felt.

“Why aren’t you guys dating again?” Her words dragged you out of your own head.

“E-excuse me?”

“Yeah like, I’ve seen enough romantic comedies to tell that you guys are into each other. What’s stopping you?”

You sigh. There was no point in keeping your feelings a secret from Gwen. After all you had been through in the short amount of time you’d known each other, you felt you could trust her.

“I’ve had a huge crush on David basically since I met him. He’s just so amazing! He’s kind, funny, smart, caring, passionate. Sure, he can be naive sometimes but it just adds to his charm. I can barely contain myself when I’m near him! But I don’t want to ruin what we do have out of fear that he may not feel the same. I’m not exactly blind, I’ve seen some signs but, what if I’m wrong and I was just misinterpreting something that isn’t there?” You pull your knees to your chest. “I’m just scared Gwen. I’m scared of doing anything to mess up what we have. I’m scared to chase him away. Hell, I’m even scared of my own feelings because I don’t want to let him know just how much I adore him!”

Gwen listened until the room was overcome with a thoughtful silence. “Wanna know what I think?”

“Shoot.”

“I think you’re in love with him.”

This revelation wasn’t exactly the most shocking to you, though it still made you a bit nervous. You had never said it aloud choosing instead to call your feelings a crush, but hearing it spoken out in the open made you realize what you felt went way deeper than some schoolgirl crush. You were in love with him, and now you couldn’t deny it.

“I think you’re right, Gwen.”

“YES! DIBS ON BEING A BRIDESMAID!” She had jumped to her feet and did a victory lap around the room. You laughed at her excitement, slightly embarrassed.

Eventually, you settled down and put on some trash TV. It was a guilty pleasure of yours and a not-
so-guilty pleasure of Gwen’s. After sitting through a few episodes of Maury, you looked over to see Gwen passed out on the couch, snoring gently as the glow from the TV illuminated her face. You dragged your comforter down the hall, threw it over her, and switched off the television before walking into David’s room. You figure he wouldn’t mind if you stayed in his bed one more night. The pillows and blankets still smelled like him, comforting you after a long day.

A buzzing noise drew your attention to your phone as you wondered who would be texting you this late. Allowing your eyes to adjust to the bright screen, you discovered the message was from David.

- **Hey, sorry for texting so late. Just needed to get something off my chest.**
- **I didn’t mean for today to be so awkward. I was just caught by surprise. I hope we can go back to normal? Or as normal as possible at least?**
- **Hey David. Don’t worry about today, these things happen. I think normal is a bit of an oxymoron around here, but I’m not worried about it. By the way, I lost my camp shirt during the escape :(**
- **You have no idea how relieved that makes me. And you can just borrow one of mine until we get a replacement. But I wanted to ask you something else.**

A few minutes passed before his next text came in.

- **Would you want to go camping with me sometime? Out of the camp? I don’t know when it would be, but if the opportunity knocked, would you answer it?**
- **Sorry, that was super cheesy.**
- **But the offer stands?**

You were shook. Did he just ask you out? Did he just fucking ask you out?! You were silently freaking out before you remembered you hadn’t responded. Trying to control your shaking hands you managed to type out *Yeah, that sounds nice* before screaming into the pillow.

Little did you know that across the camp, someone else was doing the same.

The next morning, you struggled to get out of bed. It was so warm and smelled like him, but you figured that in order to see the real David, you would have to get up. Bracing yourself, you threw off the covers and put your feet onto the wood floor, the warmth of the blanket immediately being sucked into the morning air. Shivering as you stood up, you threw on one of David’s shirts before heading into your own room to get dressed. Once you were ready, you walked to the common room to find Gwen sitting on the couch reading what appeared to be a romance novel.

“Morning Gwen,” you say as you step into the room.

“Oh hey.” She looked up from her book and suddenly had a very knowing smile on her face. “Isn’t that David’s shirt?”

“I mean, I lost mine yesterday,” you say adamantly. “But I have bigger news. Look!” You pulled out your phone and showed her the messages David had sent you last night. Her eyes got wide as the two of you had a mini freakout before heading to breakfast.

Opening the doors to the mess hall, you and Gwen stepped inside to find you were the last ones there. After getting your food, you found your way over to David where you took you place by his side while Gwen sat across from him. You didn’t talk much during breakfast but rather allowed for David and Gwen to catch up. You had kind of stolen her away during the night, and you had all
summer to talk to David. It was a pleasant morning, but like with all good things it had to end. After breakfast, everyone walked Gwen to her car in order to say their goodbyes. She gave you her number and told you to ‘update’ her with an emphasis on date. You rolled your eyes before giving her a hug.

The camp watched and waved as she drove down the dirt road until she was out of sight.

“Well campers,” David said, “now that all of the excitement is over with, today we’re going to focus on…” He stopped, realizing he hadn’t planned an activity.

“First aid!” you say, picking up where he trailed off. “Today, we’re going to show you how to change a bandage properly.” You held up your still bandaged arm before directing the kids into the mess hall.

“Thank you,” David whispered on your way in.

“No problem.”

It seemed like things were back to normal.

Chapter End Notes

David's so damn cheesy I love it. Also, here's a small bit that didn't make the fic officially.

"David, why the fuck are you screaming? We haven't even done anything to you yet." Max sat up on his cot, annoyed.

"Sorry Max! I'm just excited about some- wait, yet?"

"Nothing. Forget I said anything. Just go the fuck to sleep." With that, Max rolled over and did his best to ignore David who was rereading his messages over and over.

Campe Diem!
The next few weeks at camp went smoothly. As the kids were able show and teach their talents to the rest of the camp, you were not ashamed to admit you had learned a lot from them. Ered had shown you how to fix a car motor using only a wrench and some paper clips, and Neil had given you the basics of organic chemistry. Preston’s play had gone about as well as you had imagined it would’ve given the fact that they’re kids, but the fact that he wrote an entire musical essentially on his own made you more proud than you had expected. You had that same sense of pride when Nurf showed you the carvings he had made of trees. Even though he was just a beginner, the way he was able to carefully craft the shape of the tree and leaves had not gone unnoticed. The kid may have a future. Dolph also showed a great deal of promise in his art, even if there was a bit of underlying symbolism he didn’t seem to notice. You hoped he didn’t notice, anyway.

Harrison had only grown more talented in his illusions, and was adamantly about mastering the technique of making things reappear. He had tried to take you under his wing, but you were no good at them. You were, however, a natural naturalist- excelling at whatever outdoor challenge Nikki threw at you. You and she grew to be pretty close during the activities. You also grew a different but strong bond with Nerris who had taught you how to sword fight and guided you through your DnD campaign.

Space kid remained a bit of an enigma to you, but you didn’t mind his ramblings about space. You actually really enjoyed just how passionate he was about the final frontier. He reminded you of yourself at his age- absolutely fascinated with the world around you, so much so that you had decided to try and make a career out of it now that you’re older. You had faith that Space kid would do the same.

As for Max, he was picking up guitar just about as fast as David could teach it. He maintained his sour attitude during the lessons, but you sometimes caught him practicing his fingerings on long pieces of driftwood when he thought nobody was watching. Something told you Max was going to be a great musician, and you hoped he stuck with it. He had yet to come to you about any personal issues, but the two of you continued to honor the pact you had made.

You and David continued to run camp as best you could. Scuba camp was an absolute hit with most of the camp, though Max and Neil decided to stay on land. And even though you couldn’t really get in the water for the first few sessions due to your injury, you managed to teach well enough from the boat. You didn’t have enough gear for all of them, so you started with snorkeling. Despite this, the rest of camp adored their days on and in the lake learning everything they could about diving. The dance camp also became increasingly popular with the campers whose eyes lit up on days when it was the primary objective. As you continued to teach it, you and David began to show off a little bit more every time, entralling the campers in your techniques. They managed to learn the basics of the East Coast swing through yours and David’s guidance, but they all wanted to learn how to tango. You decided to start it in the next lesson.
Your relationship with David had remained friendly, if not a bit playful. When it was just the two of you, you would mess with him here and there, so he would return the sentiment. To an outside eye looking in, it was obvious that the two of you were flirting, but both of your oblivious natures either didn’t notice or chose not to. This was reserved for nights in front of the television though, as during the day you maintained your usual, casual self as David became the Happy-Go-Lucky man you had fallen for.

You decided not to worry the campers about the possible closing of the camp, and wracked your brains every night for a solution, but so far nothing had come to you. It worried both of you greatly as neither wanted to let the place go. Camp Campbell had wormed its way into your heart in just a few weeks time- you couldn’t even imagine how David felt. He did his best to assure you that it was all going to be ok, but you couldn’t shake the feeling of dread that overcame you when you spoke about it.

“I don’t know David. I’m at a loss for what to do.” You wrapped your arms around your stomach hugging yourself as a downcast expression took over your features.

“I know,” he said gently. “But no matter what happens, we and the campers are going to make it through just fine.” You did your best to give him a smile, but it just wouldn’t come. Not one to give up, David took your hand in his while placing his hand on your hip. You mimicked his movements and placed your hand on his shoulder before allowing him to gently take the lead. As he did, David began to sing.

“Just stop your crying its a sign of the times. Welcome to the final show. Hope you’re wearing your best clothes…”

The two of you slow danced your way around the counselors cabin, enjoying the sound of David’s voice and the contact you were sharing. Little did you know, there was a storm brewing just across Lake Lilac.

“Alright maggots! It’s time to execute plan B. Because of your pathetic attempts to stop the Campbell counselor's escape attempt, we now have to recruit the Flowerscouts.” The Scoutmaster has been livid ever since you and Gwen made your getaway with the deed and had been trying to come up with a new plan to take the camp ever since.

“We will extend an… olive branch,” he said, the words seemingly painful to him, “to them in hopes that they will be willing to share the land. PIKEMAN, SNAKE, PETROL. FRONT AND CENTER.”

The three boys stepped forward saluting the Scoutmaster. “This is your last chance. It was due to your negligence in grabbing the wrong counselor that we lost the deed. Take this letter to the Flowerscouts and return. Don’t screw this up.” Finishing their salute, the three boys turned and marched out of the camp towards the dock. Getting in their boat, they began their course towards the Flowerscouts’s camp.

The last few weeks had been hard on the Woodscouts. Due to their failure to recapture you and Gwen, life had been a living hell for them. The Scoutmaster showed no mercy in his aggravation- starting their days off with running miles before breakfast, only to do hours upon hours of climbing and physical labor later in the day. Resentment had formed in the minds of the other scouts towards the three boys, as many saw their punishment a direct result of those boy’s failures. Pikeman was taking the worst of it, though. He was chewed out practically every night by his father for his defeat, unable to defend his actions.

They reached the Flowerscouts in silence. Parking their craft they stepped into unfamiliar territory.
As they attempted to get their bearings, they saw the well-kept grounds spread toward the front gates. Tan brick cottages with red roofs and wooden doors surrounded manicured hedges and a large silver fountain. Near the front was a larger building matching the color scheme of the others, but the windows were covered in fuschia awnings and a large turret adorned the top. The trio assumed that was where they would find whoever was in charge, but before they could begin their journey through the camp, they were stopped by a few familiar voices.

“Eww, it’s like, the Woodscouts.”

“Yeah. What the hell are you guys doing here?”

“Erin, Tabii, please. You know the Flowerscouts have to greet people with courtesy and respect and all that.” Coming into view, three girls made themselves known. The first one was taller and had blue hair, some of her bangs covering one of her eyes. Next to her stood a blond with an eyepatch covering her left eye. Standing in front of the other two was a redhead who had part of her hair tied back. All three were dressed in white button up shirts and plaid magenta skirts. Sashes were slung across their bodies- each displaying a different number of patches.

The three girls curtseyed unenthusiastically. “Welcome to the Flowerscouts or like, whatever.”

“Erin. Tabii. Sasha,” Pikeman greeted them. “It has come to the attention of the Woodscouts that there is a bit of a situation pertaining to Camp Campbell. We need your help.”

“And what’s in it for us?” Sasha asked while looking at her nails.

“Half of the land that the camp currently sits on. I have this letter that will explain everything. If you could just point us to whoever’s in charge-”

“Not interested,” Tabii said.

“What?

“Yeah like, we don’t know what you guys are up to? But we want nothing to do with it,” Erin continued.

“But we-”

“Look,” Sasha said with a tone of finality in her voice, “we’re Flowerscouts. We know how to hustle and right now, it’s obvious you guys are trying to pull a fast one on us. So whatever is really going on you can keep to yourselves.”

Defeated, the Woodscouts were about to turn back to their boat when a fourth voice popped up. “Now girls, is that any way to treat our guests?” The six of them turned to face the newest voice. It belonged to an older woman trying her best to look young. Her brown hair had been done up into a big bouffant and she had a heavy amount of makeup coating her face. Her outfit matched those of the girls, but she was much more developed in the waist and chest, giving her an hourglass figure. Bending over to look Pikeman in the eye, she showed a bit of cleavage. “Now, how can I help you?”

Pikeman, a bit uncomfortable with the situation cleared his voice before speaking. “W-we have a letter to give you. It’s a contract of peace between the two camps in order to gain the land from Camp Campbell. There’s more information inside.”

“Well, consider your mission a success my little army man,” she said as she stroked the side of his face. Pikeman, now visibly sweating, did his best to remain as professional as possible.
“O-of course. But it’s now time to make our departure. Farewell Flowerscouts.” He hopped back into the boat along with the others and sped off in the direction of their camp.

The older woman chuckled. “Boys are so easy to manipulate. Now let’s see what we have here.” She took out a cigarette and lit it before tearing into the letter with one of her long fingernails.

_Dear Penelope_, the letter began.

_It has come to the attention of the Woodscouts that the Campbell’s land will be up for grabs at the end of the summer. I believe that if we are to put aside our differences and work together, we can acquire the land right out from under their noses. I propose that at the next Camporee, we make the counselors battle it out rather than the campers, seeing as Campbell has us at a disadvantage. We raise the stakes just like last year- whoever wins gets the land. If we rig it to where the Flower and Woodscouts work together, we can split the land between the camps, dividing it equally between us. You know that the Woodscouts are a proud camp, and only reach out in need of dire assistance. That being said, will you help us?_

_-Derek Pikeman_

“What’s it say Miss Priss?” Tabii asked.

“Tabii,” she said, suddenly very stern, “what have I told you about asking personal questions?”

“That it’s not something a lady who wants to get a trophy husband does,” she admitted.

“That’s right. But because it does pertain to everyone, I’ll let you know.” As she filled the girls in, they grew excited and suspicious of the plan.

“We aren’t actually going to like, help them, right?” Sasha asked.

“Oh of course not! We’ll just tell them that we are and then pull out of the deal as soon as we can. That way, we get all the land to ourselves.”

“My sister told me about this!” Tabii said. “She said that the pullout method always gives you the best results.”

“I don’t know,” Erin said, “I just think that-”

“Thinking is for ugly people Erin,” Miss Priss said, “which is why we can pay people to do it for us. In this case, we’ll just follow along with the Woodscouts until the time is right. Alright girls?”

“Yes Miss Priss,” they answered in unison.

“Good,” she said as she walked away, stomping out her cigarette as she did so.

Chapter End Notes

The Camporee approaches and the scouts are scheming. What could possibly go
The song David sings is Sign of the Times by Harry Styles. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qN4ooNx77u0

Campe Diem!
Don't Stop Me Now

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Don't Stop Me Now by Queen. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgzGwKwLmgM

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With it being Saturday, you had been watching the camp alone, as David had to head into town. He said something about making flyers for the Camporee coming up on Monday. He had received a letter from the Woodscouts early that week, asking if instead of making the campers compete, the counselors would go head to head in a show of good nature and no hard feelings between the camps. You were immediately suspicious of the entire ordeal, but David, seeing the good in everyone, had agreed wholeheartedly to the idea claiming that the campers could stand to cheer on their counselors for a change.

*It will be a good way to bring out their camp spirit!* he had told you. *Plus, won’t it be fun to show off all that you learned how to do this summer so far?*

In the end, your competitive nature won you over on the idea, but you still didn’t trust the Woodscouts. At all.

Right now, you were texting Gwen about your day. You and she talked almost nightly becoming close friends. Every night she would ask about the date, and every night you would say it hasn’t happened yet.

- *Do I need to come down there and force you guys out of camp?*

You chuckled at her response before replying.

- *You know we can’t just leave. It’s not like we can hire a babysitter for a summer camp.*
- *But sometimes, I wish we could :/ *
- *Plus, we have the Camporee on Monday so this would be like the worst weekend to leave.*

Her next text came in quickly.

- *The Camporee? Oh man, be careful. Those little Woodscout shits made it for the fate of the camp last summer, and there wasn’t even a reason to go for it. I wouldn’t be surprised if they are scheming something similar.*

You knew she meant well, but you weren’t worried about it.

- *Thanks for the heads up, but I won’t be making a deal with the devil anytime soon.*

“I’ve got the flyers!” David said as he made his way into the cabin.

- *David’s here, gotta go!*
She sent you a thumbs up emoji and you put away your phone, greeting David as he made his way to the common area. He set the papers down on the table, eyes shining in excitement.

“Are you ready for a funtastic Sunday full of training?”

“Training?”

“Yeah! I thought we could test each other on our abilities, and have the campers throw out some suggestions in order to help us prepare.”

“Geez, I didn’t think it was that serious.”

“Oh don’t worry. You’re gonna be great at it! Just look at how well you’ve done so far! I’m sure no matter what those other counselors throw at us, we’re going to conquer it with no problem! Between the two of us, there’s no way we can lose!”

David’s words made you feel a little less anxious about the competition, even if you weren’t super worried about winning or losing. After all, it was just a friendly competition between the camps. You helped post the fliers all over the camp in the late afternoon, gradually feeling yourself getting more and more excited as each staple was placed in the papers, solidifying the competition from just an idea to an actual event.

As the night continued, you and David decided to watch a movie in order to relax before the coming days. Throwing a blanket over the two of you, you began flipping through the limited stations you had, eventually landing on a bad, cheesy horror flick. Neither of you were scared of it, but instead chose to laugh at just how bad it was. Feeling yourself fall asleep, you rested your head on David’s shoulder as you drew the blanket up closer to your chin. As you got comfortable and your eyes began to close, you felt David put his arm around your shoulder and lean his head on yours. Content, you sighed before falling into a peaceful sleep.

The next morning you found yourself in your room, still wearing the clothes from yesterday. You bashfully remembered the previous night, before realizing that David must have carried you to bed. Smacking yourself in the forehead, you started giggling uncontrollably. You got ready for the day and was attempting to figure out what to do with your hair until you heard a knock on your door. You opened it to find David standing there with his hands behind his back.

“Morning David.”

“Good morning co-counselor! I have a surprise for you!” He handed you a small white box wrapped in a red ribbon. It reminded you of the box your first camp shirt came in. Opening it, you found a small blue t-shirt with the words ‘Camp Campbell’ written on the front of it.

“David, is this…?”

“Sure is! I figured we should match for the Camporee as much as possible, so I decided to give you one of my old camp shirts! It’s from my second year at camp when Mr. Campbell said he found a better deal on shirts! Though truth be told, I’m glad he switched back to yellow. He never did tell us why...” He gave you a huge smile, breaking off the train of thought. “May I help you put it on?”

You nodded. Handing him the shirt, you felt as he gently tied it around your neck, patting you on the back when he was finished. When you faced him, you swore there were actual stars in his eyes. He was frozen, just taking the sight of you in. You sheepishly rubbed your arm as your face turned about seven different shades of red.

“David? Daaaaavid?” You snapped your fingers in his face, trying to bring him back to reality. He
shook his head a bit as he came back down to Earth.

“Uh, sorry. I-”

You cut him off by throwing your arms around his chest. “Thank you.”

He returned your hug. “You’re welcome.”

The two of you walked to the mess hall and waited for the campers to arrive, eager to tell them about the new Camporee rules. Once they had all finished their breakfast, you and David got their attention.

“Good morning campers!” David said, even more excited than usual. “As you know, tomorrow is the annual Camporee! But there’s been a bit of a change in how the games are going to run.”

“David I swear to God if you say some shit about having to work in teams this year, I’m going to vomit,” Max said.

“Well, there will be one team, but I think you guys are going to like the change,” you say. “You see, instead of the campers competing this year, the counselors of each camp have decided to go head to head.”

“So you’re saying that we don’t have to do anything this year?” Nikki asked.

“Well,” David said, “we’d appreciate it if you guys came to cheer us on but-” the kids began to walk away. “NEVER MIND YOU HAVE TO BE THERE!” He shouted nervously. The campers groaned as they returned to their seats.

“Come on guys,” you say, “it’ll be fun. Plus, we’re going to need your help to get us ready for tomorrow. We have no idea what the other camps are going to throw at us, so we really want you to let us have it!”

“On it!” Nikki cried as she threw a rock at you and David. You ducked and covered your heads as it sailed through the window behind you, smashing it.

“Really Nikki?” you ask. “That’s like the third window this month.”

“Sorry,” she said, shrugging. From outside, you heard the Quartermaster grumbling about the green one getting her rocks off.

“Anyway. We want today to be dedicated to challenges you guys create in order to help us prepare for tomorrow. Can we count on you?” David asked. He was met with unimpressed stares and arms folded across chests.

“Ok,” you say, sighing and putting your hand to your temple. “If we win, we’ll have an ice cream and pizza party.” Suddenly, they were out the door, trying to rush over each other as they got to their stations. As they did, David suggested they have some prep time and offered to make some tests of your own while you waited. Agreeing, you head in opposite directions to create your challenges.

After about an hour, you still hadn’t come up with a single test for David. Groaning in frustration, you abandoned the cause and pressed your back against the tree you were sitting under. You had no idea how you were going to test him.

“Oh hey Newbie. Is this where you come to deal with the fact you’re hopelessly in love with
“Hey Max,” you sigh. Sliding down the trunk, you rested your head in between two of the roots that protruded from the ground. “No, I do that in my room. I’m trying figure out a challenge for him.”

“Seriously? You can’t think of anything?"

“Not anything good.”

“That’s not surprising.”

“Hey!”

He grabbed the paper you had been jotting your ideas down on and began to read a few of them. “High jump, discus, debate, archery, stone skipping- man these do suck.”

“Thanks Max. Really appreciating the constructive criticism you’re giving me.”

“Listen. You’re taking the whole ‘you vs him’ idea way to seriously. If you want to really challenge David, you have to drag him out of his comfort zone.”

“Wow Max, that’s…. surprisingly helpful. What’s the catch?”

“Honestly, I’m just excited to see how this all crashes and burns tomorrow. Later moron.”

You doubt you will ever really understand Max, but you think that he does like you a little bit. He just has a strange way of showing it. You had to hand it to him though, he did just give you some great advice.

Out of his comfort zone. You thought about his words as you made your way back to the activity field. Meeting David, the two of you headed to your first challenge- Nerris.

“Any good warrior must be able to prove themselves in combat,” she said as she paced in front of you. The campers soon joined, making a circle around you and David. “That’s why, I’ve decided that my challenge is to be ARMED COMBAT TO THE DEATH!” She threw her head back as she said the last part before throwing foam swords and cardboard armor at you and David. “Prepare yourself knights, for there can only be one winner.”

Dawning your armor, you picked up the sword that was at your feet. David did the same and soon the challenge began. Circling each other, you waited for him to make the first move. He swung at you, which you parried with your sword. Knocking him back a bit, you hit his arm, forcing him to put it behind his back. With one arm down, David tried his best to swing at you again but had less than desirable results. Using his momentum against him, you tripped him making him fall on his stomach. You placed your sword next to his head, signaling that the fight was over.

“Serpia has won the first challenge!” Nerris cried. The rest of the campers cheered as you waved. You helped David to his feet after he rolled over.

“Nice job,” he said after he was standing.

“Don’t worry David, after the Camporee is over, I can teach you to be as good a swordsman as Serpia!” Neris told him.

“Uh, Serpia?” he asked.
“My DnD character,” you explain.

Moving onto Harrison’s trial, he made two podiums appear from under a large cloth. He motioned for each of you to take a spot behind one where you found a small bell.

“My challenge is going to test your knowledge of the surrounding area. Whatever I pull out of my hat, you have to name. Use the bell to signal your response, and be amazed at the illusions you witness.”

“So like, Jeopardy?” you ask.

“Yeah, but with magic!” He waved his hands in front of his eyes for emphasis.

You lost this challenge hard. David beat you to the buzzer on nearly every example of flora and fauna Harrison pulled from his hat. Part of you was a bit disappointed to have lost, but your curiosity of how much stuff Harrison could fit in his hat shoved that disappointment out of the way. You congratulated David on his win before heading into the woods where you found Nikki waiting.

“Oh right climbers. Welcome to my challenge.” She rushed up the tree closest to her and pointed at the obstacle course she had constructed in the canopy. There were rope swings, a zipline, and numerous other obstacles had been placed in between the trees.

“Nikki!” you cry, “how did you even build this?”

“Timothy helped me! SKRA!” As she screeched, a hawk swooped down and landed on her arm. “On your marks. Get set. GO!” As she said go, Timothy flew off her arm. Taking the signal, you and David hustled up the tree, both determined to get to the top. You had a slight head start as you reached the first platform, so you grabbed your rope an swung to the next. David was close behind and was able to catch up to you. The next obstacle was a tightrope suspended above the forest floor. Without hesitation, he grabbed a long branch for balance and began delicately walking across. You had no idea how to walk a tightrope, but you didn’t want to lose this challenge either. Grabbing the other long branch, you positioned yourself on the edge of the platform and put the branch on top of the rope. Bracing yourself, you scooch off the platform and fall slightly before the branch caught you, making you zip down the tightrope. Your momentum only carried you halfway before you had to abandon the stick and sloth crawl the rest of the way. Despite you best efforts, you found David waiting there to give you a hand onto the platform.

You ended up losing Nikki’s challenge by a hair as David was able to scramble down the final tree’s trunk faster than you. Despite this, you went on to win Preston’s acting challenge, Ered’s freestyle skateboard challenge (you won because you didn’t fall off your board immediately, like David) and Space Kid’s rocket challenge (you threw yours farther than David did) while David won Nurf’s arm wrestling challenge and Dolph’s artistry challenge. Neil’s challenge ended in a tie as neither of you were willing to dissect the frogs he had brought you. Mainly because they were still alive. All that was left for the kids was Max’s challenge.

“Yeah I didn’t make one,” he said as everyone turned to him.

“What?” David said.

“Max!” you cried, exasperated.

“Hey, how come he didn’t have to do one!” Harrison accused.

“Ja. Zat is totally unfair,” agreed Dolph
“He does have to make one. It’s mandatory,” you say, giving him a death glare.

Putting his hand over his face, Max relented. “Oh God damnit. Fine. My challenge is that you have to perform a love song or some shit. Grab your instruments and go to the stage.”

As the others were walking away, you looked at him. “Max if this is another attempt to get us together-”

“Please. I said that because most, if not all modern songs are about some form of love or another. Pretty dense of you to assume that I meant romantic love. Either that, or you just want to serenade David.” He change his voice to mock your tone, “Oh David! Take me away from here so that we can be together forever.”

“Alright ya little shit, I get it. Just go to the stage and I’ll be there.”

After you had grabbed your ukulele from your room, you debated on what song you would perform. You thought about “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” but believed it too obvious. Then you toyed with the idea of doing a cover of “Love Song,” by Sara Bareilles, but didn’t think it sounded all that great on the ukulele.

Ultimately, you decided you would surprise the camp with a song that was completely off the wall. Excited to execute your plan, you sat in the audience as David took his place on stage with his guitar. As he began to strum, you listened as he sang a rendition of “I’ll Follow You Into the Dark.” He did a great job, but you knew he was holding back. He performed it well, but the kids weren’t really into it. You didn’t have much time to wonder why though, as it was your turn right after.

Hopping onto the stage, you confidently took your place at the microphone. Holding your ukulele in your hands, you begin to sing.

“Can

Anybody?

Find me

Somebody to love?”

As you began strumming the piano notes on your instrument, you started to really feel the song and its meaning. Your voice wasn’t the greatest, but you were bound and determined to put your damn soul into the performance.

“Everyday. I try and I try and I try.” You drop to your knees, really getting into it. “But everybody wants to put me down. They say I’m going crazy.

“They say I got a lot of water in my brain

I got no common sense I got nobody left to believe.”

As you break into the guitar solo, the kids begin to clap along to the beat. By the time you finish, they were surprisingly cheering for you! You hadn’t expected such a warm reaction, but you were grateful for it. David stepped in before they got too carried away.

“Hang on now campers. We still have to give each other our challenges,” David said, clearly excited to give your test. Leading you over to a massive stack of logs near the lake, he tossed you
his flint and steel. “For your challenge, you have to light our celebratory bonfire, symbolizing both our excitement for the Camporee and your commitment to the outdoors.”

The kids rolled their eyes, but you were up to the challenge. Trying to picture how David did it, you mimicked the actions you’d witnessed him perform on your first night there. After a few tries, you managed to get it to spark and a few minutes later you had started a small fire at the base of the logs which you added kindling to in order to keep it going. You had done it.

David clasped you on the back as you and the campers watched the fire get larger and larger. It really was beautiful, and you couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride that you had managed to get it going. You all stood until the logs turned to embers and waited until the fire was almost gone before you sent the campers to their tents. David tended to the embers while you made your way back to the cabin. As you waited for him in the common area, you decided there was still time for your challenge. You were all so mesmerized by the fire, that you didn’t realize it had been forgotten.

David walked into the building to find you sitting at the table with a devilish look on your face. In front of you were two shot glasses and a bottle of tequila.

“Oh,” he chuckled nervously, “what’s all this?”

“My challenge,” you say with smirk. “We’re going round for round until the other gives.” You motion for him to sit as you pour the shots. He looked as stiff as a board. You take yours in your hand and hold it up, and he follows with a bit of a nervous shake.

“Bottoms up,” you say as you knock the drink back no problem.

David looked like a deer in headlights. He stared at the glass for a long time before closing his eyes and taking the shot. As soon as it went down his throat, he looked like he wanted to puke. To his credit, he kept it down, so you decided to give it up.

“Congratulations, you won!”

“But I only took one shot?” he asked confused and seemingly miserable.

“Yeah, but my challenge wasn’t about who could do the most, it was going until the other gives. I wanted to see how far you would go outside your comfort zone for the camp. I wasn’t sure if you were going to do it to be honest, so I’m glad to tell you, you won.”

He gave you a wiry smile as he leaned on his elbow, rubbing his forehead. “Well then, I’d say we’re ready for tomorrow.”

You agreed, and you couldn’t wait.

Chapter End Notes

SECRET MIDNIGHT RELEASE. DID YALL WANT A LONG AS HELL CHAPTER BECAUSE YA GOT ONE

Hello and happy 4th to all my fellow Americans! If you're an international reader, please don't be alarmed by the masses of explosions coming from the USA today. We're just loud about...everything.
Also, the song you perform is "Somebody to Love" by Queen! Check it out here!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kijpcUv-b8M

Campe Diem!
The next morning you were brimming with excitement. It was the day of the Camporee, and you were ready to take on whatever the other camps could throw at you. With your competitive spirit licking your soul with its bright flames, you rushed out of bed, threw on your camp clothes, tied your new shirt around your neck and raced out of your room only to realize it was earlier than you’d normally wake up. Unperturbed, you kicked open the door to David’s room.

“GOOOOOOOOOD MORNING DAVID!”

He jumped out of bed already dressed for the day and gave you the camp salute. “Good morning co-counselor! Are you ready for the Camporee?”

“YOU BET YOUR ASS I AM! LET’S GOOOOO!” You grabbed his arm and the two of you ran through the campground excited for the day to begin, managing to wake up everyone else in the process.

“Oh my God would you two shut the fuck up? The Camporee doesn’t start for another four hours.” Max had poked his head out of his tent at your commotion- the other bleary-eyed campers following suit.

“Sorry Max,” David apologized, “but we’re just so gosh darn excited for the Camporee! It’s been so long since I got to compete as a camper. I remember it like it was yesterday.”

“Wake me up when I care,” Max said as he disappeared back into his tent.

“Well, I’m sure the rest of you campers will want to hear all about-”

“Pass,” they all said in unison before going back into their tents. You placed a hand on his shoulder and prompted him to tell you about it. He talked about it all the way through breakfast with the occasional pause for food and questions. It was obvious he really loved the Camporee, and you were sure you were going to as well- it seemed really fun!

You heard a large horn sounding from the direction of the lake, signaling the arrival of the other camps. As David nearly fell over backwards rushing to get there, you made sure all the campers finished the breakfast routine before following him out. Once you arrived, you saw David waving to the boats as they pulled into the dock. The Quartermaster stood beside him- his hook now replaced with a large, ancient-looking book. You and the campers reached the dock as soon as the scouts did, all of your feet hitting the wooden planks at the same time. Watching as the Scoutmaster barked his orders to the three boys you were uncomfortably familiar with, you took your place next to David, still not trusting them in the slightest. Turning your head, you saw who
you assumed to be the Flowerscouts. Their uniforms were sharp and pristine compared to the other two camps, though they themselves seemed a bit...prissy. This wasn't a bad thing, just a change in pace from the kids you'd met so far this summer. As they gingerly stepped out of their boat, their leader, the Scoutmaster, you and David all approached each other.

“Welcome to the annual Camp Campbell Camporee!” David said enthusiastically. “As custom, we must all introduce ourselves as acting counselors, so I’ll go first! I’m David, head counselor of Camp Campbell.”

“I’m _____,” you say, “co-counselor of Camp Campbell.”

“Scoutmaster Derek Pikeman of Woodscout troop 818,” the Scoutmaster said as he saluted your group.

“And I’m Gardenmother Penelope Priss of Flowerscout troop 789.” She pinched David’s cheek as she said her introduction. It bothered you slightly, but you wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt, especially because it didn’t seem like David was uncomfortable.

Maybe she’s just really friendly? you think, that is, until she spoke to you again.

“My my look at you,” she says as she squeeze your arm. “You certainly eat well don’t you?”

Oh.

“Yeah!” you say, not about to be insulted. “Have to keep these muscles somehow you know? Not everyone can have such a fit lifestyle.” You flex your arm, forcing her to feel the solid muscle you’d slowly developed between scuba and your time at camp.

Keeping a tight smile, she squints her eyes at you before releasing your arm, stepping back next to the Scoutmaster.

“Now that the introductions are out of the way,” David continued, oblivious to the tension between you and the Gardenmother, “it’s time for the first challenges!”

“Now hold on just a second,” the Scoutmaster said. “Penelope and I have been talking, and we thought we could make this year interesting.” He gave you a sinister smile as he spoke. Behind you, you could hear the campers murmuring about what he’d said.

“Shutting down?”

“They were serious?”

“There’s no way they’ll take the bet.”

You turned to David, who seemed nervous. He called to the Quartermaster, who made his way over.

“Oh God no. You think, panic already settling in.

“Since the your camp is going to be shut down at the end of the summer regardless, we decided to make today about who gets to keep it. You know, make it for something really important?” He gave you a sinister smile as he spoke. Behind you, you could hear the campers murmuring about what he’d said.

“Shutting down?”

“They were serious?”

“There’s no way they’ll take the bet.”

You turned to David, who seemed nervous. He called to the Quartermaster, who made his way over.

“Uh, Quartermaster, can you please tell them that last year was a fluke and that we can’t just have the Camporee for the fate of the camp every year?” The whites of his eyes had grown significantly
larger in the time he was talking.

The Quartermaster sniffed and opened the tome, “By the ancient decree, all rule changes must be agreed upon by the majority of leaders in each tribe.”

“I accept,” the Scoutmaster barked.

“As do I,” the Gardenmother said in a sickeningly sweet tone.

“Majority rules,” the Quartermaster said as he closed the book and walked away.

“Wait! David and I didn’t even get to cast a vote! It should be fifty fifty right now!”

The QM turned back and opened the book once again. “In the event that it is the leaders to battle, only one may be chosen for each challenge.”

_Damn those rules are tight._

“Camp huddle!” you say, as the other two counselors walk back to their campers, a smug look on both their faces.

“Ok kids, looks like things are a bit more...serious than we anticipated,” David begins.

“Understatement of the century,” you shoot back.

“But you have nothing to worry about. Your counselors are going to win this for you!”

“Unless they cheat.”

“Which they won’t because there’s no honor in it.”

You chastised yourself. You _knew_ that this was going to go downhill. Hell, even Gwen had warned you about it. But _nooooo_. You just had to let your competitive side get the better of you.

“_____?” Nikki asked, “Is the camp really going to shut down at the end of the summer?” Her words bring you back to the situation.

You sigh as your heart breaks for these kids. You had only known them for a short time and already you couldn’t imagine life without them. David placed his hand on your back, giving you a sorrowful look before turning to your campers. “It might. Without Campbell to sign it over to anyone, we have no way of keeping it unless we either prove we can use it best or come up with the money to buy it.”

Each of the kids cast their eyes downward, defeated. You’d never seen them so despondent before. It was strange- maybe they didn’t hate the place as much as they claimed to?

David, unable to see everyone so upset, managed to put on a brave face. “Alright campers, that’s enough. We can talk about this more later. Right now, _____ and I have a camp to win!”

You look to him as he held out his hand. “Come on. With you by my side I know we’re going to win this. We’re a team, remember?”

You take his hand, a smile returning to your face. “Alright. Let’s kick some ass.” Once you were back on your feet, you and David made your way to the dock where the others were waiting, still hand in hand. The judges had arrived during the time you had spoken with the kids, so it was time for the Scoutmaster to unveil his first challenge.
“Attention! For my first challenge, I decided to go easy on you. Therefore, whoever reaches the top of that tree first is the winner.” Pointing to a rather large tree in the forest, the counselors all began heading into lush green woods. As you did, you and David agreed that you would take this challenge considering you were able to scale a tree faster than he was. Reaching the base, you looked up - the tree was much taller now that you were in front of it, and you felt your anxiety spike. But you may have an advantage over the Scoutmaster near the top due to your weight differences. And looking over at the Gardenmother, you assumed she’d never climbed a tree in her life. You could do this.

Having switched his tome for a starter pistol, the Quartermaster began the trial with a gunshot that rang through the emerald forest. Immediately, you jumped onto the nearest branch and began pulling yourself up, nimbly traversing the lower limbs. You managed to reach the halfway point without any trouble until you felt something hit you in the back of the head. Grimacing, you pushed on, but were forced to stop as something else hit you in the back. You clung to the tree, shaking slightly and did your best not to look down, but curiosity got the better of you. You had to look and were met with a sense of vertigo and the sight of the Scoutmaster carrying Miss Priss up the tree. Turning back to the trunk, you began to hyperventilate.

Oh God why did I agree to this. Frozen, you clung to the tree and shook violently in your terror.

No a voice tells you. You can get through this. Get a grip. Keep moving up. Do it for the camp. For David. You take a few deep, steadying breaths and look up before you continue your climb.

On the ground, your campers watched with bated breath as you made your way up the tree, becoming more of a spot in the blue sky the higher you got.

“She’s like, never gonna make it,” Sasha said, as you continued up scaling the tree.

“You’re only saying that because she’s kicking yours and the Woodscouts ass right now,” Neil fired back.

“Umm, of course not!” Tabii said, latching herself onto Neil’s arm. “We rigged it!” The tamber in her voice kept the same valley girl accent as Snake produced a handsaw from behind his back. The campers froze in horror until they tried screaming to get your attention. But it was no use, you were nearing the top of the tree, unaware of the danger your campers had discovered below.

Having slowed down in the thin branches near the top, you found yourself reaching your end goal. Hand over foot you climbed steadily higher. You were going to make it! You were going to win the first challenge! You were...

Falling.

The branch you had grabbed for balance had snapped as you pulled your way up. Still holding onto it, you watched as the top of the tree quickly got farther and farther away from you. As you hit the leaves and came crashing through the leafy canopy below, you braced for the impact of the ground. But it never came. Instead, you had been caught and saved from multiple broken bones by a pair of strong arms. Slowly, you opened your eyes to find Nurf holding you, out of breath and panting. You’re brain was going a million miles an hour, and with no idea what to say, you just said, “Thank you.”

“Don’t-Don’t mention it.” He put you down and you felt yourself about to crumple. Weak in the knees, you leaned on him for support as the other campers made their way over to you. Each of them were voicing their concerns, but you didn’t hear any of it. All you could think about was getting back up the tree. You walked to in a dazed state and grabbed the nearest branch, ready to
climb again, but when you looked up, the top seemed to steadily grow farther and farther away. Ripping your hand away from the branch like it had burned you, you staggered back from the tree, hyperventilating and clutching your frantic heart. You jumped a bit when David gently placed his hand on your shoulder.

“Breath with me. In.” He took a deep breath and you did your best to copy him. “And out.” He slowly released it prompting you to do the same. “Again.” This pattern continued for a time until you had calmed down a bit. As soon as you were able, you turned and watched as the Scoutmaster tossed the Gardenmother to the top of the tree, making the first challenge a win for the Flowerscouts.

“W-we lost,” you said, head still a bit foggy.

“It’s ok. There’s still fourteen more challenges. We can do this,” David comforted you.

David went head to head against the others in the next few challenges. He lost to the Woodscouts in the foot race (as he had been tripped) and in rope climbing (his rope tore as soon as he climbed on) but he destroyed the competition in survival tactics trivia, despite having a barely working buzzer. Soon enough, it was time for the Woodscouts final challenge: boxing.

“All men knows that the only true way out of a dangerous situation is with his fists,” the Scoutmaster declared as he held out boxing gloves. David had begun to reach for them, but you stopped him by grabbing the gloves for yourself instead, surprising both men. You were still a little woozy from your fall earlier, but you knew you had to take this challenge yourself.

You’d been a fighter since middle school. It was the only way you’d found that really dealt with your bullies. Sure, you weren’t exactly proud of how you’d handled the situation back then, but your fists did a hell of a lot more to keep them away than any adult had done. It was something you’d carried with you and you were glad for it- knowing how to fight had gotten you out of some tricky situations. Plus, there was no way you were about to let the chance to give the Scoutmaster a well-deserved beatdown slip through your fingers, especially considering the fact David wouldn’t last more than a few seconds with the madman.

“You can’t be serious!” David said, as you held them in your hands. “You’ve already taken enough today! Let me do it.”

“No!” you bellowed, making him take a step back. “I’m tired of these assholes making fools out of us with their cheating. I don’t know what’s up their sleeve with this one, but I know I can take them. Just let me do this!”

“The Scoutmaster will kill you!” he said frantically.

“No, he won’t. Trust me.”

Standing around the ring of campers, you watched as the Scoutmaster and Gardenmother stood, waiting for the bell. As soon as it rang, the Scoutmaster forfeited- ending the first round as a victory for the Flowerscouts. You were up, but before you could make your way in, David tried one more time to convince you not to get in the ring.

“Yes. You don’t have to do this. The campers will understand if you-”

“I’m not doing this for the camp.” Walking away from him, you slipped on your gloves and readied your stance, waiting for the bell. The Scoutmaster seemed nervous as you took your position.
“I uh, can’t fight a woman.”

You glared at him. He had no idea the wrath he was about to feel. “Looks like my job just got
easier, then.”

The bell dinged and with strength you didn’t know you had, you right hooked the Scoutmaster
across the jaw, making him stagger back. You didn’t hesitate to throw another punch, this time
sending him in the opposite direction. He tried to block your attacks, as he was unwilling to fight,
but you were relentless, choosing to take the rage and fear you had felt since you were kidnapped
out on him hit after hit after hit.

Your campers were cheering you on, doing their best to make sure that you knew you were
supported.

“Kick his ass!” Nurf wailed.

“Make him cry!” Nikki yelled.

“Go for the critical hit!” Nerris hollered.

As he staggered about the makeshift ring, the Scoutmaster continued to take the abuse. You knew
you had to end it so you stood right in front of him and took a slight squat before uppercutting him
hard enough to send him flying to the ground, bellowing as you did so. He landed on his back,
gasping for the air that had been knocked out of him. Placing your foot on his chest, you bent over
him, grabbed his collar and forced him to look you in the eye.

“Do you yield?” you growled. He simply nodded before you released him, sending his head back
to the ground. The Woodscouts made haste to drag him out of the ring as you turned your attention
to Miss Priss. Panting and with a wild look in your eye, you pointed your still gloved hand in her
direction, “You’re next. Get your ass in here.” She forfeited the match, out of self preservation.

Stepping out of the ring, your campers surrounded you.

“Wicked fight,” Ered complimented.

“Ja! You ver wunderbar!” agreed Dolph.

You celebrated your win as the scores were tallied, everyone hopeful for the rest of competition.
David gave you a big hug to congratulate you and you hoped he thought the red in your cheeks was
from the fight. After five rounds, Camp Campbell was tied with the Woodscouts at 54 points each
and the Flowerscouts with 42. But the day had just begun.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t know about you guys, but I’m rooting for Camp Campbell.

Campe Diem!
Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by My Way by Frank Sinatra. Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljrFQyE1hAg

After the Scoutmaster’s injuries had been tended to and he was back on his feet, it was time for the Flowerscouts to show off their first challenge: Embroidery. David jumped at the opportunity, much to yours and the camp’s surprise.

“I used to embroider things all the time with my grandma when I was little. I’m a bit out of practice, but I think I’ve got this one.”

“God David, could you get any more ga-” you gave Max a look that could make a sailor apologize for his language before he finished his sentence, “rish?” he added quickly.

“Well, I think it’s very sweet, David. And also very handy because I have no idea how to embroider anything.”

As the contestants lined up, a timer was set for 20 minutes. On its start, the three competitors got to work, each trying to outdo the other in craftsmanship. It got a bit boring as you watched the three in their work, despite the high stakes that there were. Looking around, you saw your campers talking amongst themselves, the Flowerscouts stealing glances at the Woodscouts, and the Woodscouts doing their best to avoid your gaze.

You should have guessed that David would be good at the crafty side of things. Your mind drifted back to spring break when you’d decided to celebrate Coachella. Neither of you had the time or money to go to the actual festival, so you’d decided to have a small staycation instead. You remember getting dressed up in the best Coachella outfit you could conjure up- a pair of loose tie dye pants and a blue halter top. You thought you looked cute, but it was nothing compared to David- you about died when he opened the door. He’d worn a red and white cropped tank top and cut off jean shorts showing off his usually covered midsection and legs.

Hot damn.

“Hey _____! You ready for the weekend? I know I am!” He ushered you inside where the festival had already begun streaming and lead you over to the coffee table. He’d laid out all kinds of different plants across it.

“You making potpourri David?”

“Nope! I thought we could make flower crowns! No music festival is complete without them. Come on, I’ll show you how!”

You ended up needing David’s help quite a bit but, you didn’t mind. Your crown was finished as he placed it on top of your head. It was made out of pine leaves braided around your favorite type of flower and you had to admit- he did an amazing job with it. David placed his own around his
forehead—light red and orange roses with little bits of fern poking out from in between. Once they were on, he gave you a double thumbs up and a smile.

The timer went off jolting you from your memory, and the counselors showed off their work. David had made a small picture of the two of you as stick figures sitting on the docks, reminding you of when you had first come to camp. The other two scoffed at his display and pulled from behind him a tapestry of Lake Lilac and its camps. Well, almost all the camps. Camp Campbell was noticeably missing from it’s threads as you read “To New Beginnings” where it should have been.

Next was ballet. You watched as the Scoutmaster and Gardenmother performed an obviously rehearsed section of The Nutcracker, dashing any hope you had of winning on your own. The third challenge was also yours as you gave your best attempt at sewing, but the hand-stitched blanket you came out with paled in comparison to the Miss Priss’s silver party dress, complete with sequins and tassels. David was up again in round four, where he did his best at gardening, but something told you his watering can had pesticides in it, making it impossible for anything to live. You ended up winning the last challenge literally by a hair, as you had done yours into elaborate braids inspired by vikings. After ten rounds, the Flowerscouts were in the lead with 116 points, followed by the Woodscouts with 104, leaving Camp Campbell in last with 80.

Panic had begun to worm its way into your stomach as you and David tried to come up with challenges. You couldn’t think of anything, and it was almost time for you to give your first challenge. Looking towards your campers hopeful faces, you cleared your mind and really thought about how you wanted to approach this, but you quickly realized that the more you struggled to think, the less likely you were to come up with an idea. It reminded you of—

“David! Quick! I need a kiddie pool and as much cornstarch and water as possible!” You had your idea, and it was going to be a fun one.

David and the campers rushed to and from the mess hall with the supplies you had asked for. Neil, already knowing where you were heading with this, grabbed a large stick and started mixing the contents together. Soon, your concoction was ready, so you explained the rules.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the challenge is simple. All you have to do is sink into the oobleck,” you demonstrated by placing your hand in and letting it be covered, “and remove yourself.” Pulling your hand back out, you shook off what little oobleck you could. “First one out wins.”

The three of your removed your shoes and socks before stepping into the non-newtonian fluid. With the crack of the starter gun, you watched as the others struggled to get out of the pool, trying unsuccessfully to force their feet up.

“What the hell is this stuff?” the Scoutmaster yelled.

“Did you really think a challenge would be as easy as stepping into and out of a pool?” you asked condescendingly. Slowly, you managed to unstick your first foot from the bottom of the pool, leaving you with the tricky part: the second foot. Awkwardly putting your freed foot out of the pool behind you, you were left straddling the plastic divider. Doing your best to put as much weight on your grounded leg as possible, you began to slowly lift the one still in the oobleck.

The others were still struggling with their first leg. The Gardenmorther had lost her balance and was now sinking into the pool while on her hands and knees. “Derek! You’d better get me out of this!”

“Woman! I’m trying to free myself from this slimey prison.” He started pulling on his leg to no
avail. He was stuck tight.

Managing to free your second foot from the pool completely, you swung it over the side next to your other one, winning the challenge. Your campers cheered as the scouts from both sides did their best to encourage their respective counselor but this only seemed to aggravate them more. Eventually, the pool had to be drained in order to get the others out and continue with the competition.

David went next, making his a compliment challenge. Each contestant had to give every person present a different, individualized compliment. Of course, David managed it no problem, but the other two couldn’t give a sincere compliment to save their lives. You took your turn next, challenging the two leaders to fake their own deaths. Hiking back out to the Sleepy Peak Lookout, you dropped over the edge you were oh so familiar with, prompting the scouts and their leaders to scream.

“Wait for it,” Neil said, right before you walked out from behind the ledge. Derek and Penelope looked at each other nervously before backing away from the cliff. David’s second challenge was to show off your knowledge of first aid using a partner. With you at his side, he managed to take off your old bandage, clean your scratches, and rewrap your arm before the others had even managed to find the gauze in their first aid kits. At the end of the fourth round, Camp Campbell had shot to first place with 200 points. Leaving the Flowerscouts with 116 and the Woodscouts with 102. They were livid.

“ENOUGH!” Penelope screamed as she made her way towards you and David. “You two can’t just waltz in here and make your challenges so specific!”

“Well Priss,” you fire back, “You also aren’t allowed to cheat. But you didn’t seem to have any issue with that, now did you?”

Fuming, she turned to the Scoutmaster. “You! You were supposed to win this for us. Now look! Because of you, there’s no way we’re getting the land.”

“Because of me? You think this is all my fault? I didn’t exactly watch you get the crap kicked out you by some scrawny counselor!”

Before things could escalate, David stepped in between them, holding his arms out. “N-now calm down you two. We still have one challenge to go over before-”

“SHUT UP DAVID!” they scream at the same time.

“The deal’s off Penny. Last challenge. Winner takes all talent competition.”

“Fine, just don’t expect us to share when we win.”

“Uh, can we maybe discuss this when you’re not, you know, yelling at each other?” David tried to intervene, but it was too late. The two former cooperatives had walked away from each other, leaving David alone, looking between them.

“Nice going David!” Max said. “We had it, now we’re going to lose this shitty camp to either the fucking Woodscouts or the Flowerscouts.” Max said.

“Don’t worry Max, we can still win this!” David attempted.

“No, you can’t. There’s no way you’re going to be able to fix this. We’re going to lose and be forced back home because YOU couldn’t figure out a better way to save this shit-hole of a camp.
Just get over it already and move on with your sad life.”

“Yeah David,” Nurf agreed. “While I do appreciate what this camp has done for me, we’re boned.”

“Why did you agree to this in the first place?” Neil accused. “After what happened to ______ why the hell did you trust the Woodscouts? I’m a man on science! You can’t expect honestly me to become a Woodscout after today! I won’t survive over there!”

David got more and more downcast with every word the campers said, their statements cutting deeper than they realized. “If that’s really how you all feel, then I guess there’s no point in me staying for the end.” Sighing, David turned and walked back to the counselors cabin, leaving you and the campers standing alone.

“Welp, now that he’s gone, we can focus on-” Max tried, but you interrupted him.

“David wait!” You chased after him as he walked to the cabin.

“Oh God damnit. Alright guys, since those two obviously aren’t going to be able to do anything useful, looks like it’s up to us to save this trainwreck. Here’s what we’ll do.” The campers gathered in a huddle as you hurried to catch David. You found him in his room laying on his bed, facing the wall.

“David?” you ask gently as you open his door. He didn’t respond, and made no move to react. You sit on the opposite side of the bed and gently place your hand on his shoulder. “Hey. Talk to me.” You’d never seen him so... broken before. It broke your heart.

“The kids are right,” he finally said. “I can’t save this place. Even if I could today, there’s no way we’ll have it by the end of the summer. At least if we lose, it’ll go to a camp on Lake Lilac.”

“Oh Davey,” you say as you begin gently stroking his hair. “Please don’t say that. We’ll figure something out, it’s going to be ok.”

“No it’s not!” He sat up and faced you as he raised his voice. “There’s no way we’re going to be able to save this place. I’ve let all the campers down. I’ve let you down. I’ve lost the place that I basically grew up in all because that asshole Campbell didn’t know when to stop! God I fucking hate that guy!”

David panted for a minute before realizing what he had said. Putting a hand to his mouth, he hesitated a moment before speaking again. “I-I’m sorry about that. I didn’t mean to… I think I have some things I need to think about…..” He stared off into space rubbing the back of his head for some time.

You were shocked, unable to speak. David had not only sworn for the first time in the entirety you’d known him, but also condemned the person he had idolized in the past. The two of you sat in a stunned silence, just staring at the comforter hoping that it would reveal to you what to say.

Without realizing it, you found yourself singing.

“...And now, the end is near. And so I face the final curtain. My friend, I'll say it clear. I'll state my case, of which I'm certain. I've lived a life that's full. I've traveled each and every highway. But more, much more than this, I did it my way.”

David picked up where you’d left off, “Regrets, I’ve had a few. But then again, too few to mention. I did what I had to do, and saw it through without exemption. I planned each charted course. Each careful step along the byway. And more, much more than this, I did it my way.”
Standing up, you offered your hand to David which he accepted. You lead this dance as the two of you slowly circled your way around his room, continuing the song with sad smiles on your faces.

“The record shows I took the blows. And did it my way!” In the final climax of the song, you held each other in your arms staring intently into each others faces before gently pressing your foreheads together.

“Yes it was my way.”

Chapter End Notes

The Camporee isn't over yet! Don't give up David!

Campe Diem!
“Are you positive this is going to work?” Neil asked from beneath the large trench coat

“It’s got to. There’s no way I’m losing to either of the camps. And with our idiot counselors nowhere to be found, this is the only idea we’ve got.” Max was currently sitting on Neil’s shoulders. He had knitted a faux David head which Nikki was currently holding through the neck-hole of the coat as she sat on Max’s shoulders.

“Geez Max, it’s almost like you care about this place,” Nikki joked from above.

“DON’T,” he warned.

“Ah, David. Nice of you to finally make an appearance. Thought you weren’t going to show.” The Scoutmaster had exited the stage covered in soot and ash after attempting to perform a one-man-band version of the Overture of 1812, cannons and all.

“Who me?” Nikki asked in her best David-voice. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“You feeling alright, son? Your voice sounds even more girlish than usual.”

“Oh, I...have a cold?”

“Makes sense, probably caught it from one of the campers.” He put an arm around not-David’s shoulder. “You know, you do have a beautiful camp here. It’ll be a shame to see it go.” He walked off leaving the three campers alone backstage as they waited for their cue. Once they got it, they stumbled out onto the stage making their way to the microphone. Max, who was controlling the arms, flailed the sleeves around a bit before finding the mic stand.

“So,” Nikki began, leaning the fake David head into the microphone, “Do you guys like jokes?”

The Campbell Campers started cheering like mad in the hopes their enthusiasm might rub off on the judges.

“What’s the difference between a gross bus terminal and a lobster with breast implants?” She paused for comedic effect. “One’s a crusty bus station and the other is a busty crustacean!”

The joke earned a few weak chuckles from the audience, save for the Campbell kids who were literally throwing themselves on the floor from laughter. Preston had tears streaming down his face as he slammed his fists on the ground in front of him.

“Ok,” the fake David continued, “How many eggs can you fit in a tree?”

“How many?” the kids answered.
“I don’t know, I’m asking you!”

The kids once again threw their heads back in uproaring laughter, trying their best to get the rest of the people to laugh along with them.

“Knock knock.”

“Who’s there?” they chanted in unison.

“Dwain.”

“Dwain who?”

“Dwain the bathtub I’m dwowning.” Max threw his arms out to the sides for effect, but accidentally threw Neil off balance. They staggered along the stage for some time before they ultimately toppled on top of each other, falling into a pile and sending the fake David head over the crowd where it landed right at the real David’s feet.

“What in the world?”

“Hey!” Erin cried, “That’s like, totally NOT the real David!”

“What gives?” Tabii said.

“Petrol, grab them!” Pikeman commanded.

Saluting, Petrol jumped onto the stage about to grab your campers, but you slid in front of them, putting your hand up to stop him. “Alright, that’s far enough. Max? What the hell is going on?”

“Why are you assuming it was me?” he accused.

“When is it not?”

“Max?” David had made his way onto the stage during the commotion. “What’s this?” He handed Max the fake head. Sighing in frustration, Max came clean.

“Alright fine. We decided to try and win the Camporee by faking being you and using psychology to make it seem like you were the funniest guy in the world.”

“But...why?”

“Because if we didn’t, we’d have to give up our camp to one of the other two camps, each of which are somehow shittier than ours. And there was no way I was going to be turned into a stupid Woodscout.”

“The Woodscouts are NOT stupid!” Pikeman yelled.

“Shut the fuck up Edward. You literally just fell for the three kids in a trench coat routine.”

Scowling, the militant boy sat back down, crossing his arms in frustration.

“Max, I- I don’t know what to say. Thank you,” David confided sincerely.

“Whatever. I’m still mad at you so DON’T fuck this up.” He hopped off the stage and took his place in the audience, Neil and Nikki following close behind. You placed your hand on David’s shoulder and whispered good luck into his ear before taking a seat next to Max.
“If he blows it, I’m blaming you,” he said as you sat down.

“Max. Dude just...give him a fucking chance for once? Please?”

He frowned before pulling his knees up to his chest where he rested his chin, watching as David got to the microphone.

“Heh, hi everyone-” a loud ring of feedback cut through the air like an arrow piercing the ears of the audience, forcing him to draw back from the mic to make it stop. Once it did, he looked out over the audience who was mildly upset with him. All except for you, who had an encouraging smile on your face. Returning your gaze with his own sheepish smile, he pulled out his guitar and began to sing.

“Starry starry night, paint your palette blue and grey. Look out on a summer's day, with eyes that know the darkness in my soul.

Shadows on the hills. Sketch the trees and the daffodils. Catch the breeze and the winter chills, in colors on the snowy linen land.

Now I understand what you tried to say to me. How you suffered for your sanity. How you tried to set them free. They would not listen. They did not know how.

Perhaps they'll listen now.”

He closed his eyes, allowing the meaning of the song to take a hold of his very soul. It transformed him from being just David to a vessel for the pain and sadness behind the lyrics so that he may deliver its delicate message to all who need to hear it.

It was at your request he perform this song. You knew he could perform it perfectly, as he understood it. He understood the meaning and how to portray it in a way that made others understand, too. It was a perfect snapshot of who David was, as his performance allowed the listener to catch a glimpse of the beautiful, tender soul that was tucked away behind his hyperactive outer shell. It was a side of himself not many had the privilege of seeing.

“For they could not love you. But still your love was true. And when no hope was left in sight on that starry, starry night.

You took your life as lovers often do; But I could have told you Vincent, this world was never meant for one as beautiful as you.”

He continued his song keeping his voice steady as it progressed. He told the story expertly through his inflection and subtle movements. He was no longer David, but had become the music itself as he sent its sorrowful message through the still summer air.

“And now I think I know what you tried to say to me. How you suffered for your sanity. How you tried to set them free.

They would not listen. They're not listening still.

Perhaps they never will.”

As he finished the last bars of the song, he looked up at the audience as silent tears ran down his face. As the last chord of his guitar reverberated through the air, a silence hung over Camp Campbell as everyone sat mouth agape with tears falling from the corners of their eyes. Even the Quartermaster had taken off his hat in respect. A solid minute and a half went by where you could
hear a pin drop from across the camp—no one wanted to break the delicate silence that had befallen them.

Eventually, somebody started clapping, leading to a chain reaction of people clapping, cheering, and openly weeping into each other’s arms. You rushed the stage and into David’s arms, wrapping him in a tight embrace. Pulling back, you cupped his face in your hand, gently wiping away his tears with your thumb. He reached up and held your hand there for a moment before turning his head and pressing his face into it, giggling as he did so. You followed suit in his laughter before he picked you up and spun you around the stage, still laughing joyfully.

He set you down before long, as the judges had yet to make their announcement. The choice was obvious though, and Camp Campbell was announced the winners of the Camporee. A huge cheer came from your campers as David took to the mic.

“Gosh. I just want to thank everyone for coming out today. It was certainly a wild ride all the way until the end and I’m honored to be part of the winning camp for the second year in a row.” Your kids continued to whoop and holler while the others clapped politely. “But, I’ve been doing some thinking over the past day and have decided to change things up a little bit.” Confused as to where he was going with this, everyone looked at him expectantly.

“You see, with the current unknown future of Camp Campbell, I realized it’s kind of selfish to keep this beautiful camp to ourselves. That’s why I propose that, on Sundays, all the camps meet here for a mixer! We can mingle and see what’s been happening during the week, get to know each other better, and hopefully put our pasts behind us so that we can work together in the future!” He flashed his huge smile at the crowd who didn’t quite know what to think of his suggestion. There was murmuring between scouts and campers alike.

“Don’t we already have the summer social though?” Nikki asked.

“Well, yes. But I thought we could forgo it this year and use the summer to its fullest! Instead of just one night, we can really try our best to become better friends over the rest of the time we have!”

The Scoutmaster took to the stage. “Beanpole here is right,” he said as he clapped David on the back. “For too long us camps have been at each other’s throats. It’s time we really put the past in the past and look toward the future, as we don’t know how long we’re going to have with each other. NOW MINGLE!”

At his command, the kids jumped awkwardly into different circles, trying their best to make conversation. Satisfied with how things went, David proudly looked out over the audience who was doing its best to talk to each other.

The scouts stayed through the afternoon so you and David decided to fire up the grill for a BBQ. You had grabbed the supplies from the kitchen with the help of the Q.M. and made your way back to the grill where David was waiting. You tossed him about six packs of hotdogs of varying variety before setting up picnic tables. As you did, you looked around the camp to see everyone at least trying to get along. Ered and Nerris were currently with Erin and Sasha, who were hesitantly making a cootie catcher, trying to determine their future. Preston and Harrison stood nearby, acting out whatever popped up as their fortune. Nikki was trying to wrestle Petrol, who simply picked her up over his head, shaking his head like he would with an excited sibling. Dolph and Pikeman were having a seemingly intense conversation about how to run a government, coming to several agreements and disagreements in doing so. Snake was showing Nurf how to most effectively how to turn a candy cane into a spike, and in return, Nurf had shown Snake how to get the most amount of depth in a single stab, demonstrating on a nearby tree. Space Kid was helping Tabii chase down
Neil, who was doing his best to get away. You could still feel the tension in the air from both camper and scout alike and you wondered how much of their efforts were genuine.

Spotting Max leaning on a nearby tree, you gestured for him to come sit by you as you set up. He jumped up, sitting on the table and placed his feet on the bench, looking out over the camp with you.

“I don’t know why David thought this was going to be a good idea. Look at them, they’re only doing this because they have to! It’s not genuine.” He took a swig of his soda.

“Maybe not,” you admit, “but it’s certainly a start.”

Max paused and looked at you. “I don’t get you. How can you be so calm about this? They kinda almost killed you? Remember?”

You let out a small sigh. “Max, listen. I’m not exactly...thrilled about all this,” you say as you gesture to the kids, “but sometimes you have to...grin and bare it for others. This is something David wants desperately so who am I to say he can’t at least try to make it happen?”

“You’re just as hopeless as he is.”

“Alright then smartass, if you hate us and this camp so much, why did you try to save it? And don’t give me the whole ‘because I hate the Woodscouts’ bullshit because we both know that’s not the real answer.” You smirked as you waited for an answer.

He sighed in frustration. “Alright, fine. Ya got me. I don’t hate this place with every fiber of my being, just most of them. And David isn’t the bane of my existence anymore. But if you tell anyone, I’ll end you.”

It was as good as you were going to get out of him. “Hey man, you know our truce. Though, you may not have to hold up your end for very much longer. Check it.” You toss him your phone with the last message David had sent you open.

“He asked you out?”

“You’re just as hopeless as he is.”

“Well, good for you. You idiots seem happy together.”

You punched him lightly in the arm, catching him off guard for a moment and chuckle as he voices his displeasure. Grabbing a soda for yourself, you sigh happily as he quiets down. Silence befalls the two of you momentarily before you speak again.

“He really cares about you, ya know. David, that is.”

“But it’s David. He cares about literally everything all the time. I watched him give a funeral to a ladybug he had accidentally stepped on.”

“Yeah but that’s his nature. When I say he cares about you Max, I mean he really, deeply cares. It’s not just a passive feeling that he has all the time. You’re special to him.” You take a quick sip of your soda. “I thought you would want to know that.”

You both looked over to where David had begun to distribute hotdogs to everyone. His smile had begun to slowly spread over everyone’s faces as he handed out the food. It was really a beautiful sight to see. “Come on Max, let’s eat.” You hopped off the bench and lead him to the grill.
After dinner, everyone had gathered around the campfire to finish out the night. People made s’mores as David’s guitar and your ukulele were passed around the ring. The tension had waned slightly as conversation continued through dusk, but you remained on edge around the scouts, choosing to stick near David and your campers. Music filled the air and sweets filled the stomachs of camper, scout, and counselor alike. You and David even got around to dancing to one of the songs that was played, leaving the scouts in awe of the talent you didn’t have the chance to show earlier.

Things may not have been perfect, but they were ok, and that was really all you could ask for.

Chapter End Notes

The song David sings is "Vincent" by Don McLean. I personally believe it to be one of the most beautiful songs of all time and can’t recommend it enough. If you want, I would go back and read the lyrics as you listen to it, for I think through performance is one of the best ways to really understand the meaning of this song.

Here it is: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxHnRfhDmrk

And, as always, Campe Diem!
In the next few weeks that followed the Camporee, camp spirit was at an all-time high: moderate! The kids were slightly more enthusiastic for activities, both for teaching and participating. You and David had begun to teach the kids how to tango at their request, and they loved it. It was rather cute to watch them all pair up and learn the steps, as most of them took some time in order to get it right. It reminded you of how you and David first learned how to dance- one always tripping over the other until it finally clicked.

Your journal was quickly filling up with all of the activities you were writing in it. You were glad you had started it, as it was going to be a Godsend when you wanted to remember all the things you had done this summer. With every day being completely different from the last, it was really fun to write down all you experienced- both good and bad. You doubted that anyone else was having a summer quite as interesting as you were

Music camp had been going over well with the kids, too. Even if you didn’t have enough instruments for all the campers, you managed to teach them all basic ukulele chords. Pretty soon, they were able to play four chord songs, much to their amazement. You’d also decided to try and teach them how to sing, but most were too embarrassed to show off their voice. Preston was the exception in this and had the potential to become a fantastic opera performer.

As for your scuba camp, you were finally able to get in the water thanks to the fact your arm had healed. There were a few small scars (which Nikki thought were awesome) but nothing super serious. With only the one tank, you took the kids one at a time on the lake and demonstrated proper breathing techniques with your respirator. You made sure to find a place in the lake that was shallow enough to where nobody would get the bends when they surfaced.

It was great to see everyone so animated, but part of you wondered if it was only because they knew they may never get to come back. You and David still had not been able to come up with a solution, even with the help of the campers and scouts. Every suggestion hit a snag or just wasn’t feasible in the time you had left. But, you and David were going to make this the best summer ever for your campers, regardless if there’s a camp here next year or not, and regardless if they wanted it to be or not.

The Friday night after the Camporee was the night of the ice cream pizza party you’d promised the kids. They were confused at first when they walked to dinner only to find the mess hall decorated with different color streamers and lights, until you and David walked in with six large pizzas and three huge tubs of icecream. They went nuts, swarming the boxes as soon as they were set down. You managed to grab some plates and a scoop before they dug into the ice cream with their hands which, knowing them, you wouldn’t have been surprised it they had. David flicked off the main lights and turned on the party ones while you started the music, bathing the room in a different color with the beat of whatever song was playing. It moved from pink to blue to green to orange
and every color in between as you, David, and the kids partied the night away.

The mixers had grown less and less awkward in the short amount of time they existed. Tentative friendships had already started forming between the former enemies and David couldn’t be more proud. In the end, this was his dream coming true— to have all the camps get along as friends and equals. He always was a little emotional by the end of the night.

However, what you and David didn’t know was what the campers were planning. You see, telling Max that David had asked you out was probably not the best move, because by the end of the first official mixer, EVERY kid on the lake knew about it. With their first few attempts not going as planned for you and David, your campers had decided to recruit the Flower and Woodscouts to help them in their endeavor.

“Oooh! They should totally go take a night walk at the park. It would be like, so romantic,” Tabii suggested.

“Naw,” Max said, “he asked her to go camping somewhere outside of camp.”

“Aren’t we already camping though?” Harrison asked.

“It’s David we’re talking about, Harrison. I wouldn’t be surprised if he secretly lived in a fucking tent back home. My question is why doesn’t he just take her into the woods around the camp?”

“Umm, hello? It’s not a real date if they’re so close to where they work. He probably wants to take her somewhere special.” Erin said. “Plus, he probably wants it to be just the two of them, away from all the campers. No offence,” she added.

“None taken. But how do we get them alone?”

“That’s where I believe we can be of assistance,” Pikeman spoke up after having listened to the discussion. “It’s simple, really. All we have to do is ask to visit each other’s camps for a weekend under the guise of ‘seeing how the others live firsthand.’ The Campbell campers ask your counselors if they can be transferred to each other respective camps for the night, while we ask our counselors to send an invitation for the Campbell campers to stay the night.”

“Wow Pikeman,” Max said, impressed, “that’s the least stupid plan I’ve heard in awhile.”

“Thank you.”

And so, the campers and the scouts put the plan into action. They had to wait until after the second mixer, because strategically, they needed to make sure enough time had passed to appear comfortable enough to stay at the camps. They didn’t want to seem suspicious about going too soon. With the scheme planned, Ered had given each troop a small communicator so that they could easily inform each other about the state of things and when they could move forward.

On the Monday after the second mixer, you and David received a letter from both the Scoutmaster and the Gardenmother about a potential sleepover between the camps. The girls would head to the Flowerscouts while the boys would go to the Woodscouts from Saturday morning to Sunday afternoon, being returned to camp for the mixer. David was ecstatic.

“Isn’t this wonderful? All the camps are finally getting along with each other. I didn’t think I’d ever see the day.” His toothy grin reach all the way across his face as he reread the letters over and over, overjoyed that his dream of friendship between all the campers was coming true.

“You know it’s all thanks to you, right?” you say proudly. He suddenly looked a bit timid as a
small blush covered his cheeks.

“I don’t know about all that. All I did was give a gentle push. It was really up to them to decide to follow it.”

You decided to test the waters a bit. “It’s more than Cameron ever did.”

His eyes grew wide as his expression changed from embarrassed to ashamed. “Y-yeah.”

You still hadn’t spoken about David’s outburst during the Camporee. It had caught both of you off guard that he had rebuffed Campbell so openly in a moment of high strung emotions. The sudden emotional and mental clarity had given David a lot to think about when it came to camp as he wrestled with the idea that maybe he only liked the place because of Cameron and the pedestal he’d placed him on. Scooting over on the couch, you pat the seat next to you, prompting him to come sit.

“Do you...wanna talk about it?”

“I don’t even know where to begin.”

“Start at the beginning.”

He closed his eyes and sighed, trying to find the right words. “When I first came to camp, I didn’t enjoy it. At all. I was actually a bit of a troublemaker. But then, when I went into the woods with Cameron and Jasper, I realized that the sense of pride I felt when I was outdoors was something I really liked!

“For years I attributed Cameron to my love for the outdoors, but looking back I don’t think he ever cared about any of it. He was willing to leave Jasper in the woods after he fell off a cliff, had no respect for any of the kids or counselors, and covered up everything he could to make sure he still got his cash.” He breathed in, steadying himself.

“I think that, as I grew up, I just pictured Cameron to be this great guy who wanted to show everyone how wonderful the outdoors were, but now I know that he never cared about the outdoors at all. Even up until last year he was constantly putting me and the kids in danger, would disappear from the country for weeks on end, and force Gwen and I to cover for him when things went wrong. And then, after everything I’d done for him, he tried to frame me for his misdeeds. I thought I was over it, and that I could forgive him but, I guess not.” You stayed silent, letting him get it all out.

“I think the worst part though,” he said, “is just how blindly I was willing to follow him, and he knew it. I don’t even think he knows my real name! He manipulated me in every situation he possibly could and I just...let him. So now I don’t even know how to feel about Camp Campbell or even nature in general. I feel like my whole world has been flipped over and I don’t know what to do. Do I save the camp? Do I let it go and try to move on? But so much of my life has been dedicated to it that I have no other plans but to spend as much time outdoors as I can, leaving me with no other options but to continue. I just feel so...lost.” Resting his elbows on his knees, he put his head in his hands.

You reached over and rubbed his back in a soothing motion, allowing him to have the silence he needed to come back to himself.

“David, I don’t think for a second that anything Cameron did made you an outdoorsman. Everything you learned, you learned yourself, am I right?”
He nodded, face still resting in his hands.

“You’re David: Camp counselor extraordinaire, woodsman, botanist, and wildlife expert. Nowhere in there is anything that Cameron can lay a claim to. Maybe he unknowingly jump-started your love for it, but that doesn’t mean it was him who made you like it. You came to the realization on your own that being outdoors and living in nature is part of who you are as a person.

“You’re so much better than Cameron could ever hope to be, David. You actually care about your campers and how their activities affect them. You’ve taken the time to not only get to know them, but encourage them in whatever their doing. Not to mention you’ve had to basically run this menagerie of a summer camp with little to no guidance, and I’d say you’ve done a pretty damn good job.”

He looked up at you with glossy eyes and a small smile on his face. “Thank you, _____. I...I think I needed to hear that.” The two of you hug it out before leaning back and sinking into the couch.

“You know,” you begin, “if you still want to, this could be the weekend we go camping. I think it would be good to get out of camp for a while and just be able to chill for a bit.”

He looked over at you, smiling weakly. “I think I’d like that a lot.”

Chapter End Notes

WELL I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU BUT I’M EXCITED TO SEE WHERE THIS GOES.

Campe Diem!
This chapter, it's title, and the whole fic was inspired by Lily Allen's version of Somewhere Only We Know. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mer6X7nOY_o

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The morning after you and David had your heart to heart, you had pitched the idea of the camp sleep-overs to your campers. They seemed to be really into the idea, so you went ahead and let the scouts know that the plan was all set to go. You didn’t know that the kids plan had also been set into motion.

With only a few days before they were set to leave, you had to admit you were anxious about the whole ordeal. You tried your best to play it cool when you were around David and the campers, but when you were alone, you found yourself silently freaking out. You managed to send a message to Gwen later that night, as you needed to talk to someone other than your journal about it.

- **GWEN**
- **GWEN**
- **GWEEEEEEEN**
- **IT’S HAPPENING**

A moment went by before she got back to you.

- **TELL ME EVERYTHING.**
- **I WANT ALL THE DETAILS.**

You and she texted back and forth for a bit as you told her everything that happened over the past few days. It seemed unreal to you that David had agreed to go out- you were barely holding yourself together. But you didn’t care at the moment, seeing as you were alone in your room. You could flip your shit as hard as you wanted.

- **Ok so you guys are leaving on Saturday morning? God way to make me wait.**

You shook your head at her text, a dopey smile on your face.

- **BITCH**
- **YOU’RE TELLING ME**
- **I’M FREAKING THE HELL OUT**

Eventually, you say your goodnights to Gwen and do your best to fall asleep despite your mind drifting to all the possibilities that you may come across during your time with David.
Unbeknownst to you, all the campers had gathered in a single tent to go over phase two with the other camps. With a walkie talkie out and on, they had laid out a large map of the area on the floor along with a number of binoculars. Picking up the walkie talkie, Neil grabbed the attention of those listening on the other side.

“Alright does everyone have their stuff? Let’s do a rundown people.”

Pikeman’s voice came through the speaker. “The Woodscouts have the camouflage uniforms prepped and ready to go for everyone and have acquired permission to have an introductory survival course on Spooky Island.”

Sasha’s voice came next. “We studied up on all kinds of body language, we’re practically experts now. And we got Miss Priss to let us take our guests to Spooky Island as like, a bonding experience.”

Max told what your campers had gathered. “We stole a bunch of binoculars. Now we just need to figure out where they’re going.”

“What about where David took us when we went camping?” Nikki suggested.

“It would be too obvious,” Sasha said. “It’s a first date so it has to be special. Can someone like, send me the map?”

“On it.” Ered snapped a picture before texting it to Sasha and the other Flowerscouts.

“Since when the hell do you guys text?” Max asked.

Ered shrugged, a cool smile taking over her features. “We just clicked, you know?”

“Edvard,” Dolph began. “Do you need a map as vell? I’m sure I could be of assistance.”

“No need Dolph. The Woodscouts have an intricate memory of the surrounding area due to our wilderness training.”

“Alright Pikeman,” Neil challenged, “where do you think he’s taking her?”

“I’m glad you asked. Look near the area where Sleepy Peak meets Lake Lilac on the East side of the map.”

“There’s just a lot of forest? I mean it’s good for camping and stuff but it doesn’t seem super romantic for a date,” Neil said. The campers murmured their agreement.

“Perhaps to the untrained eye it would appear that way, but if you look closely you’ll see a small mark indicating a trail that leads to an outcropping a third of the way up the mountain.”

“There it is!” Nikki pointed to it. “But what’s so special about it?”

“Wait! I’ve heard of that place!” Tabii’s voice suddenly jumped into the speaker. “My sister told me that she and a boy snuck up there one night to watch the sunset! She said that it’s like, stupid pretty up there.”

“Precisely,” Pikeman said. “If there was ever a place for a first date, that would be it. And we should be able to spot them if we’re careful and calculated.”

“Well, I’m sold,” Nurf said. “You guys ready to do this? Hands in the middle.” The campers and scouts all put their hands in over their respective speakers, connecting them in their common goal
even if they were separated by distance. “Steakout on three.”

“One,” said Pikeman and the Woodscouts.

“Two,” said Sasha and the Flowerscouts.

“Three,” Max said as he placed his hand on top of the pile, unknowingly unifying the three camps together in a bond tighter than they’ll realize.

The rest of the week crawled by, seemingly taunting everyone in its endeavor to make itself as long as possible. The Quartermaster had realized that several pairs of binoculars had gone missing on Tuesday night, but you assured him that they were probably misplaced. You and he got along significantly better since the Camporee; he had told you he liked the way you fight, but today, something was off.

“No,” he said. “Things don’t get misplaced ‘round ‘ere. Them kids ‘re upta somethin’.” He pointed his hook to a group of campers who were huddled around something you couldn’t see. One of them turned around to see you and the Q.M. looking at them, causing them to scatter. “See? Upta somthin’.”

“It’s certainly strange,” you agree. “Do you want help looking for the binoculars?”

“No. I got an idea where they are.” He squinted his eyes in suspicion before walking off- muttering something about ‘those damn squirrels.’

Finally after what seemed like an eternity, it was Saturday morning and the kids were packed and ready to go to their sleepovers. As they got into their boats, Nikki came to give you a hug before she left. You were surprised at the small gesture, but happily returned it. What you didn’t know was that she placed a small microphone on the back of your shirt before she released you. You and David waved goodbye to your campers before going to get packed yourselves. He had told you that there would be a hike to where you were camping, so after stuffing your backpack full of clothes and attaching your bedroll to the top, you threw on your hiking boots to ensure that you would be able to make it to the end. At the last second, you tied the small blue t-shirt David had given you around your neck.

You were just finishing up in the bathroom when you caught a glimpse of yourself in the mirror. Your face had gotten darker from all the time you’d spend outdoors and your nose a little bit pink from the sun. Your hair was a bit wild, though you managed to keep it mostly under wraps when you braided it back. You could see the muscles in your neck and shoulders sticking out significantly more than they were before you got to camp and in flexing your arm, your bicep made itself known. The camp had changed you in ways you hadn’t expected, not only physically. You had felt yourself grow mentally in the time you’d been here, as before you were never sure you would’ve been able to connect with so many people, let alone kids. You were a becoming new person, and you kinda liked it.

You and David hopped the car before travelling up into the mountains to reach the base of the trail. Sitting in the car made you a bit nostalgic, as it had been quite some time since you had the chance to do so. You laughed and sang along with the radio to songs you only half knew, enjoying the freedom of being alone together. The ride ended much too soon for your liking, but as soon as you had stepped out of the car and saw the base of the trail, you were excited all over again.

It was marked by two large boulders near the entrance before turning into a tunnel of overhanging trees- their branches bending down to entice your sense of wonder and curiosity. From what you could see before the path curved, the mountain stayed to your right, creating an impenetrable wall
of dirt and stone. Remnants of wooden steps were quietly peeking out of the ground covered by moss and dirt, waiting to one day be fully reclaimed by the forest. David walked to the entrance, waiting patiently for you to join him, just as radiant as the woods that surrounded him.

It was an amazing hike. You were unable to have much of a view due to the thicket that surrounded you, but you didn’t care. You were enjoying looking at all the different types of plants that you passed by. You would ask David about what they were and he would tell you along with a fun fact for every one. It reminded you of your time in the cafeteria, though instead of the occasional animal, you were able to ask him about every plant in the forest. You loved it.

Once you reached the end of the trail, you got to see where you would be staying. With your eyes wide and mouth open, you walked forward into the center of the ridge, taking in the sight of everything. Soft, green grass muffled your footsteps as you did so, its lush nature covering the area like a plush carpet. To your right was a small campfire pit with a single log behind it, its bark smooth from years of being sat upon and its length just long enough to hold two people comfortably. A tall Oak tree rested near the ledge, its leaves covering the ground in puzzled shadows as the sun shined through its long, spindly branches. And of course, there was the view.

You could see Lake Lilac in its entirety from where you stood- it’s clear water reflecting the sun that bore down on it. It’s glossy surface changed colors from a light blue near the shoreline of the lake and its islands to a royal blue the deeper the water got. Beyond its distant shore were miles of dense forest, hiding its inhabitants like closely guarded jewels. The sun was beginning its downward descent where later that evening, it would delicately land on the horizon in front of you before slipping below to greet those on the other side of the world.

David came to stand next to you as you gazed in awe of the majesty that had revealed itself to you. You stood there silently for what seemed like an eternity, doing your best to take it all in. A slight breeze passed through the area making the leaves rustle on their small stems that connected them to the mother tree.

David sighed contentedly. “It really never gets old.”

“David, it’s beautiful,” you say, still in awe.

“I’d say so.” He had turned his head to look at you, but you didn’t notice.

You eventually managed to tear your eyes away from the view long enough to set up camp. While David set up the tent, you hung the cooler from the tree nearby in order to keep it off the ground. You ended up gathering enough wood for a small fire and David started it, bringing extra heat to the summer air. After getting everything set up, you and David sat on the edge of the cliff dangling your legs in the air as you watched the sun begin to set, sending the sky into a rainbow ombre. Another small breeze made its way past the two of you, gently making your hair blow in the wind.

“This is nice,” you say as you lean your head onto his shoulder.

“It really is.” David’s voice had come through the radio next to Space kid who was currently on watch.

“We have first contact!” he yelled to the others. Quickly, all the kids grabbed their own pair of binoculars to view what was happening. Through the magnified lenses, they saw you and David sitting on the ledge. Your eyes were closed as your head rested on his shoulder, and he had placed his arm around you. He had a bashful expression on his face as he looked up and off to the side, his other hand rubbing the back of his neck. Both of you had a light blush on your cheeks.
“Flowerscouts, status report,” Max said, keeping his eyes on you and David.

“They’re in stage two,” Sasha said. “Light physical contact between two parties shows that there is a connection. Judging by their posture, we could be reaching the next stage within the next few minutes.”

“Perfect. What about atmosphere?” He questioned.

Erin put down her binoculars and put a few fingers between the sun and the horizon, squinting as she did so. “The sunset will be at maximum romantic interest within the next five minutes.”

“Not bad,” Snake said, “but if you’re going for a true half set, it will be closer to seven.”

“True, but we’re going for romance and if you account for wind...” She handed him her binoculars in time for him to watch another slight breeze make its way across your features.

“Impressive. You would make a good survival scout.”

“Oh my God thank you. You know I’ve always-”

“Focus people,” Max said before David’s voice once again came through the radio.

“I...know I already told you this, but I’m really glad you came to camp with me this summer. For a lot of reasons.”

“I’m glad I came too.” Your voice was now coming through the speaker. “It’s been a wild ride but, I’ve had a lot of fun so far. I can’t wait to see what happens next, you know?”

“Yeah. Seems like every day is a new chapter in our lives.”

The two of you were silent again for a moment as you watched the sun touch its first golden beam to the line dividing the land and sky. You were nervous. Everything seemed so perfect- the sky, the area, David. You had a question lingering in the back of your mind, so throwing caution to the wind, you decided to speak up.

“Hey David? I’ve gotta ask,” you say, mustering up as much courage as you possibly could. “Is this a- a date?”

His blush only deepened as a nervous smile overtook his features. “Do you- do you want it to be?”

That wasn’t at all what you were expecting to hear, but if the pounding in your heart was anything to go by, it’s what you’d hoped to hear. “Yeah,” you say as you lean into him a little more. “Yeah I do.”

“Then yes.”

“Can we get that on record?” Max asked nobody in particular.

“Already recorded,” Neil said as he continued writing down his transcript.

You noticed David was super on edge after you asked your question. It made you feel a little bit guilty- you didn’t want to upset the poor guy. You supposed it was a bit selfish to assume these things, but your heart wanted what it wanted. After some time had passed, though, you knew you needed to set it right.

“David if you didn’t want this to be a date then-”
“What? No! Of course I want this to be a date! I was actually kind of hoping you were thinking that it was…one…” He paused looking into your surprised face.

“Aww geez…”

“What’s happening? What’s he doing?” Harrison asked.

“He needs to roll a charisma check!” Nerris yelled.

“David don’t you fuck this up,” Max said

“No!” Sasha exclaimed, a huge smile on her face. “This is good! We’re about to hit stage three!”

David sighed before composing himself. “Listen _____, I- I like you. A lot. More than a lot. You’re smart, kind, thoughtful- you always know just how to cheer me up. I...wasn’t kidding when I said I don’t know what I’d be doing without you, because ever since you came into my life, I can’t picture it without you.”

You were stunned, mind blanking. “David I... I don’t know what to say.”

“It’s ok, you don’t have to say anything. I probably shouldn’t have anyway.” He stood up, an embarrassed mess of his usual cheery self. Neither of you could hear it, but a huge chorus of ‘no’s’ came from Spooky Island.

“David wait!” You grabbed his hand, stopping him from walking away. You paused before using what little courage you had left to blurt out what was on your mind. “I feel the same way about you.”

Now it was his turn to looked shocked. “You do?”

“Yes!” you laughed, relieved as your emotions began tumbling out of your mouth. “David, I’ve had a huge crush on you since we met. You’re just so…God I can’t even find the right words! Every little thing you do is amazing. You’re vibrant and wonderful all the time, even when you’re down. I didn’t know what to say because I had to make sure I heard you correctly. I adore you, David.”

He stared at you for a moment before he started to laugh. It was not cruel or mocking, but relieved. You watched as tears of joy streaked down his face, unaware that you had matched his emotions. Picking you up, he spun you all around the campsite, holding your close to him as you laughed and cried with each other over your confessions. Eventually, he set you down and wiped the tears out of his eyes before gently placing his hands on your hips. Wrapping your arms around his neck, a smile of pure adoration washed over both of your faces as you slowly leaned in close to each other.

Closing your eyes, you bridged the little distance that was left between you as your lips met his.

Chapter End Notes

*breathes in* AHHHHHHHHHNNHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

I HAVE BEEN WAITING TO POST THIS SINCE MID FUCKING MAY. I'M STILL SCREAMING.

And, because my birthday is this week, I've decided to release not one, not two, but
SEVEN new chapters! Starting today, SOWK will be getting daily uploads until the 29th!

Campe Diem, I'm happy as fuck.

P.S. @queenofdarkness, NOW you can have your heart attack.
Time. Stopped.

All that you were aware of was the fact that you were kissing David. Nothing else mattered. Nothing else even existed.

It was a passionate kiss - not needy or hungry for anything more than the warmth that David had sparked long ago. The longer you kept your lips pressed to his, the more you felt like you were being carried away by the very butterflies that had manifested themselves in your stomach every time you were with him.

You were brought back to reality as the kiss was broken. You gently pressed your foreheads together as you stood with arms wrapped around each other. David cupped your face in his hand, gently rubbing your cheek with his thumb.

“I, uh. Heh,” he chuckled shakily. “I’ve wanted to do that for a long time.” His cheeks turned a dark crimson as he spoke.

“Can we again?” you ask, flustered.

He answered by pressing his lips to yours for a second time, sending you flying right back into the clouds.

Back on Spooky Island, the kids were going crazy. Preston and the Flowerscouts were swooning over the romance between you two. Max and Pikeman fist bumped in their victory - the plan a complete success. Nurf shed a single tear of joy as he watched through his binoculars the relationship that was going to blossom before his eyes. Neil and Nikki shared a solid high-five as they and the rest of the campers cheered. They had finally, finally done it. They got you and David together (at least in their minds it was because of them). Either way, as dusk turned to night and everyone rolled out their camping gear around a small fire, it was the first of many things they discussed as their laughter rose into the air, following the smoke.

You and David huddled close near the fire that night, stealing kisses and sharing the true feelings of your memories as you watched the flames mimic the ones burning inside you. It was a dream come true being there with him as his girlfriend; the thought made you giddy everytime it passed through your head. As the night grew older, the two of you headed into the tent and unzipped your sleeping bags, turning them into blankets. Crawling into bed, you and David wrapped each other in a tight embrace before drifting off into a peaceful sleep.

You woke up the next morning still wrapped in David’s arms. As you slowly opened your eyes, you found that you had woken up before he had - seemingly a first. You took in the sight of his features as he slept: his beautiful eyes were hidden beneath heavy lids and a small smile was on his
You sat and watched him for a short while longer, enjoying being close to him and listening to his unconscious ramblings. Soon though, a rather mischievous idea came to you. Taking the end of your hair, you tickled the tip of his nose. His face scrunched up slightly, making his nose crinkle and his mouth turn into a small frown. It only lasted for a moment though, and soon he was back to his original state. A small giggle bubbled its way up your throat as you did it again, eliciting the same response, only this time he slowly blinked open his eyes, a befuddled look plastered on his face. Yawning and rubbing his eyes, he came to his senses as his eyes fell on your coy features. He gave you a sleepy smile before kissing the top of your head, leaving his face nestled in your hair.

“Good morning,” he said, his voice slightly muffled by your hair.

“Morning Davey,” you say, moving your head to look him in the eye. Even though he was still half-asleep, you could see the admiration in his eyes. You watched as he checked the time: nine am.

“We slept in.”

You snort before giggling at his announcement. “If you think that’s sleeping in, wait until you see me outside of camp.”

The two of you lay in bed for a while longer, laughing and talking with each other until the need for food grew to be too much. Bracing yourself, you throw off the blanket and exit the tent into the cool morning air. Standing outside, you cross your arms and look out over the ledge, watching as the sun begins shining down on the land below it. David joins you after a short time, wrapping his arms around your midsection as he stood behind you, face once again nuzzled into your hair. You breathe in the fresh air, holding it in your lungs before releasing it slowly, allowing yourself to be fully immersed in the moment.

The two of you ate a breakfast of skillet-made pancakes and sunny-side up eggs. He showed you how to flip a pancake without a spatula, and after a few tries (and a few cakes in the fire) you managed to get it right. It was fun having him teach you, and you both cheered when you finally got it. After breakfast, you packed up the camp, saying your goodbyes to the place as you did. Fingers intertwined, you make your way back down the luscious green path, taking your time to gaze at the woods around you as you did so. The car ride back was again filled with the comfortable laughter and harmony of your voices as you drove back to camp, the only difference being you caught David sneaking bashful glances every once in a while, making you blush.

Once you got back to the camp, you saw the Quartermaster dragging a large sack leaking brown and red fluids.

“Uh, hey Q.M. Did you...find the binoculars?”

He turned to look in your direction as you stepped out of the car. “Nope. Stopped the second uprising though.” He didn’t elaborate any more as he hauled the sack to the Quartermaster’s store.

You looked to David who only shrugged as a response.

The day passed relatively normally as you and David waited for the mixer to start. You ate a small lunch and decided to brush up on a few of your old dance routines, now unafraid to get just a little bit closer. He’d plant a few pecks on your cheek to try and throw you off, which you countered with your own. As the afternoon turned to evening, you walked to the dock to greet everyone,
debating as to whether you should tell the kids or not about the development in your relationship.

“I don’t know,” David said. “I wouldn’t want them to feel weird around us when we’re together. Maybe we should just let them figure it out gently.”

“I don’t think they’d feel awkward. I think they’d probably be really happy for us. Either that or just be totally over it.” You did your best Max voice, “God, fucking finally. It’s about damn time.”

“_____,” he said in his counselor voice, “you know it’s not nice to make fun of people. No matter how good the imitation is.”

“I’d bet Preston would write a play about us.” You grabbed him around his waist and moved your hand across the sky as if you were reading off a marquee. “’David and _____, the modern romance that ends with only one of them dying.’ You know, to divert from Romeo and Juliet’s famous ending.”

“Alright, that’s enough,” he said good-naturedly.

“You’re right,” you admit. “Knowing Preston, we’d both end up dead.”

You hear him chuckle just the slightest bit and you flash him a toothy grin before turning your attention back to the lake where the first boat had just made its appearance as a small dot in the distance.

“Can I at least hold your hand?” you ask, watching as the boat gets steadily closer.

He laces your fingers together before responding. “Always.”

The first boat that made its way to the dock belonged to the Flowerscouts and your girls, all happily chattering away about various things. You and David welcomed them all back to the camp, sending them toward the activity field. The Woodscouts and your boys made their way soon after, exiting their boat and greeting you and David before heading off in the same direction.

The third mixer was going even better than the first two. It looked like the sleepover really worked wonders for everyone! Kids you never thought would talk to each other were having full blown conversations. Harrison was showing Tabii how to perform the “quarter behind the ear trick” with which she was thoroughly invested. Snake, Erin and Neil were currently discussing meteorology, trying to predict what the weather would be like tomorrow based on the cloud shapes. Nerris was showing Ered and Sasha the different colors of dice she had, and how you could even turn them into accessories if you tried hard enough. Nurf and Pikeman looked to be in the middle of a rather serious conversation about life outside of camp for them. In the middle of camp, you saw Nikki resting on Petrol’s shoulder as they talked to Max, and for the first time in your memory, Max looked genuinely happy about where he was without having any sort of prompting. You pointed it out to David who wrapped his arm around your shoulder, looking out over your camp. A few kids noticed the contact, using elbows to nudge their friends or giggling into their hands, but you didn’t catch it.

As you all sat around the campfire, you and David were eager to hear all about the night the kids shared together. They’d come up with alibis fit for a king wherein the girls had stayed up all night watching movies and playing board games, while the boys were tested in their physical attributes as they explored the woods. Where one person faltered, another was always there to fill in the blanks, covering for each other when need be. To you and David, it just sounded like they were all remembering a day of fun in a new place.
Once it was time for the scouts to leave, you and the rest of camp waved goodbye from the docks, watching as the boats made their way back home.

“Well campers,” David said, “I sure am glad to hear you all had such a fun weekend. Now it’s time for bed, we have to be up tomorrow for our morning activities!”

Escorting the campers to their tents, you and David made sure everyone was there and accounted for before making your way back to the counselors cabin, hand in hand. You didn’t see the campers peak their heads out of their tents giving each other thumbs up as you walked away.

“I think that went well,” you say as David holds the door open for you.

“I like to think so.” He made his way in behind you, only to find you kissing him as soon as the door had closed. He smiles into it, slowly pulling you closer.

“I’m never going to get over that. Just a heads up,” you say, breaking the kiss.

“Me neither.”

The two of you say your goodnights before heading into your rooms, deciding to remain in separate beds in case a camper needed either of you in the night. As much as you wanted to stay with him, you knew it was the right thing to do. Giddy and twitterpated, you giggle yourself to sleep thinking of David.

Miles away, a young man stands looking into the bathroom mirror of an old, rundown motel, quietly humming as he inserts his contacts. Blinking a few times to get acclimated, he stares at himself, rather enjoying his new look. A box of empty auburn hair dye sat on the counter next to the sink, its contents having been used on his head. The eyebrows had been the hardest part of the ordeal, as they were much more difficult to dye correctly, but he was pleased with how everything had turned out. Grabbing his belongings, he left the room and struck a match- lighting the gasoline doused carpet aflame before closing the door. He continued singing his little song as the flames grew smaller in the distance behind him.

“We’ll meet again. Don’t know where. Don’t know when. But I know we’ll meet again some sunny day.”

Chapter End Notes

Gee, I wonder who it could be?

The song the unknown person sings at the end is We’ll Meet Again by Vera Lynn. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsM_VmN6ytk

Campe Diem!
David gently shook you awake early the next morning, whispering your name to try and rouse you from your sleep. Slowly, you opened your eyes to find him kneeling by your bedside, smiling softly as he watched you wake.

“David?” You rubbed your eyes, trying to get acquainted to the low morning light. “What time is it?”

“5:15. The sunrise is going to start soon, and I wanted to watch it with you.” He touched his nose to yours to give you an eskimo kiss. “Do you wanna come?”

“Yeah sure, hang on.” You roll yourself out of bed taking all the covers with you, and land with a small thud on the floor. David looked like he was trying his hardest not to laugh at your wobbly form autopilot its way across the room before you drag a sweatshirt out of your wardrobe. Halfway through putting it on, you stop with your head leaning against the wall- asleep once again. Biting his lower lip, David did his best not to laugh at your adorable attempt to wake up. He gently shook you again, startling you awake.

“Huh? Wha?”

“You fell asleep putting on your sweatshirt,” he said.

“Yeah, that sounds about right,” you say as you slip the garment the rest of the way over your head. This time he couldn’t resist and he let out a quiet laugh as he pulled you into a tight hug.

“Come on, let’s go watch the sunrise.” He offered you his arm and you took it, allowing him to lead you to the center of camp. Slowly, as the sky began to brighten, the sun gently began to peak itself over the trees, waking the creatures of the forest with its silent, luminescent melody. One by one, birds began to fill the air with their morning symphony, competing to be the most beautiful sound in the woods. The cold air made you glad you’d brought your sweatshirt as it made its way into your lungs. It was a very peaceful way to begin your day.

“You were right, you know. About Cameron. I don’t need him to enjoy camp or nature or anything.” David closed his eyes as he gently breathed in the scent of the early morning pines. “This is all I need.”

You slip your arm around his waist and he puts his arm around your shoulder, leaning his head on top of yours. You giggle slightly, happy to be sharing this moment with him.

“What?” he asks tenderly.

“It just...feels like a dream, being here with you. I don’t think my mind has quite realized that it’s real.” You blush a little as you confide your feelings to him, and look to him as his expression
becomes demure.

“Well,” he says shyly, “you’re my dream come true.” He meets your eyes for a moment before leaning in and kissing you warmly on the lips. You close your eyes and allow yourself to be stolen away by the atmosphere.

Breaking away from each other, you catch a glimpse of movement out of the corner of your eye. Turning to look you saw, standing there in his pajamas and holding a toothbrush, a starstruck Space kid, eyes wide with a quiet excitement. Slightly mortified, you and David look at each other not sure of what to do. Unable to speak, you simply watch as Space kid gives you a wink while holding his finger up to his mouth in a ‘shh’ gesture before continuing on his trek to the bathrooms. You and David look to each other again before your faces scrunch up in silent giggles.

“Alright, enough of that,” you say. “What’s on the agenda for the week?”

“Looks like it’s an arts day so, music, art and theater will all be taking center stage.” He nudged you with his elbow at his pun. “Then tomorrow, we can do Dance camp?”

“Sounds good to me. Extreme sports on Wednesday, space Thursday and science Friday?”

“Sounds like a plan.” He gave you his trademark grin.

After the two of you headed back to the cabin to get ready, you realized that it was nearly time for breakfast. Quickly getting dressed, you make your way into the mess hall only to find it completely empty. Bewildered as to where the Quartermaster was, you search the area until you find a small note attached to the coffee maker:

*Rabbits have joined forces with the birds. Be back by lunch. -QM.*

“Does this mean he wants us back by lunch or that he’ll be back by lunch?” you ask. David shrugs, just as confused as you were. With not a lot of time before the campers arrive, you and David set to work in making eggs and toast for everyone. It may have been simple, but it was all you could do with your limited time frame.

As the campers started to make their way into the mess hall, they immediately noticed yours and David’s absence from your normal spot. Some started snickering as their imaginations ran wild as to where you could possibly be. That was until they heard David call them from the back.

“Campers? Is that you?” He poked his head out of the serving window to see the kids congregating near the door. “Good morning everyone! The Quartermaster had some...errands to run this morning, so my trusty co-counselor and I are here to serve you breakfast. Hope you’re all hungry!” He slipped his head back into the kitchen as the kids began to line up.

As the two of you served, you noticed some of the kids giving you and David interesting looks. You wondered if Space kid had told them about what he had seen that morning, as when he looked at the two of you, he was still starstruck. You suppose you didn’t really mind if they knew or not, though it would have been nice to tell them yourselves. But, if the word had already gotten out, you figured there was nothing you could do about it. After all the kids had been served and you and David grabbed food for yourselves, you made your way to the table, waiting for morning activities to begin.

You made your rounds between Neil, Nerris and Preston as the day went on, making sure to keep your eye out for any suspicious behavior or ensnaring questions. As you did, Max and David were currently in the middle of another guitar lesson.
“Max, I just want you to know how proud I am of you for how much you’ve improved so far. You’re really doing a great job!” Max grabbed David’s guitar as he rolled his eyes before strumming a short melody.

“So, you and Newbie are a thing now?” Max asked nonchalantly, still plucking at the strings.

“Uh, what are you...talking about Max?” David’s voice became slightly higher pitched as he looked up and away from Max.

“Space kid told me what he saw this morning. You guys are about as subtle as a plane crash.”

David sighed, placing his thumb and index finger on the bridge of his nose. “Of course he did. Fine, yes, whatever. We’re dating.”

“Well good for you. Love is dumb and considering you don’t find people much dumber than the two of you, I can’t say I’m surprised.”

“Hey! Love isn’t dumb! It’s beautiful and-”

“No, David. Love is dumb. All it ever does is trick people into thinking they like each other long enough to reproduce before they slowly grow to resent each other and the life they have. It never leads to anything but pain for everyone involved. That’s why I don’t love anybody, or anything.” His bitterness was more raw than usual.

“Max... is that really what you think love is?”

“...What else can it be.” He turned his head, unable to look David in the eyes. David reached out to put a hand on his shoulder, but Max shrugged it off. “Don’t touch me.”

They were silent for a moment, as David didn’t know what to say. He knew Max didn’t have the best home life, but he hadn’t realized that it may have struck him deeper than he originally thought. Did Max truly not know any kind of love in his life? Were his parents that awful?

“Hey, can I borrow this?” Max asked suddenly, jolting David out of his thoughts.

“Uh yeah, sure.”

Without another word, Max took the guitar and walked off toward his tent, leaving David sitting alone on the stage.

The rest of the day went relatively smoothly. The Quartermaster had returned by lunch with fresh rabbit stew, and the performance camps went well. David had told you in private about his conversation with Max, so you and he decided to not have him show the camp his skills. You found him on the dock later that day strumming David’s guitar, and he either didn’t notice or didn’t acknowledge your approach until you sat next to him. You stayed silent, allowing him to finish the song he was currently lost in. He sighed as he came to its conclusion.

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Didn’t say you had to.”

“Then why are you here?”

You shrugged your shoulders and laid down on the dock, lacing your fingers behind your head as you closed your eyes. “Play me something.”
He stayed silent for a while making you think he wouldn’t do it. But then, you heard him very faintly begin to play. Quieter still, he began to sing.

“*You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are gray. You’ll never know dear, how much I love you. Please don’t take my sunshine away....*”

“I like that song, Max.”

When he didn’t respond, you looked to him. He had an upset expression on his face. He wasn’t angry or mad- he looked like he was concerned or maybe about to be sick. “My mom used to sing it to me...when I was little.” He scrunched his face up before pulling himself into a tight ball, unable to continue. You placed your hand on his shoulder comfortingly and he looked at you with sad eyes. Without warning, he suddenly latched himself around you, so you wrap your arms around him and gently stroke his hair, doing your best to let him know he was safe.

You stay like that for some time, just letting Max allow himself to get all the emotion that he needed to out. He let out a shaky breath when he finally released you. “That never happened,” he said as he used the sleeves of his hoodie to wipe his face.

“What never happened?” You wink as he pulls away from you, and he gives you a weak smile.

“There you two are!” You suddenly hear David from behind you. “I’ve been looking all over camp for you guys!”

“Well David, I don’t know how to tell you this,” Max looked to you, horrified that you were about to tell David everything that just happened. You winked at him. “But Max and I have decided to elope. We’re leaving tomorrow.”

David snorted. “What?”

“Yep, it’s true. Sorry David,” Max said, putting his arm around your waist. “I stole your girl.”

“Oooh, careful Max,” you tease. “He might hit you with a chair.” Max began to laugh as David flushed, looking embarrassed and chuckling awkwardly.

“No, I won’t be beating anyone with a chair today,” he said, before he grabbing Max’s hands and forcing him to look him in the eyes, a playfully devilish expression suddenly taking over his face. “Only because I know you’re kidding.”

“Whoa alright. Big man on campus has a dark side. I get it, you can have her.”

You chuckle at their interaction before turning your head back to the lake. With it being midsummer, the sunsets came much later in the day prolonging the amount of time Lake Lilac was a beautiful pool of liquid gold. You gaze fondly across its surface watching as small waves make their way to the sandy shore. The others took notice and began looking out silently as well, just admiring the way it looked

“You know,” Max said, “for a rundown old summer camp made by a convicted felon, I guess this place isn’t so bad.”
“I’m glad to hear that, Max.” David says softly as he ruffles Max’s hair. For the first time, Max didn’t make an immediate attempt to put it back in place, instead giving David a small smile. Leaning back, you place one hand on the planks behind Max which David covers with his own as the three of you watch the water glisten in the evening sun.

You were blissfully unaware of what was lurking in the shadows.

Chapter End Notes

A little fluff, a little angst, and a whole lot of anxiety from the last line.

Hope everyone is ready.

Campe Diem!
He waited. And waited. And waited.

He waited until you, Max, and David had made your way back to the hall for dinner. He waited until the campers had retreated to their tents. He waited until the last light in the counselors cabin had been doused, and then stayed silent for another hour. Finally, he was done waiting and was free to roam camp as he liked.

The thought of going after the campers first seemed tantalizing to him, but he knew it would cause too much of a scene. Much too messy. No, he knew he had to take out his primary target first, so as he slowly made his way into the counselors cabin, he slithered to David’s room. Silently opening the door, he walked over to David’s bed, watching the man sleep.

Rousing slightly, David looked up to see a figure standing over him. “_-___?” he asked before a terrible white smile was reflected in the moonlight and a large, blunt object came into contact with his head.

David woke up some time later in a dark room looking into the eyes of...himself?

“Oh good! You're awake! I thought I was going to have all the fun without you.” The man stood up and walked across the room, obstructing David’s field of view.

“Who- who are you?” David asked through his throbbing headache.

“Aww, you really don’t remember me? David I’m hurt! But, let me see if I can jog your memory.” Grabbing David’s guitar, the man began to play a very familiar song.

“I hope this won’t sound impolite. Or come across as too forthright. But even though you seem alright I,” eyes widening, the man swung and bashed David’s guitar across his face, “THINK I’M BETTER THAN YOU.”

David groaned, the coppery taste of blood filling his mouth. “Daniel?” David tried to stand but found himself restrained by something unseen.
“Oh so you do remember me! Well that’s just wonderful.”

“What are you doing here? I thought you’d been sent to prison after the hospital!” He was scared and confused as to what was happening.

“I was, but I was so lonely. Not even a card, how inconsiderate of you. I didn’t really like it there, so I left.”

“Left? How?”

“Oh you know, the usual. Showing people the glory of Zeemuug and helping them reach ascension.”

“But why are you here?”

“Ohoho David. Don’t you know? Once ascension has started, it can’t be stopped. I’m here to make sure that your campers are at peace with Zeemuug once and for all. Now as for you,” Daniel pulled his dagger from his belt, slashing at David’s chest as he did so, “I’m afraid you’re just too far gone to be saved. But I’m sure there’s something you can be of use for.” An evil, crooked smile took over his face as he began his work.

Daniel started small, grazing David’s arms with small nicks and cuts, just enough to draw out small droplets of blood that trailed down his slender limbs. David hissed in pain as the knife moved along his skin, revealing the red beneath.

“Stop!” David cried. “Why are you doing this?!”

Daniel paused for a moment before responding. “Because, David, not only did you stand in the way of ascension for your campers, but I have a little deal I have to hold up. And part of that deal is getting rid of you.”

On the word ‘you’ Daniel slashed again, giving David a clean red gash across his chest. David screamed in pain before panting, tears in his eyes.

“Wh- who would do this?” David asked. His voice was pitifully small to Daniel.

“I’m afraid I can’t let you know, friend. But what I can do is take. My. Time.” Daniel sneered again as he continued marking David with the dagger.

When it was over, David was bloody and bruised, but breathing. Daniel seemed satisfied with what he’d done, so he put the dagger away. “That was real fun David, but I have a camp to purify. So if you’ll excuse me.” He began to walk away, out of David’s line of sight.

“Wait,” David called weakly. “Please, don’t hurt them. Kill me if you have to but don’t hurt my campers.”

“Oh David,” Daniel said as he opened the door, “if only it could work like that.”

Daniel shut the door leaving David alone in the dark.

You woke up the next morning feeling a little sick. You figured it was bound to happen eventually, even if you didn’t want it to. Sighing, you figured you might be able to kick it by gargling with saltwater and taking it easy the next day or so, but it was the day of dance camp and you wanted to show the kids one of yours and David’s big dances.
Oh well. We can do it next time you think as you get out of bed. You got ready for the day and headed to the mess hall where you saw David in the corner reading the newspaper. He gave you a smile as you walked in and you waved, returning it. Ready to go through the grunt routine with the Quartermaster, you make your way to the counter.

“Morning QM. The usual, please.”

He handed you your coffee before glancing at David in the corner and back to you.

“The red one ain’t himself. Seems off. Dangerous.”

That surprised you. The Quartermaster isn’t usually wary of the campers, let alone David. He may have more secrets than you could ever come to realize, but you knew better than to question the man’s instinct.

“Thank you.”

He nodded before returning to the kitchen to finish breakfast. You went and sat across from David, giving him a small smile as you did so. “Morning David. Are you alright? You look pale.”

He waved hello before gesturing to his throat and mimicking the fact that he couldn’t talk.

“Sick? Yeah, me too. I think something’s going around.”

He shrugged and returned to his paper.

Soon enough, the campers began filing into the mess hall. You gave everyone a good morning as they came in, but David just continued reading his paper. This was unusual- David never missed the opportunity to say good morning to the campers, yet there he sat not even glancing up. It was weird to watch, maybe the QM was right, maybe there was something wrong.

After breakfast, you let the kids know about David’s temporary ailment and gave him a clipboard in order to communicate. Then, you all headed to your morning activities. Something was bothering you though, you just couldn’t place it.

Neil noticed your discomfort as he was finishing up an experiment with liquid nitrogen. “Is everything ok? You seem distracted.”

“Hmmm. There’s something off about David I think.”

“What do you mean ‘off?’”

“You see, that’s the thing. I’m not sure. It was weird for him not to greet the campers this morning. Even with his voice gone I was sure we would have at least waved or… something!”

“Yeah, now that you mention it, it was kind of weird,” Neil said. “But maybe it’s just because he’s sick? He might not have as much energy, you know?”

The two of you shrugged. It was likely- you’d never really seen David sick before. Next, you headed to Neris’s castle.

“Alright Serpia,” she said, “I need you to roll a perception check.” You roll and add your modifiers, but it wasn’t great.

“Eleven,” you say, and she rubs her hands together.
“You sense something lurking in the shadows, but you are unaware of what it may be.”

“I’d like to cast detect good and evil.”

“Wait,” she asks, slightly confused. “You’re a sorcerer right? Only clerics and paladins can have that spell. Do you have a feat that allows it?”

“Oh, no. Sorry. I guess I’m just a bit distracted today.” You look off towards Harrison’s camp and catch a glimpse of David acting seemingly indifferent towards the show Harrison was practicing. It was weird to see him so uninterested.

“What’s on your mind? I’m all ears.” She points to the elongated tips of her ears, a silly smile on her face. You give her a lighthearted smile for her pun before you turn serious again.

“I’m just worried about David. He seems a bit off today.”

“Well, you said he’s sick right? Maybe he’s just upset about losing his voice. Or maybe-” she gasped and pulled out her monster manual, scanning the index for the creature she needed.

“Nerris?”

“Here it is! A changeling!” She began to read silently. “Tell me Serpia, is his skin tone paler than normal?”

“Yeah, now that you mention it, he did look pale this morning. But it might just be because he’s sick.”

“He’s already slender, so we can’t really use that sign. And his hair is dark color, not light like most changeling’s true form.”

“Nerris, what exactly is a changeling?”

“Oh! A changeling is a creature that is able to change its form at will to resemble any given person, hence the name ‘changeling’.”

“So, if David is a changeling, how would we know?”

“Well, most people tend to use thought magic, but neither of us have those spells available. I guess you could tell in their behavior, but there isn’t one solid way to detect one.”

“Interesting. Thanks Nerris. Same time tomorrow?”

“You know it!”

As you make your way down the cardboard steps, you hear a bit of a commotion coming from the art camp, so you decide to investigate. When you got there, there was a very upset looking Dolph and a rather disgruntled Nurf both working on making goblets out of clay. A stern David stood there, arms crossed, foot tapping impatiently.

“David? What’s going on? I thought they were supposed to be doing their morning activities. Pottery class isn’t until next week.”

He wrote something down on the clipboard and handed it to you.

“I thought since they were the art kids, they should get a head start on it.”
“That’s fine and all, but why do they look so upset?”

He took back the clipboard and wrote again.

“They kept doing it wrong, so I had to get a bit stern with them. You know how it is with kids these days. Always needing to question the boss man.”

“Doing it wron- David what the hell are you talking about? They haven’t done pottery in like a year, give them a break!”

He just rolled his eyes and walked away towards the amphitheater, slightly irritated. You look at the two boys in front of you, their clothes and hands covered in wet clay.

“I think you two have earned a break. Go wash up and get ready for lunch. I have no idea what’s gotten into him today, but as soon as I figure it out, I’ll let you guys know. I’m really sorry that happened.”

You sent them on their way before you made your way to the amphitheater to help Preston write lines for his new play. As you did, you saw Max and David sitting on the stage, glaring hard at each other. David tried to write something down, but Max just shoved the clipboard right back in his face. You walked over hoping that you could help the situation de-escalate.

“Woah, what’s going on here?” you ask.

“Can you please tell your stupid as fuck boyfriend that I’m not going to play his weird, culty song?”

“Culty song? What?”

David wrote something down. “Max is feeling a little pushy today. All I’m asking is for him to sing a folk song for me! It’s not that hard!”

“I mean, you probably shouldn’t force him if he doesn’t want to do it.”

“Oh come on, co-counselor! You know as well as I do that a little push is never a bad thing!”

“Max, what exactly did David do?”

“Ask him to hand you the music- you’ll see what I mean.” He turned his attention to David. “I knew you were a fucking weirdo, but I didn’t think it was this bad.”

“David, let me see the music.” You were curious.

“You’re taking his side?! I thought we were a team!” He gave you a hurt expression as he handed you the clipboard.

“I’m not taking sides, David. I just want to see where Max is coming from.”

“Well, I see where I stand. I’ll see you for lunch.” He huffed and walked off towards the counselors cabin.

“You guys uh...having a lovers quarrel?” Max asked.

Preston walked over to where you and Max were standing. “A lovers quarrel?” He gasped, eyes shining with excitement. “So you two are-”

“Yes, Preston. We’re dating.”
You watched as he pranced around the stage pretending to throw flowers from a basket. Max just facepalmed. “Idiot.”

Preston continued on for some time, babbling about having to rewrite his play so that you and David could be the leads—star crossed lovers fated to meet on a long journey only to part ways and never see each other again.

“Come my new leading lady! We must get you into character!”

“Uh, sure. Max, do you want to join us?”

Max sighed in annoyance. “Usually, I’d rather die. But considering my options are either this or dealing with whatever the fuck David has going on today, I’ll help you losers with the play.”

“EXCELLENT!” Preston shouted, “Let’s get to work!”

You and Preston worked together to try and get you into character, but the roll was just not suited for you. You felt awkward and out of place reciting the lines you were given—it just wasn’t clicking. Preston was growing more frustrated as time went on.

“CUT!” he yelled as you were speaking your lines for the tenth time. He walked over to you and placed his hand on your arm. “I’m so sorry, but I just don’t think you’re suited for this roll.”

“It’s alright Preston. I guess I just couldn’t get into character.”

“That’s quite alright. Not everyone can execute a character as expertly as moi.” He struck a pose to emphasize his theatrical prowess.

His words about character got you thinking about David again, and how out of place he seemed to be. It was completely uncharacteristic of him to act the way he did! Preston noticed your thoughtful expression and tried to assure you that not clicking with a character was nothing to get so upset over. You were about to respond when Nikki came charging over to the stage. She looked terrified.

“_____! Something is seriously wrong with David! I just saw one of his eyes fall out!”

Max’s “what the fuck” and Preston’s “good heavens” were lapped over each other.

“Nikki? What are you talking about?” you ask.

“I saw him walking back to the counselor’s cabin but he tripped on something. When he got up, he had covered his eye and was looking for it on the ground! It was like this little, green filmy thing that he had to stick back in its socket!”

Max facepalmed again. “God. Nikki, he just dropped his contact, not his fucking eyeball.”

Suddenly, everything made sense. The behavior, the skin tone, even the fact that he wasn’t talking. You were stock still, looking in the direction of the counselor’s cabin.

“Guys,” you say hesitantly, “David doesn’t wear contacts.”

Chapter End Notes
Not gonna lie I hated writing this chapter. It was one of the few that physically pained me.

That being said, THE CULTIST IS HERE LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

Campe Diem.
“What the hell are you talking about?” Max asked.

“Guys, whoever is in that cabin is not David. I thought it was just him being upset over being sick but there’s no way that’s David. He’s acting way to out of character- irritable, unenthusiastic. Just not David.”

“But if it isn’t David,” Preston asked, “who is it?”

“I don’t know, but the real David is missing and it looks like an impostor has taken his place.” You bend down on one knee so that you’re at their level. “Is there anyone who might want to get back at David for anything?”

“Well,” Nikki said, “there was that one cult leader who tried to take over the camp last year. I think his name was Daniel or something?”

You blink, confused. “A cult leader? What?”

“Yeah,” Max said, “David hired a cult leader to help run the camp last year without realizing it. Almost killed us all with poison punch. Typical camp shit. You know.”

“But why would he be after David?”

“I don’t remember much after being forced into the purification sauna,” Preston said, “but it sounds like David put a stop to his plans. There was an ambulance that was driving away at the end of the day…”

“So you guys are telling me that there’s a cult leader dressed as David currently back for revenge, and now we have to stop him and find the real David?”

They looked at each other uneasily before shrugging.

“Great.” You stand up and put your hand over your eyes. “Just fantastic. Ok, here’s what we’re
going to do. Nikki, warn the others and make sure no one is alone with “David” for any reason.”

“On it!” She rushed off back to the activity field.

“Preston, I need you to help train me how to act like myself so that I can get close without being suspicious.”

“A scene in which the main character has to fake being themself? Brilliant!” You could see his wheels turning.

“Max. I need you to start a huge commotion during lunch so that you can look for the real David while the rest of us attend dance camp. Think you can do that?”

“Is there currently a maniac wandering the camp?” he smirked.

“Alright. Let’s get to work.”

Putting the plan into action, Nikki found all the campers and let them know about the possibility that David was actually Daniel. They were scared, but put on brave faces for the sake of each other. Meanwhile, you and Preston worked on how to best act like you. Between the two of you, it was agreed that you would continue to be pleasant until the time was right. Max was currently concocting a plan to create mass hysteria during lunch, deciding ultimately on a food fight to cause confusion. Preston suggested that you and he work out what you would say when you ‘confronted’ Max for his actions.

As the campers made their way to lunch, they were careful to watch not-David without making it seem super obvious that they were doing so. He was currently sitting while staring out the window, the relaxed smile on his face betrayed by his fingers tapping the table he was at. You stepped in behind them and made your way over to him, acting as if you were ashamed of your earlier actions.

“Uh, hey David,” you say as you make your way over. He looks at you out of the corner of his eye and frowns before turning his attention back to the window. “Yeah, you’ve got every right to be mad at me. I was a total jerk today. I’m sorry, I should’ve listened to you.” You sit down, an embarrassed frown on your face.

Not-David looked to you and gave you a smile before writing something down.

“Don’t worry about it co-counselor. We can’t all be right 100% of the time. Just trust me next time, ok?”

“Yeah, no problem David.” I don’t trust you as far as I can throw you. “Ready for dance camp? I thought we could show the kids one of our swing charts. I know we’ve been doing the tango, but I think it’s fun to mix it up now and again.”

“That’s a great idea!” he wrote. “Which one did you have in mind?”

You talked for a bit longer doing your best to seem calm and collected as your stomach churned in on itself with every passing second you had to talk to this guy. You hated having to laugh and giggle at what he was saying, but you knew you had to so that you could have a chance at getting your David back. You could endure.

Max watched and waited for the right moment to start his part of the plan. After ample time had passed and you had ‘reconciled’ with not-David, he sent a spoonful of mashed potatoes at Preston. Preston winked and flung a bit back at him, but accidentally hit Nurf in in the side of the head.
Irritated, Nurf took his entire tray and flung it across the room spraying peas, mashed potatoes, and spaghetti everywhere.

“FOOD FIIIIIIIGHT!” Nikki cried as she jumped up on the table, grabbed a handful of her own spaghetti and pelted Harrison in the face with it. Utter pandemonium overcame the mess hall as splottedch of red, white and green began to cover the walls, floor, ceiling, and campers. You held up your own tray to best protect yourself from the fallout and you saw not-David do the same. You watched in secret admiration of how the kids were able to so expertly pelt each other with uneaten food as it sailed through the air. You uncovered yourself when there seemed to be a pause in the action.

“MAX!” you bellowed, storming your way over to where he stood. “What the HELL has gotten into you?!”

“Thought the walls could use some redecorating. I think it looks nice.”

You grabbed his shoulders. “The only thing you should be thinking is how lucky you are that I haven’t thrown your ass out the window. Now you’re going to stay here and clean up this mess by yourself until it sparkles.” You winked at him before taking his arm and dragging him into the kitchen. You gave him the cleaning supplies and walk him back out the hall, ordering him to get to it.

“Come on kids, let’s get cleaned up and ready for our afternoon activity.” They all walk out to make their way to the showers. You secretly give Max a thumbs up as you leave with them.

As soon as the door had latched, Max burst through the kitchen to find the Quartermaster standing in shock as he looked at the carnage that had happened in the mess hall. Max stopped short thinking of what to say. “Uh, I can explain—”

“My precious potatoes. Wasted.” The Quartermaster took off his hat and placed it over his heart as a single tear fell from his eye. Realizing that he had not been noticed, Max quietly backed out of the kitchen and through the front door, thinking of where David could possibly be. He searched all around the activity field, the counselors cabin, the bathrooms, he even made his way into the Quartermaster’s store. He knew there was no way he could check the amphitheater when everyone was there, so he knew there was one other place to look. Racing to the docks, Max began to row his way to Spooky Island.

You and not-David lead your group out to the amphitheater to start the dance lesson. Pairing the kids up as usual, you wondered how this was going to work. You had no idea if this guy even knew how to dance but, he seemed confident when you talked with him earlier. Maybe he could fake his way through it, even if he didn’t know the routine. As you paired up with him to teach the rest of the tango, you automatically wanted to drop his hand and run for the hills. His hand was much too far down your hip, lingering too close to your backside. The grip in which he held your hand was tight and awkward, completely different from David’s gentle grasp. You hated every second you had to be pressed against him- it made your skin crawl. Soon though, the lesson itself ended and it was time for you to do your own chart.

You’d decided to do Sing, Sang, Sung- an upbeat swing chart that paid homage to Benny Goodman’s Sing Sing Sing. It was one of your favorite dances with David, and was what you had performed as a midterm. As soon as it started though, everything felt so wrong. Not only were his steps off, but he was trying to force you to follow him in whatever he was trying to do. You battled for the lead all through the beginning of the song, but ultimately you gave in near the first chorus, letting him practically throw you around the stage. You only hoped that Max was successful in finding David.
Max stepped out of the boat upon reaching the shore of Spooky Island and raced to the mansion in the middle. If David wasn’t anywhere else, he must be here. Bursting through the doors, Max passed through the library and made his way to the laundry shoot that would lead to the lab. Bracing himself for whatever he was about to see, he slid down the shoot and landed in the disturbing lab once again, surrounded by whatever horrific experiments that Campbell had made in his time there. Unfazed, Max rushed down the stairs to the dungeon and threw open the door, revealing a dark room. He smelled blood and as his eyes adjusted, he saw mysterious dark puddles covering the floor. He flicked on the light switch and illuminated the room, eyes scanning it until he spotted David on his knees chained to the wall.

“David!” Max rushed to David taking in the sight of him. He had large, long gashes covering his chest and arms. His shirt was tattered and covered in dried blood from his wounds. His head was down but Max could still see that he had some scuffs on his forehead and a large black eye. Max tried to get him to respond, but David didn’t seem to be conscious as his head lulled side to side. In this state, Max had begun to think the worst, but upon placing a finger to David’s neck, he found a weak pulse. He was still alive!

“Hang on David!” Max rushed back to the lab to see if there was anything he could use to wake David up. Tearing the room apart, he found a second aid kit on the back of one of the shelves. Looking through it, he found smelling salts. Max sprinted back down the stairs to where David was still chained, uncapping the salts in his haste. Dropping to his knees, Max brought the salts under David’s nose, hoping that he wasn’t too far gone to help.

Without warning, David’s eyes shot open and he began sputtering at the scent that had penetrated his nose. Groaning, he went to wipe his eyes before realizing he was still chained to the wall. Looking up, he saw Max’s concerned face kneeling in front of him. “M-Max? What are you doing here?” His voice was weak and hoarse, barely a whisper in the cold concrete chamber.

“David holy shit, what happened to you?”

“Daniel’s here.” He started coming back to his senses, hyperventilating as he did so. “Daniel’s here. I gotta get you kids safe. Where are the others!?” He was frantically pulling on his restraints, unsuccessful in his endeavor of escape.

“David, I need you to focus. Why’s Daniel here?”

He looked to Max, a terrified expression on his face. “He’s here to kill everyone.”

As you and not-David danced across the stage, you got more and more uncomfortable. Not only was he trying to force you through the song, you kept having to maneuver your body awkwardly to keep yourself as far away from him as possible. Finally, at the end of the song, he suddenly dipped you, a very strange smile on his face. As you stood there, you knew it was now or never.

You kneed him in the groin as hard as you could, sending you to the ground as he dropped you on the wooden stage and causing the kids to gasp in shock. You looked as he was now on the floor, hands between his legs and groaning in pain. Racing to get up, you got to your feet and pulled whoever this was off the ground, forcing him to stand.

“Alright you fucking creep, who the hell are you and what have you done with David?” He answered by grabbing your arms and bashing his head against yours, leaving you stunned and forcing you to drop him. Through your blurry vision, you saw him rubbing his own forehead, a wicked smile on his face.

“Well, I guess you’ve figured it out. But it’s too late, David is gone.”
“W-what the hell are you talking about.” You were still coming back to yourself, trying your best to get over your dizziness.

“I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is Daniel. I was a counselor here briefly last year before I was unfairly terminated by your good friend.”

“Don’t listen to him!” Neil cried. “He tried to kill us all last year!”

“Oh Neil. I was just trying to help you all reach ascension! You seemed to be fine after your time in the sauna.”

“That’s because you brainwashed us you fucking cultist!”

You swear you heard Daniel’s neck crack as he whipped his head to look at Neil. “I’m so sorry you feel that way Neil. I’m only here to make sure you’re all at peace with Zeemuug, once and for all.” You stare in horror as Daniel produces a long, crooked silver dagger from behind his back.

_Nope_. Without thinking, you rushed Daniel and punched him in the face, making the knife fly out of his hand and skitter across the stage. The kids ran away in terror leaving you alone with the madman. As he turned back to you, you noticed you had knocked one of his contacts out, revealing his own pale blue iris underneath. He had a murderous look in his eye that reached all the way down to his smile. “Looks like you’re going to be first, then.”

Without warning, he socked you in the jaw sending you staggering backwards. He landed another blow to your stomach, causing you to yelp in pain. You blocked his next punch and sent one flying back at him, connecting with his nose as a sickening crack filled the air. Now with the advantage, you kick him in the stomach forcing him backwards. He lets out a huff of air as the wind is knocked out of him. You uppercut him, making him stagger back again and are about to throw another punch when you feel a solid blow hit you in the chest. You wheeze, trying to catch your breath and are left vulnerable to Daniel’s next attack as he kicks you.

You fall to the ground, panting and hurt but force yourself up again into a ready position- you were not about to go down that easily. Charging forward, you start swinging recklessly, landing mediocre hits on the man but still forcing him on the defensive side. Finally, you manage a solid kick to his side, forcing him to bend.

As he’s doubled over, he brings a hand to his now broken nose, covering it with his own blood as he wipes it. You tackle him to the ground and do your best to knock him out, but he grabs both of your wrists and flips you on your back. With him now on top of you and you unable to struggle your way out of his grasp, you watch in terror as he grabs the forlorn blade and hovers it over your neck.

“You really should be thanking me,” Daniel says as you struggle underneath him. “Soon you and your campers will know the true love of Zeemuug. Now, this won’t hurt a bit.” Slowly, he raised the knife above his head ready and in position to strike. You closed your eyes and turned your head, waiting for the end.

Suddenly, an angry scream filled the air before you heard a loud crashing noise. Opening one eye, you saw a stunned Daniel drop his dagger before flopping on top of you, unconscious. Behind him stood a bruised and bloodied David, broken chair in hand.

Chapter End Notes
"Hey Ram what did you do on your birthday?"

"Oh you know. Broke a cultist's nose and almost died. No big deal."

The song you and Daniel dance to is "Sing Sang Sung" by Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MCGApB7Uxg

Campe Diem!
Saturn

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Saturn by Sleeping at Last. Check it out here!  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzNvk80XY9s

I'm not sure how many of you listen to the songs as you read, but I'd recommend doing it for this chapter. Start when you hit the lake.

-Ram

See the end of the chapter for more notes

David stood over you, panting with a look of pure rage on his face. It quickly changed to worry as he saw you still trapped beneath Daniel. He helped shove him off of you and got you to your feet, pulling you into a tight hug as you begin sobbing into his chest.

“Hey, it’s ok. I’m here,” he says as he strokes your hair. Pressing his lips to the top of your head, he breathes in deeply, still trying to calm himself down. As soon as he and Max had arrived, he watched as Daniel had overpowered you, threatening you with his knife. David saw red as he rushed the stage. The next thing he realized, he was standing over you and an unconscious Daniel while holding a broken chair in his hands.

You pull away and look at his busted face and bloody shirt and an uncontrollable sense of rage began to fill you. You look at the unconscious Daniel laying at your feet and attempt to strangle him. David pulled you off of him, picking you up and carrying you off the stage as quickly as possible with you kicking and screaming how you were going to kill the bastard.

He took you to the center of camp where the Max had found the campers. They screamed as David carried you over, before Max assured them it was the real David. You had calmed down some as he set you down in front of the campers. Taking a deep breath and looking up to the sky, you steadied yourself and tried to force back your fury.

“Is everyone ok?” David asked, distressed. They all nodded, traumatized but safe. “Good,” he said with a smile before promptly passing out.

You snapped out of your murderous state and caught David before he could hit the ground. Immediately, you went into damage control mode.

“Nikki, get the first aid kit. Nurf, bring Daniel here and tie him up. Ered, call 911.”

“I’ll do you one better,” Ered said as she turned to make a phone call. Nikki returned quickly with the first aid kit and you promptly got to work. Cutting off his shirt, you really got a look at what he had been through: Large, long gashes crisscrossed their way across his body, caked in dried blood. With every shallow breath, the ones on his pecs seemed to break a little bit, not allowing them to fully heal. Purple and yellow bruises stretched themselves across his skin, making him look incredibly sickly. It was a mess and you felt your rage bubbling again, but you needed to focus. Grateful that he was unconscious, you swabbed down every cut with alcohol and managed to get
him wrapped in gauze. You placed an ice pack over his eye to help with the swelling, but the
bruises were going to be there a while.

No sooner had you finished did Nurf bring Daniel over, bound completely in rope. You felt
yourself shaking with anger as your hands balled into fists and your breathing got rapid and
shallow. Nurf placed his hand on your arm before speaking.

“____. I know you’re angry and you have every right to be. But right now, you need to breathe,
get a grip on your emotions, and calm down. Do it for David.”

You did as Nurf said and took a few large deep breaths, turned your back on the impostor and
focused your attention on David. A few minutes later, an ambulance arrived along with a black
government vehicle. Two agents stepped out of the car and made their way over to the group of
you, while paramedics put David in a stretcher, carrying him to the back of the ambulance. You felt
a pang in your heart as they loaded him up.

“Ma’am, are you in charge here?” The first agent asked you once they arrived, throwing you out of
your thoughts.

“Y-yes. How can I help you?”

“We were alerted to a distress call coming from the camp. Something about a cult leader and an
unconscious counselor?”

“Yeah. The counselor is currently being taken to the hospital and well…” you step out the way to
show the detained Daniel on the ground. “I’m sorry, who are you? How did you find out about
this?”

“Allow us to introduce ourselves,” the second agent said. “I’m agent Miller and this is my partner,
agent Miller.”

“Miller?” you ask before the realization sets in. “Wait, are you-”

“Yes,” Ered says. “My cool gay dads.”

“Meredith has told us about you,” the first agent said. “She says she likes your vibe.”

“Daaaad!” Ered said, “you’re embarrassing me! And I told you to call me Ered.”

You manage to explain the situation to the agents who thank you for your contribution. You tell
them that if it wasn’t for the kids, you weren’t sure what would have happened today- they’re the
real heroes. They assure you that Daniel would be kept in a maximum security facility away from
others and that there was no chance he was getting out any time soon. The paramedics look you
over after you tell them what you know about David’s injuries. They tell you that nothing is
broken, but that you’re definitely going to have to take it easy for a while.

You watch as the black government vehicle and the ambulance carry the two away until you
couldn’t see them anymore. The kids all looked to you for what to do next, but you had no idea.
You felt sick. You just wanted to break down and cry right there in the middle of camp, but the
kids needed you to be strong. Afterall, you weren’t the only person who just went through
something traumatic.

“Alright guys, let’s just...take some time off. For the rest of the day and tomorrow, you guys are
free to do what you want. You’ve earned it. Come on, let’s have dinner.”
The kids seemed hopeful at your suggestion and followed you into the mess hall. As soon as you entered, the smell of old spaghetti and mushy peas overpowered your senses as you’d forgotten that the mess earlier had yet to be cleaned up. You slammed the door as quickly as you opened it and looked to the campers again, stupefied. “Alright. Tonight is a pizza night.”

After you’d finished your pizza and sent the campers off to do what they wanted, you threw on your swimsuit, grabbed your flippers, mask and snorkel, and made your way to the dock. Setting everything down, you dive into the water, allowing the sense of weightlessness to overcome you. Keeping your eyes closed, you release some of your air through your nose and sink a little deeper into the lake, the cold water surrounding you as you slowly fall. Once you hit the bottom, you open your eyes and look around at the blurry scene in front of you: muted browns and grays took over the bottom of the lake as it sprawled out in every direction. Swirls of green rose up from the bed, swaying gently back and forth as the water moved around it. Looking up, you saw small ripples reflecting the sun’s light and obscuring the world above you- a false mirror into another world. Pushing off the ground, you make your way through the shimmering surface and made a small gasp for air when you breached.

Pulling yourself back onto the dock, you slipped on your flippers and adjusted your mask before plunging back in. Positioning yourself on your stomach, you put the snorkel in your mouth before you floated on the surface of the water. You could see clearly now what you couldn’t before: gray sand and sun bleached wood littered the bottom of the lake, while long strands of plant life protruded from it. Rocks of varying shapes and sizes gave it character as they rose from the depths. Small, silver fish darted their way out from beneath your shadow, unaware if you were friend or foe.

You released the breath you didn’t know you were holding as you took it all in. You decided to circle spooky island and come back to help digest what happened today, but once you got to the halfway mark you just...kept swimming. Looking down into the depths of the lake made you feel very small. Insignificant. Lonely. It reminded you of the sea, even though it had no strong currents or large waves to battle. It was peaceful in its own, humbling way, for if you were so small in just a single patch of water, what were you to the rest of the world? The universe?

Sighing, you close your eyes and float over the deep blue water. I’m me. You tell yourself. I’m ____. I’m a college student trying to make a place in the world. I’m still a kid in a bigger body, trying to figure out why no one told me life likes to throw curveballs. Right now, I’m on a lake where I’m working as a camp counselor. You breathe in again as your hair billows around your face.

I’m alive. I’m small in the grand scheme of things, but I’m alive, and that’s gotta count for something. I don’t know what’s going to happen next. I’m afraid. I’m sad. I’m angry. But I’m not the only one. The kids need me. David needs me. I need me. And even if I’m small, I can still try to make sense of it all, and right now knowing that David is safe is what’s going to keep me moving forward. What makes sense is to make sure those kids are going to be ok.

You flip yourself from a horizontal to lateral position and tread water as you remove your mask. You realize you’d swam much farther than you’d intended to, shrinking Camp Campbell to the point where it looked like a distant memory. You hovered there for a moment before making the swim back.

The shadows of dusk had already made their presence known by the time you reached the dock. As you pull yourself out of the water, you found Space kid there to help you, his gloved hand reaching to pull you out. With one hand on the planks and the other grasping his hand, you get onto the dock no problem.
“Howdy _____,” he says once you are fully standing.

“Howdy Space kid. Thanks for the help back there. Who knows where I’d be without you.” You sit down on the dock as you remove your flippers, the cool air making your shiver slightly as it hits the water on your body. Space kid takes a seat next to you.

“How was your swim?” he asks innocently.

“It was…” you pause, trying to find the right word, “cathartic.”

“What’s that mean?”

“It’s a fancy way of saying it helped me clear my head.” You give him a small smile before turning back to the water. “Swimming usually helps me with that. Gives me a sense of scale of how small we are in the universe, you know?”

“Oh I completely understand,” he says. “Sometimes, when I can’t sleep, I like to go look at the moon and think ’my Grandpa was up there!’ He used to tell me all kinds of stories about it. The one I like to think about when I’m upset is the one where he blotted out the whole world with his thumb.”

“Wow,” you say. “He must have felt like a giant.”

“That’s what I thought too, but he said it made him feel really small. So I like to think, ‘hey, if my Grandpa felt small on the moon, then maybe I don’t ever need to feel big.’” He paused for a second before looking at you. “Does that make sense?”

“More than I think you know.” You rub the top of his dome, giving him a weary smile.

“Look!” he says as he points to the sky. “It’s Venus!” Following his finger, you look up into the sky to find the planet beginning to twinkle softly as the sun falls to the horizon.

“Venus huh?” you say. “She’s the Roman goddess of love.”

“And Earth’s sister planet! You know, aside from being completely inhospitable.”

You hum contemplatively before speaking again. “Hey Space kid, I know that usually you wish on the first star you see, but do you think there’s a rule about wishing on a planet?”

“I don’t see why we couldn’t!” He gives you another big smile before holding his hands in front of him and closing his eyes. You smile tenderly before turning back to the sky and closing your own eyes.

Venus you think. If you can hear me, I wish that David makes a speedy recovery. Please, if you can, send him my love.

You open your eyes again and look out at the sky as the stars begin to make themselves known. You and Space kid sit for a while longer, enjoying the peacefulness of the constellations as they shine down on you.

“Oh! A bunch of us are gonna watch a movie! Neil set up a whole projector on the side of the mess hall. It’s pretty cool. Do you wanna watch it with us?” Space kid asks, excited.

“That sounds great, Space kid. I’d love to.”

As you stand, he takes you by the hand and leads you towards the rest of the camp, stars still sparkling overhead.
Chapter End Notes

I can't really explain why, but this is probably my favorite chapter of the fic. Space kid is the purest boy and no one can convince me otherwise.

Campe Diem!
You slept in the next morning hard, not getting out of bed until around noon. You’d enjoyed the movie with the kids the night before, as it was a good distraction from the days events. Their faces lifted when you showed up with Space kid and as the night went on, you watched as they fell asleep one by one under the stars and in front of the makeshift screen. You woke them up gently after it ended and made sure they’d gotten back to their tents safely, heading to the counselors cabin when they all disappeared inside. You hadn’t expected just how lonely you’d feel knowing David wasn’t going to be there that night and the fact that you didn’t know when he was coming back didn’t help things, either. You tried to sleep in your bed, but it just wasn’t working, so you made your way into David’s room and wrapped yourself in his sheets attempting to imitate his warm embrace.

Now, as you woke up, a feeling of guilt washed over you knowing that the mess hall was still a complete disaster. You realized that the kids either had to eat in that, or maybe didn’t eat at all. You hoped that most of them were still sleeping as you trudged over to the mess hall, bracing for the worst.

Upon opening the door, you were shocked to find the kids listening to music while scrubbing down the little mess that was left. It didn’t seem like they were being forced to, either.

“Aw shit, she’s up.” You heard Max’s voice over the music as the campers all turned to look at you. You suddenly felt embarrassed.

“Guys? It’s your day off. You didn’t have to do all this.”

“But ve vanted to!” Dolph said enthusiastically.

“Yeah,” Neil agreed. “You seemed really stressed out after yesterday, so we thought you could use a break, too.”

“That’s why we decided to clean the mess hall!” Nikki said.

You were touched. They had gone completely out of their way on their day off just to make you feel a little better. You couldn’t help but get teary eyed. “Thank you,” you say, barely holding it together.

“Don’t mention it,” Ered said. “Plus, it’s not every day that you have to fight your boyfriend’s evil twin. Take a load off.”

“Man, I guess that secret’s out, huh?” you ask sheepishly. “Does everyone know?”

“Everyone plus the Flowerscouts,” Ered responds holding out her phone.
“And ze Voodscouts!” Dolph says, copying her.

“Wow. Word travels way faster than I realized,” you say as a blush slowly creeps onto your face. The campers all share a knowing glance.

The next few days came in a blur. For the rest of their day off, most of the campers decided to spend the day on the lake so you joined them, enjoying your time in the sun. Wednesday was spent dedicated to extreme sports camp, and Ered showed everyone how to do a 720 off the half pipe. Thursday was the day you were supposed to get Space kid into space, but you’d received a message from the hospital notifying you that David was most likely going to wake up within the next 24 hours. You were sobbing that morning, relieved that he was going to be ok. When you told the campers, Space kid was adamant about turning the day into ‘get well soon’ day wherein everyone had to make a get well soon card for David.

You felt like you didn’t deserve that kid.

You woke up on Friday to a message from the scouts letting you know that they were willing to take the kids for the weekend so that you could visit David. You guessed that the Scoutmaster and Gardenmother most likely also knew of your relationship with David by now, and you were quick to accept their invitation. Your campers seemed enthusiastic about the idea of returning to their friend’s camps, so that afternoon you saw them all off safely, profusely thanking the scouts. Grabbing the hand-made cards from the kids, you jumped in the car and made the trek to Sleepy Peak General. To David.

Upon your arrival, you were a bit disheartened to know he was already awake, but the nurse reassured you that it happened at night, so you wouldn’t have been there anyway. She lead you down a long corridor before arriving in front of a single room marked by a small name plate with David’s name on it. Poking her head in the door, she said, “David, you have a visitor.”

“That’s great! Send them in!” He sounded cheerful, but a bit weak. Stepping into the hospital room, you found him sitting upright in his bed- his green eyes and red hair were a stark contrast to the white sheets and light blue gown he was wearing. A heart monitor to his right started beeping more rapidly as soon as you stepped into the room and without a word, he held his arms out which you gladly melted into. He was here. He was here and he was ok.

“I’ve missed you,” you whisper into his neck.

“I’ve missed you too.” He nuzzles his nose on your cheek to get you to turn it before kissing you. The heart monitor continues speeding up.

You sit and talk with him for hours, even though it only seems like a few minutes. You catch him up on everything that happened from the moment he passed out to the moment you walked in the door. He listened eagerly and you realized he probably couldn’t wait to get back to camp. You know you couldn’t wait for him to come back.

“Oh! And the kids made you these!” You pulled out the get well soon cards and handed them to David, watching as a thoughtful expression took over his face. Each of them had incorporated their own little quirk into the card.

Harrison’s had all kinds of different magic items on the front which on the inside read: *I wish I could make you magically better.* When he closed it, the front design had change, now reading: *But I guess we’ll have to wait for the reveal!* Bewildered, you and David tried your hardest to figure out how the card worked, but you couldn’t get it.
Nerris’s card had a picture of David dressed in full armor fighting a white dragon on the front. On the back, it says: *Hope your long rest gets you back to full HP!*

Ered’s didn’t have a personalized message. Instead it had been decorated in a multitude of interlacing designs that covered the page. You and David had a difficult time putting it down.

Preston had cut his into the shape of a director’s chair with David’s name written on the back. When you flipped the card over it read: *Wishing you a stellar recovery, super-star.*

Nurf had opted not to make a card and instead had hand carved a small version of the tree that was on yours and David’s camp shirt.

On Dolph’s card, the text *No matter what anyone says* sat above where he had drawn a big red X through Daniel’s blond haired, blue-eyed face. The inside revealed the message *You’re already the best you you can be!* written above David’s own green eyes and red hair.

Nikki had drawn a very sweet collage of stick figures representing her and David involved in the different activities at camp. In the middle, it said: *Thanks for always being there for me.*

Neil’s card had diagrams of Endorphins, Dopamine, Serotonin, and Oxytocin all across the front of the card while the back said: *Sending you all the happiness I can.*

Space kid had drawn a picture of the milky way and had written *You’re the coolest counselor in the galaxy* across the top.

Lastly, Max’s card had a picture of him standing with his hands in his pockets. Through his speech bubble, he said “Don’t fucking die on me, idiot.” On the inside, though, he had drawn David and himself standing watching the sunset. David had his hand on Max’s shoulder while another speech bubble said, “I’m serious.”

All of them had been signed by the campers with a small ‘get well soon’ near the bottom of the card. As he looked them all over, David began to weep. He felt so loved by the campers- he couldn't believe they did this just for him. You brought him into another hug and stroked his hair lovingly while he cried. He deserved all the love from the campers and more, you just wished he received it more often. You wanted to get him back to camp so that he could be where he was meant to be- not stuck in some stupid hospital away from his calling. Away from his home.

David managed to pull himself together after some time, so you handed him a box of tissues so that he could wipe away his tears and blow his nose. You leaned your head on his shoulder, happy to be close to him again as a tender silence came over the two of you.

“All right. I’ve had this question on my mind and you’re the only person who can answer it.” He spoke without warning.

“Shoot.” *Was he seriously about to-*

“Does nearly getting stabbed to death get me a step closer to being the avatar of near-death experiences? You know, with it being metal and all.”

You just stared at him. You couldn’t believe that after almost dying and being in a coma for nearly five days, he was already bouncing back.

“..Too soon?”

You started laughing- you couldn’t help it! The thought was just too ridiculous to ignore. David
soon joined in your laughter, glad that he hadn’t scared you. You kissed him on the forehead before you answered. “Yes. I think it counts.” You sigh as you lean back into his shoulder. “When can you come back?”

“The doctors told me that waking up was the hardest part. The injuries aren’t super serious, so I should be out by Sunday.” He sighed and looked ahead at the wall as a small frown crept its way onto his face. “I hope Daniel is ok. I feel kind of bad for what I did to the guy.”

You manage to subdue the fact that your blood was boiling even at the mention of Daniel’s name, choosing instead to just hum in contemplation. Another silence comes over the room as David reflects on the day. You know his heart is in the right place when it comes to his concern for Daniel, but you just couldn’t bring yourself to feel even the slightest bit of empathy or remorse for him- he could rot for the rest of his life because of what he did to David for all you cared. But, David was different from most people, and you knew that he always did his best to see the good in others- even if there wasn’t any there.

“There was something he said that bothered me, though,” David said after a few moments had passed. “He said he had a deal to uphold, and that he had to get rid of me. Do you think he was sent by someone?”

“I don’t think so, David,” you confide. “It was probably just something he said so that if he was caught, he could have something to fall back on. Something to throw you off.”

“But he said it so confidently.”

“He said everything pretty confidently.” You take his hand in yours and cradle the side of his head, turning it to look at you. “Whatever he said you can’t trust. And even if there is someone out there trying to get you, they’re gonna have to go through me first.”

David gives you a small smile.

“By the way,” he ponders, “where are the campers?”

“They’re with the scouts this weekend. Word traveled about what happened pretty fast so Derek and Penelope offered to take the kids so I could come visit. They’re safe. You don’t have to worry.”

His soft smile returned as he relaxed, relieved at the news that the campers were ok.

“But just so you know, that wasn’t the only news that traveled rather quickly.”

“What? What else happened?”

“Literally everyone knows about us. Everyone.”

He chuckles a bit as his cheeks turn red. “Oh.” You giggle at his reaction- he was absolutely adorable.

No sooner had the two of you finished your embarrassed tittering did the nurse walk in, doing her best to hold… something back behind the door. “David, you have more visitors.” She seemed to struggle a bit, but managed to keep whatever was wriggling around behind her in place. You and David look at each other, curious as to who it could be.

“Well, the more the merrier. Send them in!” As soon as David said it, a teal blur came flying through the door, landing on David’s lap and forcing him to let out a puff of air. When he got over
the initial shock of the blow, he realized Nikki was now standing on his bed, her face an inch away from his own.

“Hi David!”

“Nikki?” you both say at the same time.

“Not just her!” Harrison’s voice came from the door as he stepped through the threshold. He was followed by Preston and Nerris, each of them giving their respective hellos. Soon enough, all your campers had found their way into the room, surrounding you and David as they squished as close together as possible. You wondered why they were so close until you realized that more people were still coming through the door! The Woodscouts filed in orderly after your campers and the Flowerscouts came next with Derek and Penelope following behind. Lastly, Gwen and the Quartermaster made their way into the cramped room completing the group in its entirety.

“W-what are you all doing here?” David asked. You were too surprised to speak, but Pikeman was not.

“Your campers alerted us of your current condition, so we decided to come for a quick visit.”

“Yeah,” Sasha said. “Plus, we wanted to give our congrats to the happy couple.” She clasped her hands together and put them up by her face. You and David shared sheepish smiles as your faces turned pink.

“Thanks for letting me know by the way, ____.” Gwen said in mock annoyance. “God, one week with your boyfriend and you already forgot about me. I see how it is.” She gave you a wink and you rolled your eyes at her. “And David, how many times have I told you to not go and get yourself killed?”

“Including this one?” he asks. “Fifty four.”

You laugh and turn your attention to the Quartermaster, “QM? Why are you here?”

He sniffed. “Lost a bet.”

The kids and counselors all talk for awhile longer trying to get the full story on what really happened. David left out some of the more gruesome parts for the sake of the kids, or did he just not want to relive it? You didn’t blame him either way. Much too quickly, the nurse returned to let everyone know visiting hours were almost over and that everyone would have to leave soon. You weren’t ready to leave yet, and it seemed like the kids shared the sentiment. But, you knew it was inevitable. When the time came, you watched as everyone gave David a hug and head out of the room before you gave him a kiss goodbye.

“I’ll be back on Sunday,” he reiterates. “Try not to have too much fun without me!” He flashes his signature grin, making your heart melt into a puddle on the floor.

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

Chapter End Notes

The kids aren’t little monsters all of the time it seems, and David's coming home soon.
Campe Diem!
Who We Are

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Who We Are by Imagine Dragons. Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbrpuDoMqU4

WARNING! IMPORTANT!
Reader has a panic attack in this chapter.

Read on, read on, read on, read until your dreams come true.

Writing was painful for you that night. You forced yourself to retell the journal everything you’d been neglecting to for the past five days. Gwen was staying the night again and it had given you an outlet to just break down and get all your emotions out about how scared you had been. You told her of course about your emotions regarding to David, but even she didn’t know about your current inner turmoil.

When I saw him there, all I thought was how much I wanted him dead. Your hand shakes as you write, scribbling your personal font into chicken scratch. I actually went for it, but David pulled me off. But I went for it without hesitation. What kind of monster… you were unable to finish the thought before quiet sobs began to wrack your body. You push on. I scared myself that day, not just because of what I did, but because I don’t know if I would have stopped on my own. Even now, all I can think of is my hate.

You allow yourself to cry for what seems like an eternity, thinking about what could have happened that day. Every possibility ran through your mind- each just as worse as the last. David dead, Daniel dead, the kids dead, yourself dead- they all came rushing at you in a flurry of silent assaults on your psyche.

Gwen found you moments later lying on your back and hyperventilating as your terrified face looked up at nothing. She rushed to your side, trying to get your attention. “_____! It’s ok. I’m here. You’re safe.” She was doing her best to calm you as you were still lost in your trance, petrified by what might have been. When you finally manage to come back to yourself, Gwen holds you as you sob into her, confused and scared and angry. She rubs your back soothingly as you calm down little by little, and eventually you find your quiet, frightened voice.

“They all could have died, Gwen. They all could have fucking died.”

She just holds you and rocks you slowly side to side while you drain yourself physically and emotionally.

The next morning was the most difficult wake up you’d ever had to force yourself through; you were exhausted both physically and mentally. Gwen stayed with you that night, unwilling to leave you alone in such a vulnerable state, but even after she helped you calm down you had a restless sleep. Groaning, you force yourself to throw off the blankets and shiver in the cold morning air. Gwen stirs slightly, but ultimately doesn’t wake up.
As you finished getting ready, you tied the small blue shirt around your neck and realized it had become as much a part of your outfit as David’s yellow one had. It comforted you knowing that you had at least a small piece of him with you at all times, even if you were separated. You leave Gwen a note and make your way to the mess hall, desperate for some caffeine to get you through the day. Ordering it black, you accept the mug and sit at your usual table watching as the campers slowly start to trickle inside. They had come back to camp after visiting David, claiming that they wanted to ensure they were there when he returned.

Max makes his way in late as usual, a mug of his own coffee in hand. He notices you sitting in the corner looking a bit ragged. As he walks over, he sees your eyes are red and puffy while dark bags hang below them. You did your best to manage your hair, but your heart wasn’t in it, leading to all kinds of strays and flyaways that stuck up all over the place. You looked physically exhausted as you struggled to keep your eyes open.

“Jesus Christ. The fuck happened to you?”

You turn to him and give him a weary smile. “Morning Max, and you know, just the feeling of existential dread and contemplation that comes with almost dying.” You take a sip of your coffee. “The usual.”

Max was concerned. “Are you...ok?”

You ruffle his hair. “I’ll be fine, Max. I just need some time.” You smirk as he puts it back in place. “Now, who the hell are you? For a second there, it sounded like you kind of cared about me, and God knows that the real Max hates everything.”

“Welp, you got me,” he says. “You going to kick the crap out of me too?”

“Naw, I don’t feel like getting blood on my boot.”

You and he shared a slightly morbid chuckle as you watch the rest of camp eat and converse with each other. Gwen eventually staggers into the room, bleary-eyed, and makes her way over to the counter. Without turning your head, you address Max once more. “Hey Max? Thank you.”

He lifts his mug. “Anytime, moron.”

Gwen eventually finds her way over to you and the three of you converse. With it being a Saturday, there were no planned activities so you were free to do as you pleased. Max and Gwen went with Neil and Nurf who said they were working together on a project. Nurf emphasized the fact that he only had to wedgie Neil once in order to help him. You decided to go with Nikki to try and reacclimate yourself to tree climbing as your fall had left you hesitant to really try again. But, you were confident that with Nikki’s help, you would be climbing again in no time. You enjoyed the time you spent with her- it was always a treat to spend the day in the woods.

After you had climbed as much as your mind allowed you to, you decided to hang out with Harrison for a bit. You often debated whether or not the kid actually had magic tendencies, because on more than one occasion so far, you’d caught him practicing levitation. Part of you was insanely curious while the other was slightly terrified. You sat and watched as he practiced his illusions, and you were not afraid to say that you were on the edge of your seat the whole time. He finished his routine by making a full bouquet disappear only to have the petals delicately fall onto the top of your head. He seemed stoked that he made them reappear, even if it was just pieces.

“Harrison that was spectacular! How did you do it?”
“A great magician never reveals his secrets,” he said as he brushed off his shoulders. You chuckled a bit.

“You know, Neil said something similar when he gave me his synthetic chocolate. I think the two of you may have more in common then you realize.”

He rolled his eyes. “Oh please. That cynic and I have nothing in common. You work together one time to steal some binoculars and suddenly everyone thinks your best friends.” Wide eyed, he slams his hands over his mouth at the realization of what he said.

“Binoculars? Harrison what are you-” He throws something on the ground and disappears in a puff of smoke, leaving you bewildered.

_That was weird._

As the day went on, you were getting more and more impatient for David to return. You wanted him back to camp there and now. You sulked around the camp for a bit, letting your mind wander every which way. _What difference does one day even make? If he’s just resting, he could be doing it here. He has a bed!_ You mulled over the thought for a while until you came to the conclusion that it would be cruel to have him here but force him to stay in bed. Knowing David, he’s going to want to jump right back into every activity headfirst.

Through your aimless walking, you found yourself at science camp where Neil and Nurf were currently working together on something. They both had large aprons, safety goggles, and oven mitts on- further prompting your curiosity. Nurf was unintentionally blocking your view with his body, but even when you walked over and did see the small iron...thing he held, your questions were left unanswered.

“Uh, hey guys? What’s all this?” You saw various pieces of metal strewn about the place as well as a large burner beneath the table. A large iron pot with a small open spout sat atop it as molten metal bubbled inside.

“Oh hey!” Neil said, taking off his safety goggles. “You’re about to witness our first test! Quick, put these on!” He hands you your own apron and goggles before he returns his to his face. “Alright Nurf, it should be ready. Put the cast in the ground and pour the liquid into it.” Nurf did as he was told by burying the iron thing he held in the ground. A large hole on the bottom revealed that it was hollow on the inside. Carefully, Nurf tipped the large pot and watched as the red-orange liquid fell into the hole, filling it to the top. Once it hardened enough, he grabbed a pair of large metal tongs, pulled the cast from the ground, and placed it in a large barrel of water which almost immediately began to boil. When it had calmed down, Nurf pulled it out again and removed the cast, revealing a small steel tree.

“You guys,” you say, “that’s amazing! I didn’t know you were into smithing.” They went on to explain Nurf’s interest in metalwork and how he and Neil had come up with the process. It was ingenious and you didn’t hide your excitement for the boys. “I’m really proud of you guys, this is amazing. Who knows, maybe I can convince David to turn blacksmithing into a camp. Would you like that?” Nurf’s eyes grew wide with excitement as he nodded his head. You sent him on his way, watching as he admired the small statue he had created. Finding yourself alone with Neil, you figured this could be a good time to talk to him about what Harrison said.

“Hey Neil?” you ask somewhat seriously. “Can I talk to you about something?”

“Yeah, sure,” he says as he begins taking off his apron. “Is everything ok?”
“Well, Harrison told me something interesting about binoculars today. You and he took them for something?” Neil froze making your suspicion only grow. “It’s ok, you can tell me if you did. I’ll make sure you don’t get in a lot trouble.

“I knew I shouldn’t have trusted that-” He stopped short remembering you were still there. He cleared his throat seemingly about to speak before sprinting in the direction of Nerris’s castle. You started after him.

“Neil!”

“Code black! Code black!” He yelled as he rushed toward the cardboard dwelling. Nerris gasped when she heard him, immediately throwing open the castle door and slamming it shut when he was inside. You arrived only ever too late.

“Neil! What is going on? Nerris are you in on this too?” There was no response. Frustrated with their behavior, you walk off to the mess hall for lunch. Hopefully some food will help their attitudes.

You enter and find Gwen sitting in the corner with Max again, talking about something. She waved you over once you were inside so you joined them, still confused and crabby at what just happened. Gwen noticed your downcast attitude when you walked over.

“Hey, everything ok?”

You sigh before you answer her. “Harrison said something about stealing binoculars earlier with Neil, but when I tried to talk to Neil about it, he just booked it to Nerris. None of them will tell me what’s going on or why they even needed the binoculars. It’s weird.”

Lucky for him, you didn’t notice Max tense up when you spoke as your attention was on Gwen. As you and she pondered why they would need several pairs of binoculars, Max snuck away to Harrison’s table, smacking him on the back of the head when he got there.

“Idiot!”

“Ow, Max! What the hell?”

Max grabbed him by the front of his vest. “Thanks to your slip up, she knows about the binoculars. Now Neil and Nerris are out of the bag too. Do you have any idea what’s going to happen if they find out we spied on them?”

“Calm down Max,” Harrison said as he took Max’s hands off him. “Nothing is going to happen. And if Neil and Nerris are as smart and magical as they claim,” he put his hands up and wiggled his fingers sarcastically, “they’ll figure a way out of this.”

“You had better be right.”

Chapter End Notes

Damn it Harrison. She wasn't supposed to find out! Also Gwen is the realest MVP.

And just like that, the week is up! The schedule will return to normal uploads 2 days a week on Sundays and Wednesdays, but I had a lot of fun doing daily uploads and
interacting with you all. See you Wednesday!

Campe Diem!
It was finally Sunday. The day he was coming home. The day you were going to be able to see him again. You couldn’t wait to see him. God you couldn’t wait. You fly out of your bed, not even phased by the cold trying to nip itself at your skin, and throw on your clothes so fast you didn’t realize your shirt was inside out until you were halfway out the door. You fix it before making your way to the mass hall eager to start the day.

“GOOOOOD MORNING CAMPERS,” you yell as you kick the door open. They all turn to stare at you as you bounce your way inside the room. Rolling their eyes, they return to eating their breakfast, doing their best to ignore your cheery-ass ramblings about the day. Even the Quartermaster seemed done with your shit after about 5 minutes, purposefully making your coffee wrong, but you didn’t care. All you had to do was get through the morning activities before you got to go pick him up. Max was currently sitting with Neil and Nikki at their table.

“God, he’s not even back yet and camp is already forty times more annoying.”

“Aww,” Nikki said. “I think it’s sweet. She’s so excited to see him.”

“It is kind of cute,” Neil agreed. “Plus, it could be the distraction we need to make her forget about yesterday’s incident.”

Things had been a bit tense around camp after Max confronted Harrison. By the end of the day, it seemed like the campers were split between who to trust and who to be angry with. Space kid had tried to keep the peace, suggesting that it wasn’t really anyone’s fault and that they should just put it behind them, but everyone disliked that idea. Instead, tensions had run high through the day and into the morning. Even now, kids were giving each other shifty glances across the mess hall.

“Maybe,” Max said. “But we have to keep it under wraps at all costs.”

You were in a good mood all morning and you didn’t bother trying to hide it. You did your best to give the campers your attention, but you were just too antsy, taking to fidgeting with your hands in anticipation. You could barely sit still. Gwen noticed your impatient nature and decided to take over for the rest of the morning.

“Alright, that’s it. You’re officially too much of a space case to work this morning. Go get him, I’ll take over from here.”

“Gwen, are you sure? I can hold out a little longer.”

“No you can’t. Now go!” She pushed you in the direction of the car and gave you a thumbs up as you looked over your shoulder. As she watched you drive away, she turned to face the campers. “Alright kids, here’s what’s gonna happen today…” They began to plan as your car disappeared.
You were flying down the dirt road that lead out of camp without a care in the world. You managed to slow yourself down a little bit once you hit the highway, but you still were probably going too fast to be considered legal. The drive to the hospital was always long, but today was even worse, for you knew David would be there waiting and so did the road. It went out of its way to make the drive as excruciatingly long as possible from construction, to traffic, to a full on detour that forced you all the way around the town of Sleepy Peak just to get into the hospital. But, it was all worth it once you got there. Standing in the overhang of the main entrance was David, looking around for when you would get there.

You found a parking spot near the front and honked your horn to get his attention. When he didn’t react, you leaned your head out the window.

“Hey!” you called to him, and he looked in your direction. “Get in loser we’re going camping!”

Jumping out of the car, you slam the door and run over to him, wrapping your arms around him when you finally meet. Before he has the chance to say anything, you pick him up and swing him around, earning you some confused looks from the patrons walking in and out of the hospital.

“This feels reversed,” David says joyfully as you spin him around. You put him down and just let him hold you for a while, forgetting that you were currently standing in the middle of a hospital pick up area. Somebody honks, throwing you out of your love struck state, so you and David quickly move out of the way, giving apologetic waves to the irritated driver.

As soon as you got in the car, your lips were on his. You feel him smile as he brings his hand to your face, cradling it gently as you lean more into him. You wrap your arms around his neck getting as close as possible with the stupid divider between you, never wanting to break away from his soft kiss. He broke it off first, releasing a soft exhale when he did, leading both of you to lean back into your seats.

“You ready to get back to camp?” you ask as you start the car. When he doesn’t answer, you glance over to find him looking quite shy.

“A-actually, I was hoping we could spend some time together? We’re out a bit early, and well, there’s a place I want to take you.” He touched the tips of his index fingers together nervously as he waited for your response.

“Sounds like a date to me,” you say. “Show me the way.”

You drive as David gives you the directions on where to go, ending up in a secluded area of the woods near the base of a small grassy hill. Through the trees that line the sides, you could see daylight shining in between the top of the hill and beneath the branches that kept the area covered in light shadows. You step out of the car only to find David placing his hands over your eyes.

“Wait,” he says, “I want this to be a surprise.” He unwraps the shirt from around his neck and places it over your eyes, blindfolding you. Taking your hand, he rests it on his arm and begins to walk you up the grassy knoll. As you follow him, you notice the air smelling ever sweeter the longer you walked, and once you the sun shone on your face again you felt David walk in front of you. “I’m going to take the blindfold off, but keep your eyes closed until I tell you to ok?”

“Ok.”

He reaches behind your head and fiddles with the shirt until you feel it fall away from your face. You do as he says and keep your eyes closed waiting for him to tell you to open them.
“Alright, go ahead.”

You blink your eyes open, adjusting to the bright sunlight after having hidden them away from its warm greeting. Once you realized what you were looking at though, they opened wide as your mouth slightly parts in awe. In front of you was a field of the most beautiful wildflowers you’d ever seen. White and yellow irises, snapdragons, forget me nots, lilac, lavender, and hundreds of daisies ranging in color from red to purple and in size from the length of your fingernails to as big as the palm of your hand sprawled out in front of you. Surrounding the field were hundreds of wild rose bushes- their colors interchanging from white to pink to red as they dotted their way across the green thorns they were connected to. Wisteria swayed above the entrance of the forest as jasmine lined the sides- its sweet fragrance nearly bringing you to tears.

You step into the field and the flowers begin to tickle your legs- their leaves, stems and petals all reaching to touch you as you walk through them. Fat bumble bees fill the air with their hum, buzzing between the flowers as they continued in their work. A light breeze momentarily carried the scent of the flowers away only to have it return full force once it died down.

“That one’s a keeper.” David’s voice brought you back to yourself as you saw him, phone in hand, grin plastered on his face.

“You’re a keeper,” you say as you embrace him and give him a playful peck on the cheek. He shows you the picture: your face in pure astonishment as you stood in the middle of a patch of the flowers. He caught it just as the wind had begun to blow, lifting your hair out of your face to reveal your eyes full of wonder as they fell upon the land. “Alright, that one’s a keeper too,” you admit.

He suddenly steps away from you, fiddling with his phone for a moment before putting it away. You were confused until you heard music coming from his pocket.

“David, oh my God.” You start laughing at his song choice- Waltz of the Flowers by Tchaikovsky. He was damn cheesy and you loved it. The song continued to play, so he held out his hand with a regal smile- an offer to dance. You return his smile and stand before him. “You know the rules. You have to bow first.” Taking his outstretched hand, he places it across his stomach and bows deeply while at the same time, you curtsy with a dress that isn’t there. David reaches out his hand again and you take it right as the harp finishes its moving line, beginning the dance as soon as the waltz starts.

You move, spinning through the flowers as the song progresses, each of you taking longer strides as the music swells and falls through its melody. It was like a dream- the sweet flowers rising up to meet you as you daintily stepped through them. David maintained his perfect placement like usual- his right hand rested gently on your shoulder blade while his left held your right one steadily, relaxing you into the steps of the Waltz. Your eyes never left each other during the entire dance, tenderly speaking to each other through your subtle movements.

As the piece reached its climax, David began to spin you around and around before ending the song with a dip, kissing you as he did so. You closed your eyes and felt your arm fall to the side, hanging in the air as the other clasped the back of his head. This was it- you were going to melt away right here and become part of the soil that made the plants grow and you were perfectly fine with it. You felt your face grow warmer the longer he held you there, but you didn’t dare open your eyes to see if his cheeks were that same shade of scarlet yours were. He slowly pulled out of the kiss, not even giving you a chance to react before he said it.

“I love you.”
ASJLREVBJB HE SAID THE THING.

"But wait!" I hear some of you saying. "They've only been dating like a week! That seems a little soon." And to that I say:

See you Sunday.

Campe Diem!
Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by Rubik's Cube by Athlete. Check it out here!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1M32hgVvAg

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fucking.

What?

Did he just say that?

Your eyes shoot open to find David sharing an equally surprised face. “Did- did I just say that out loud?” He looked mortified.

“I...think you did?” You find yourself being brought back to a standing position as you and David just stare at each other, unsure of how to proceed. His pupils had reverted to pinpoints as he did his best to avoid your eyes, and his hand was awkwardly rubbing the back of his head. You couldn’t seem to find your voice, despite your heart and mind agreeing on something for once.

Say it back.

“I’m...sorry? I think?” He was getting more and more nervous.

“Wh-why are you sorry?”

Say it back.

“It just kind of slipped out I guess. But that doesn’t mean I don’t mean it!” His panicked gaze returned to yours as he put his hands out in front of him. “I mean, I meant it but you weren’t supposed to hear it yet? Unless you weren’t scared of me or anything, that’s not it. I think I’m most scared of losing you? But that doesn’t sound right either? I’m confused as to what’s going on, but I know that I care about you. A lot. More than a lot.”

Rubik's Cube

“I think I’m in love with you, ______,” David said. “Whatever I feel around you isn’t just a crush?” He seemed unsure of himself, but kept going. “All I know is that you’ve been the only thing on my mind since we met. Everything you do makes me crazy, it’s kind of scary.” He holds you tighter.

“I’m not scared of you or anything, that’s not it. I think I’m most scared of losing you? But that doesn’t sound right either? I’m confused as to what’s going on, but I know that I care about you. A lot. More than a lot.”
“David.” You move to look him in the eye. “Is that how you really feel?”

“Yes. But I don’t want to pressure you into something like love, it isn’t right. I want your feelings to develop naturally for me, not be persuaded and rushed.” He sighed as he brought you back into him. “I’m...sorry if I made you uncomfortable.”

“I...know how you feel.” YES. “I do feel the same about you- the whole feeling of being scared of losing you, but that’s not really it? I understand, and I care about you a lot, too” GOOD. “But maybe it’s just a little early to call it love?” WHAT. “I mean, I really really like you, but we’ve only really gotten to known each other as friends not...you know.”

“L-lovers,” he finishes.

“Yeah.” WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN. YOU KNOW YOU’RE IN LOVE WITH HIM NOW SAY. IT. BACK.

“So then, what should we call this?” he asks.

“You mean besides scary and confusing?” You manage a small smile, which he returns along with a soft chuckle.

“How about we call it endearment?” he suggests. “I think it moves quite a bit beyond friends, but doesn’t quite cross the line.”

You rest your head against his chest and sigh contentedly. “Endearment. I like it.”

The ride back was quiet, though not in a bad way. There was just not a whole lot that needed to be said. It was a very comfortable silence that neither wanted to break with your own words or the radio. Every so often, your eyes would meet and you would look away, a blush making its way onto your faces. Pulling onto the dirt road, you finally break the silence. “So...you hungry?”

“Starving! You know, I didn’t think I’d miss the Quartermaster’s food as much as I did but...” he continued on the entire way down the road, talking about his time in the hospital and how different it was from camp. You couldn’t help but smile- it was just so David to do so. You were pretty sure that if you asked him to, he could talk about the place for a week straight. You didn’t blame him- even though you’d only been there about six weeks, Camp Campbell had placed itself firmly in your heart and wasn’t moving any time soon.

“...and that’s why the doctor called me Shirley. Hey where is everyone?” Looking around the camp, neither of you spotted a single camper- it was like they had disappeared. You were trying not to panic when David took your hand in his. “Hey, they’re here somewhere. They’re probably just playing a big game of hide and seek!” He gasped, a huge smile on his face. “I’ll be they want us to find them! Come on!”

“Do you really think they’re hiding?”

“It’s what I’m going to tell myself until we find them. Let’s go!” His voice didn’t lose a single bit of cheerfulness making you wonder if he was serious or deathly sarcastic. Either way, it didn’t help your anxiety.

You searched all over camp: the tents, under the dock, the stage, the activity field. You even checked the counselors cabin but to no avail. The campers were nowhere to be found.
“D-don’t worry!” David said, his smile strained and sweat starting to form on his brow, “They’ve got to be here somewhere! Maybe we should eat something to… help us think!” He started tensely walking to the mess hall and you followed him, your stomach in knots.

David opened the door to the mess hall to find it pitch black. You and he stepped inside only to have the lights flash on and have everyone, camper and scout alike, jump out at you.

“SURPRISE!” They cheered in unison as you and David clung to each other, screaming. Once the initial shock wore off, David asked, “Kids?”

You saw what the campers had done with the place: A hand painted banner with “Welcome Back David!” written in different colors was hanging on the opposite side of the room. Green and brown streamers had been hung from the ceiling, twisting around each other to give a patterned effect. The was little tree confetti on the tables, and in the corner was a small dessert table with cabin-shaped cookies on it. It was all really cute.

“We decided to start the mixer a little early this week,” Neil said. “Hope you don’t mind.”

“Ja!” Dolph said. “Ve vanted to make sure that all our friends ver here to see you home!”

“But, whose idea was it?” David asked.

“It was all Gwen’s idea!” Nikki said. “She wanted to see you before she had to leave.”

“Gwen?”

She stepped out of the corner and walked up to you and David. “Really it was just a suggestion. It was the kids who really ran with it.”

“I made the cookies!” Nurf said.

“I did the streamers. STREAMERS MAKE EVERY PARTY COMPLETE,” Preston exclaimed.

“Ered and I made the banner,” Nerris said, “and Dolph made the confetti!”

“I- I don’t know what to say.” David clasped his hands near his chin as tears pricked the corner of his eyes. “Thank you.”

“Well,” you say, “what are we waiting for? Let’s party!”

It was a great time had by all. The kids ate sweets and talked with each other until the music started. At that point, your campers paired up and started dancing with each other, much to the amazement of the scouts. Nikki was the first to notice and lead Petrol onto the dance floor to show him how to dance. It was cute to watch- he had to awkwardly bend over as she guided him, ultimately giving up and swinging her around the room by her hands. She loved it.

Preston lead Pikeman onto the floor and started showing him where to place his feet to lead. Soon enough, the two had a rather good swing going while the others cheered. Ered and Nerris soon paired up to show Snake and Erin how to tango. Sasha wound up with Harrison as he pulled a rose from nowhere and placed it in his mouth, and in the corner, you saw a giddy Tabii dancing with a rather amused Neil. Dolph and Space kid were currently just spinning each other in circles while Nurf and Max watched off to the side, each taking a turn at choosing songs.

Not wanting to be left out in the fun, you were about to ask David to dance when Gwen stole you away. You laughed as you were dragged away onto the floor and you showed her how to do the
Charleston. You tried to anyway- it looked more like she was just kicking her legs out every which way, making you laugh even more. Eventually, you took the lead and just danced her around the room with the rest of the kids.

David felt a sense of pride as he watched the campers all pairing up to dance as well, even believing there may be a few budding romances. But, it may have just been the hopeless romantic in him. Speaking of, his eyes finally landed on you as you danced like there was no tomorrow. He smiled at the pure joy on your face. He loved seeing you like this: happy, carefree, just enjoying life to its fullest. He couldn't take his eyes off you.

“Hey. Idiot.” Max snapped his fingers, jolting David back to reality.

“Oh! Hi Max. What can I-”

“Are you going to just stare at her, or are you going to ask her to dance?”

David smiled and rolled his eyes before they fell on you again. “Honestly? I’m happy with both.”

“Here.” Max tossed him his phone. “Pick a song. It’s your party after all.” He left David there to decide, but David already knew what song he wanted.

Standing in position, he waited for the song to start. To the campers, he looked ridiculous: it looked like he had the invisible man in a dip as he held perfectly still. You, however, knew exactly what this was and got into position “off stage” just in time for the violin to start. It was Voltaire’s “When You’re Evil”- your all-time favorite dance. It was a sensual tango you and he had choreographed as your final that earned you a great deal of admiration (and curious looks) from your peers.

As the song began, you slunk out in front of him caressing his face as you passed by. Winding up behind him, you spin yourself into a quadruple pirouette in time with the violin’s trill. Landing, you slither around his other side, running your hand through his hair as the violin trills again, snaking your fingers through the top of his fohawk before placing yourself in his arms.

When the devil is too busy. And death's a bit too much. The words snap him out of his trance-like state, and he slowly swings you in a semi circle, now facing the opposite direction.

They call on me, by name you see. For my special touch. You slowly run your hand up the side of his face.

To the gentleman I'm Miss. Fortune. He pulls you out of the dip and spins you around.

To the ladies I'm Sir Prize. With your back to David you bend one leg down and stick out the other as you hold your arms above your head.

But call me by any name, any way it's all the same. Pulling you up, the two of you take the position for the tango.

I'm the fly in your soup. I'm the pebble in your shoes. The dance really starts as you are suddenly pulled close to him and move sideways across the floor. At the beginning of the second line, you quickly force your hips forward and continue stepping to the beat of the song. As the chorus hits, your footwork got more complex as you began to use more of the floor. Picking you off the ground, you bring one leg in and leave one out as he swung you in a circle effortlessly. Setting you back down, you do a modified version of your original steps for the second verse.

Your eyes don’t leave each other’s gaze for nearly the entire song. Your foreheads almost touch for
most of it, both of you giving the other a piercing gaze and a sly smirk. When you’d first performed it, you’d just thought he was acting to fit the roll. Now though… you weren’t so sure. You wouldn’t lie, it made you the slightest bit excited to see such passion in his eyes- a complete change from his usually gentle features. You couldn’t let it distract you, though, as it was nearly time to finish the song.

*It gets so lonely being evil.* You step away and place your hands over your stomach.

*What I'd do to see a smile. Even for a little while.* You pique turn twice before lifting your hand longingly into the air.

*And no one loves you when you when you're evil.* You shrink back into yourself as David places a concerned hand on your shoulder. Flashing him an evil, toothy grin, you snatch his hand and take the lead for the rest of the song, practically throwing him around the floor as he tries to get away.

*I'm lying through my teeth! Your tears are the only company I need!*

It ends with you dragging him off stage by the collar the way you had come on.

The kids went crazy when you finished dancing. The were clapping, cheering, whistling, swooning, and more. You helped David back to his feet before taking a bow for your audience.

The party indoor continued for a short time longer, until Gwen had to leave. You and David each gave her a huge hug and thanked her for everything she’d done for the past few days. You weren’t sure what you’d be doing without her. The kids all say their goodbyes and you watch as she drives off, away from the camp.

“So,” David says, “who wants to roast hot dogs?” His voice turns more singsong near the end and the kids all start making their way to the fire pit. You began to follow them but David caught your hand and pulled you into a quick kiss. The two of you followed behind together.

**Chapter End Notes**

Did anyone else feel like this week went by super slow? Like idk but the time between Wednesday and Saturday felt like forever.

Also, the song you and David dance to is When You're Evil by Voltaire. Check it out here! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWYCS6k1IOA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWYCS6k1IOA)

*Campe Diem!*
As you walked, you discussed the binocular situation that you’d encountered on Saturday. David agreed that it was strange that the campers had reacted the way they did- usually when you catch them at something they at least attempt to lie their way out of it. But to just run? That was suspicious.

“Do you think the other campers know?” he asked

“I’m not sure. I’ve been hesitant to ask them about it just in case they are. I’m more confused as to why they need like, twenty pairs of binoculars, but something tells me it wasn’t for bird watching.”

“Oh, I’m sure it’s nothing.” He waved his hand in front of him dismissively.

“If you say so.”

The campers had already set up the logs for the fire by the time you and David arrived, sticks and hotdogs in hand. Pikeman walked over to you as you stood in front of the pit.

“David, I’d like to ask if I could light the fire tonight. It will be good practice for when I get my fire-starter badge.”

“That sounds great! Here, I’ll show you how.”

As David showed Pikeman how to light the fire, you took your spot next to Ered who handed you your stick. Soon enough, the fire was lit and everyone started roasting their food. You looked out at the faces of Lake Lilac fondly, watching as they laughed and joked with each other. You were really glad David had decided to start the mixers- it was nice to see everyone getting along. In just a month, everyone had gone from worst enemies to good friends. It made you both happy for everyone and incredibly sad to know that they may not ever have this again. Even though the past week had been absolutely insane, the knowledge that you still didn’t have a way to save the camp had slowly started making its way from the back of your mind to the front.

David eventually made his way back to you, placing his arm around you when he sat down. You leaned your head on his shoulder, happy to be where you were even if it may not last. All you knew was that right now, you were in place you’d come to love dearly with people you’d come to love as well.

Love. There was that word again. The four little letters that made your stomach flip when you thought about it. You knew you loved everyone here, though in different ways. You loved the scouts for their ability to put aside their differences and really get to know everyone here. You loved the campers for their passion in what they do, as well as how much they had come to remind
you of yourself in little ways. Max had especially won you over and even though you’d never say it out loud, he was probably your favorite camper- becoming your little buddy over the summer.

And then there was David. You were completely in love with him and everything he did, you knew it. There was no doubt in your mind that he was the one. He didn’t complete you- you were already whole on your own. No, David did something so much better: he made you more than you ever thought you could be, turning you into a better person in the process.

You took his hand in yours and watched the fire burn, glowing brighter as the area around you turned darker in the dying sunlight. Even though David’s guitar had been trashed, you all did your best to sing along to songs anyway, at least until Max pulled out the guitar, now being held together by glue and duct tape. There were pieces missing and the strings all curled off in a tangle at the ends, but it was still there.

“Max? Did you-” David started but was cut off.

“Shut up David. Just fucking play something already.” He handed off the guitar, but the neck snapped leaving it broken once again. David just smiled and held it in his hands, happy to have it back.

“Thank you, Max.”

Max rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. “Whatever.”

As the night grew darker, it seemed like the perfect time to tell scary stories. You and David refrained from participating this time, instead choosing to the campers try and outdo each other in horror, even though most of the stories didn’t do much to scare you. David, on the other hand looked just as scared as the campers.

“They opened the door slowly,” Tabii said as she squinted her eyes, “unprepared for what they were going to face on the other side. Once the door was fully opened, an huge hook was shoved into Brad’s chest! Blood oozed from it as he fell to the ground shrieking in pain. The man slowly made his way out of the room towards Chelsey.” Tabii didn’t notice the figure slowly creeping up behind her. All the other kids couldn’t take their eyes off of it, though and neither could you and David. “He slowly raised his hook,” the figure followed suit, “until finally-”

Tabii screamed as the Quartermaster picked her up by the collar. The kids and David did too- Preston passed out dramatically. You were on your feet. “QM! Put her down!”

He just peered at her suspiciously as she repeated ‘please don’t kill me’ over and over through chattering teeth. Finally, he pulled something from out of her pocket. “Found ‘em. Last pair.” He set her down back on the log as he held up the binoculars for you to see.

“Binoculars? What-”

“Tabii what the fuck,” Sasha said, eye twitching slightly. “I told you to give those back a week ago.”

“Wait, why do you have our binoculars?” David asked, over the shock of the Quartermaster’s unintentional jump scare.

“Yeah Tabii,” Max said, irate. “Why do you have our binoculars?”

“Don’t you high road me,” Tabii shot back. “It was your plan to get them in the first place.”
Now you were really confused. “Max? What’s she-”

“Don’t blame me for all this. Pikeman was the one to suggest we use them!”

“Me?” Pikeman cried. “You Campbellians were the ones who wanted it so bad!”

“Kids?” David tried, “I think we should-”

“SHUT UP DAVID,” everyone yelled before devolving into a massive argument about whatever it was. You and David looked at each other shocked that everyone was suddenly at each other’s throats. They were fine just a moment ago!

“Enough!” Pikeman yelled. “It’s clear to me that this whole attempt at friendship was futile. Come gentlemen, I think it’s time we take our leave.”

“No! Wait!” David cried.

“Yeah,” Sasha said, “you losers obviously don’t know how to be anything but fake. Come on girls.”

The scouts got up and started to walk away while your campers all continued arguing with each other. David looked distraught at the fact the everything he’d worked toward was crumbling to pieces in front of him. You were confused as all hell- what the fuck just happened?

“Wait!” you say in a last ditch attempt to get them back. “Someone already fessed up! We know what happened!”

Well, that worked. All conversation stopped. All movement stopped. The only sound for miles was the slight crackling coming from the fire in front of you.

*What the fuck*. “Yeah, we were told about it days ago,” you lie, nudging David with your elbow in a silent plea to get him to back you up.

“Uh, y-yeah! We’ve known the whole time.” He said, doing his best to pick up where you left off. The kids of Lake Lilac were all still as statues. With wide eyes they all looked to each other briefly before returning their shocked faces back to you and David.

“Alright,” Max said, “which one of you assholes snitched? Was it you Preston ?”

“No!” Preston said, shaking his head back and forth quickly while holding his hands up. “I didn’t say a word!”

“So quick to accuse, Max,” Dolph said. “Trying to divert attention?”

“You think it was ME!!?”

“You were adamant about me keeping it a secret,” Harrison accused.

“THAT’S BECAUSE YOU FUCKED IT UP! WE ALL HAD A PACT.”

“Yeah, Harrison,” Neil said. “If it wasn’t for you, we wouldn’t be having this conversation!”

“And if it wasn’t for your stupid scheme to get the things in the first place, I wouldn’t have even had anything to say!” Harrison spat back.

“I don’t know, guys,” Nurf said. “Those Flowerscouts have been awfully quiet.”
“You seriously think it was one of us?” Erin said.

“You have been awfully quiet,” Snake said, taking a sharpened candy cane out of his mouth.

You and David sensed tensions rising dangerously again as you watched the kids all accuse each other of being the snitch. Fearing a fight you spoke up, “There was no snitch! I just said that because I thought something was up! You all just snitched on yourselves, now we’re all going to sit here until you tell us what the fuck is going on.” You sat back down in a huff as the kids all looked at each other again. The Flowerscouts and Woodscouts took their seats again, silently, wondering who would be the first to crack under pressure.

“Guys? What’s this all about? You were all so happy just a few minutes ago! If you’re worried we’ll be mad at you, I promise we won’t be!” David did his best to prompt a conversation, but everyone remained silent. You tossed another log on the dying fire, not willing to have them leave due to low light. You were getting to the bottom of this, now or never.

You noticed Space kid steadily growing more and more uneasy the longer they all sat there.

“Space kid?” you prompt. “Is there something you want to tell us?”

“SPACE KID. DON’T.” Max yelled

“Max,” you chided, trying to silence him before returning your attention to Space kid. “Space kid, it’s ok. You can tell us.”

“SPACE KID I SWEAR IF YOU-”

“WE SPIED ON YOU!” Space kid yelled as he began to cry.

“What?” you and David said at the same time.

“We never spent the night at the other’s camps! We all got together on Spooky Island and watched you and David on your date! Neil and Harrison stole the binoculars so that we could all see you guys, the Woodscouts showed us where to go, Nikki put a microphone on your back so that we could hear you guys, and there was camouflage and lookouts and we stayed the night and-and I’M SORRY!” He wept into his hands which he had brought into his suit.

You...couldn’t believe what you’d just heard. David had placed his fingers in front of his open mouth, trying to conceal his shock. You just stood there, trying to process. All the kids looked ashamed of themselves, unable to look you and David in the eyes as Space kid silently cried. You looked to Max who was doing his best to keep his eyes on the ground, away from you.

“Oh kids,” David said, disappointed.

The fire had nearly died, shrouding you and the kids in the dark velvet of night. You were still trying to come to terms with what you’d heard. “But...why?”

“Because,” Max said, “everybody else but the two of you knew you were into each other, so we came up with a way to let you guys be alone.”

“That’s…” David struggled to find the words. “How are we supposed to trust you at all knowing this?” He was hurt, not only because of the spying, but because he’d been lied to. Was everything else just an act to keep this hidden?

The kids all continued to look down in shame. A cold wind blew through the area making you
shiver. You threw a bit more kindling in the fire in the hopes some warmth would return, but you weren’t sure it would.

“So let me get this straight,” you say, speaking for the first time in what felt like a millenia. “You all concocted a plan to get us alone, worked together to get the items you needed, spent the night on Spooky Island, spied on us, lied to your own counselors, and managed to keep it a secret this long?”

They nodded.

“I….I don’t think I can even be mad at that. I’m impressed.”

“What?” everyone cried out at the same time.

“But it was a complete breach of our privacy!” David said. “We can’t let them think it’s ok to do this!”

“Yeah!” Max said. “You should be furious right now! What gives?”

“Well, think about it,” you say. “Before this, when have you ever worked together at all for anything? All of you came together for a common goal for the first time, right?” They all nervously nodded their heads.

“David’s right,” you say as you place a hand on his shoulder, “it was a complete misuse of our trust and privacy but, I’m strangely proud of you? You all recognized a common goal and worked together to attain it- even if it was at our expense.” Everyone was silent again.

David thought for a moment before speaking up again, “I may be upset about why you decided to come together, but I have to say that I’m proud of you all too. I guess it’s not everyday you find a way to bring everyone together. Plus, I may never have gotten the chance to ask her out if you didn’t do it so, thank you?”

“You’re welcome,” Max said confidently. “See? I knew it was all going to work out.”

“No you didn’t,” Nikki said.

“Does this mean we’re not in trouble?” Neil asked. You laughed aloud, startling the campers.

“Oh of course you are.”

“And don’t think any of you are getting out of this,” David said as he pointed to the scouts. “We’ll be contacting Derek and Penelope about this-”

“No we won’t,” you smirk.

“But they were involved too. We can’t not tell them!”

“David, I think that we should just keep this whole thing a secret from those two. We really don’t need to get them involved.” You turn and face the kids. “I’m sure that a lot of planning and preparation went into this, but I also know that our campers have been trying to get us together from the beginning. Therefore as punishment, you have to personally hand deliver any and all fanfiction or fanart of David and I that’s been written or drawn since camp began.”

The kids all looked at you, panicked. “Wh-what are you talking about? We don’t have any of that!” Preston struggled awkwardly.
“Oh really?” You say as you make your way over to him. “But you were so ready to write he and I into your play. Are you sure that’s not the case?” You turn to a very nervous Nerris. “And Nerris, we both know you love coming up with plots and stories for our campaign. Who’s to say you haven’t had some thoughts on this subject?”

“Zis is absurd!” Dolph cried. “Ve don’t have anysing!”

“So quick to divert attention, Dolph. Hiding something?” You ask him and he begins to sweat nervously.

“N-no!”

“Well, if you all really don’t have anything, I guess we’ll just have to put everyone on bathroom duty for the week. Derek and Penelope will be contacted in the morning.”

“Wait,” Max said. “Are you blackmailing us?”

“Yes,” you say as you bend down to his level. “Yes I am.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, this should be interesting to say the least.

Campe Diem!
Stay With Me

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by "Stay with me" by Sam Smith. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8o71H1zonk

Also, there's a little bit of NSFW content at the end of this chapter. The tags have changed my dudes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As it turns out you pen in your journal the kids knew about our relationship the entire time. You still were impressed that they’d managed to pull it off so well, but you were also going to be keeping a closer eye on them. Who knows what else they could be hiding.

David was upset at first about the way I’d decided to punish them, but came around in the end. It was true- he wanted to make them write out why what they did was wrong, but you asked him how often he thought that worked.

“Well… ok fine, we’ll do it your way,” he said, giving in.

“Trust me David, embarrassment can be some of the most effective punishment a child their age can receive. Plus, we’re not exactly throwing them to the wolves, anything they give us we can just hide away.”

If it’s any good, I’m keeping it. You chuckle to yourself as you continue to write in your journal. These kids are damn resourceful, I’ll give them that. And it was really sweet of them to throw David a welcome home party.

You sigh a bit before continuing. Speaking of David, he told me he loved me today, I was just too scared to say it back. It was so beautiful- the flowers, the dance...him. He’s just so amazing, why couldn’t I just say it back? You frown as you do your best to push away your disappointment. Your heart still hadn’t talked to you since you’d ignored it, frustrated with your lack of discipline.

Maybe it’s a good thing? I don’t think either of us really know if it’s love just yet but, we know how we feel each other a little better now, so maybe we can grow...

Oh who am I kidding. I’m hopelessly in love with him. Fuck it. Turning out the light, you close your journal and head to sleep.

You wake up the next morning feeling refreshed. David was back, there were no crazy cultists in the camp, whatever sickness that tried to get at you had fled, and you were going to read some interesting things written about yourself today. You were secretly excited to see how the kids portrayed you and David, though you wouldn’t dare say it out loud.

You had just finished in the bathroom when you noticed a quiet melody coming from David’s room. You knock and upon not receiving any response, you let yourself in. The melody was coming from David’s phone which was still charging on his nightstand. Walking over to it, you discovered it was his alarm set for 5:00am. Checking the time, you found that it was currently 6:30.
David himself was drooling onto his pillow, one arm underneath his head, the other hanging off the bed as if he went to turn off the alarm, but gave up halfway through.

You softly place your hand on his shoulder and rock him, trying to wake him up. “Daaaaavid. Time to get up.”

He jolted awake and looked at his phone, panicking when he saw the time. “I’M LATE FOR CAMP.” He sat up before a relaxed expression came over him. “Oh right, I’m an adult.” He laid back down and pulled the covers back up to his chin, smiling.

“Uh David? You’re a counselor?” You watched as his eyes shot back open, panicking again as he literally jumped out of his bed to get ready. You blinked and he was dressed, halfway out the door. Following him into the hall, you noticed he left the bathroom door open and was currently brushing his teeth with one hand and his hair with the other, not doing a great job of either. “David? Are you ok?”

“Perchr.” He still had his toothbrush in his mouth as he spoke, frantically trying to finish cleaning his mouth.

Another blink, another realization that David had zipped past you and was rushing to the main door of the cabin. You catch his hand before he can get out the door. “David, calm down. It’ll be ok if we’re a little late.” As you spoke, you got the first real look at him you’d had all morning: his eyes seemed bloodshot and he had dark bags beneath them. His hair was still a complete mess from his poor attempt at trying to brush it, and he seemed to be struggling to keep his eyes open. “...David?”

“I’m ok! Really! Just...need to wake up.” He seemed stressed. You rub your thumb against his cheek, concerned for his well-being.

“Just… don’t push yourself too much ok? You’re still recovering whether you like it or not.”

“Yeah,” he said sadly as he pulled you into a small hug, “I know.”

“Come on,” you say, trying to lift his spirits. “Let’s get some breakfast. I’m starving.”

The two of you make it to the mess hall just before the campers do and watch as they do their best not to make eye contact. You chuckled slightly as they staggered in, clearly not ready to face you. You could not wait to see what they brought you.

For you and David, breakfast went normally, even though David seemed tired for the first time ever. You’d decided that today would go as usual until after dinner where you’d have all the kids turn in their work before bed, giving you and David all night to read it. You wondered if it was weird to find yourself excited to read about yourself, but shrugged the thought off - it probably wasn’t that weird.

Probably.

After breakfast, you began to make your rounds between the campers. They were mainly quiet, trying their hardest not to seem nervous but failing miserably. Part of you felt bad for putting them through this, but they did need to learn their lesson, and it could have been worse - you could have made them read it to you.

The afternoon’s activity was chess. You decided David needed a break from physical activity and thought it would be a fun, relaxing way to spend the afternoon. As it turned out, he was amazing at it and won four out of the five games you played.
“Hustler,” you chuckle as he put you in check again. He just closed his eyes and shrugged before knocking over your king.

The kids seemed more relaxed about the day during dinner, and you wondered if they thought you’d forgotten about their punishment. David seemed a bit better after the day went on, too, almost getting back to his usual self by the end of it. You and he shared casual conversation as the din of chatter came from the kids as they ate. You watched with a slightly smug expression as they cleaned up, waiting until the very last second to garner their attention.

“And where do you all think you’re going?” you ask as they began to walk out the door.

“Uh, to our tents?” Neil tried.

“Good, we’ll wait here while you grab your papers.”

And there it was- that look of the purest ‘oh shit’ you’d ever seen radiating off their faces. You merely sipped your water as you watch them ridgedly make their way out the doors. When they returned, they each had a different amount of paper in their hands from Space kid’s single sheet to Preston’s memoir. They all tried to push each other to the front of the line, no one wanting to be the first. Eventually, they’d pushed Neil to the front who slapped his papers face down and made his way to the back of the room, sulking.

They each followed suit, and by the end, you had a stack of paper the size of a novel in front of you, plus a few canvases that Dolph had turned in

“I hope that you’ve all learned your lessons,” David said in his counselor voice. “Now head to your tents, it’s time for bed.” They didn’t need to be told twice as they all booked it out of the room as fast as they could.

You chuckled as you watched them go, and David gave you a small smile. You make your way to the counselors cabin, carrying your new guilty pleasure in your hands.

“What are we going to do with all this, anyway?” he asks as he closes the door behind you.

“Well, I don’t know about you,” you say, “but I’m probably going to read it.” You set it down on the small table in the common room and take one off the top before plopping yourself down on the couch.

“Actually,” he says, suddenly serious, “can I talk to you about something?”

“Y-yeah, of course. What’s up?” You put the paper down and make room as he comes to sit. It takes him a moment to speak, concerning you more than you had been earlier.

“I’m...not doing so great. I can’t sleep at night and during the day I’m exhausted constantly. Even when I was in the hospital, I would wake up in the night just...scared. I’m worried that it’ll never go away, and I’ll just be terrified to sleep.” He stared at the floor as he spoke. You rubbed his back for a moment before putting your arms around his shoulders. He brought one of his hands to yours and gasped it.

“It’s... going to take time, David,” you say after some time. “You need to give yourself time to heal mentally as well as physically- it’s not going to happen overnight.”

“...I know.” You and he just stay like that on the couch for a while, silently comforting each other. You sigh and hold him tighter and he returns the sentiment by squeezing your hand a little more. He closes his eyes as you begin to run your fingers through his hair, the feeling soothing his
nerves. He whimpers a bit when you stop, causing you to blush.

“S-sorry,” he says, embarrassed, “It’s just...really nice.”

You smile softly before continuing with it, causing him to lean his head into you a little more. He seemed to calm down the more you did, each small streak causing him to breath deeply and sigh, content to just stay like that forever.

“Hey will you… stay with me tonight? I... need you.” He looked away briefly, a small embarrassed frown on his face.

“Of course I will, David.” You give him a small kiss on the cheek, causing him to blush. Cupping your face in his hand, he returns a sweet kiss to your lips.

Pulling away, he looks at you bashfully as a light blush creeps across his face. You smile.

“What?”

“I just...really like kissing you, is all.”

“Well you know,” you say playfully, “I kinda like it when you kiss me.” You plant your lips on his and hold them there, feeling as he eventually places his hands on your hips. Leaning into him, you deepen the kiss and throw your arms around his neck. He begins to run his hands up and down the sides of your body, never straying too far up or down, but enough to get you flustered.

“W-wait,” you say, pulling away suddenly, “are you sure you want to do this?” You didn’t want to push him into it, especially if he was in such an emotionally vulnerable state. He gives you a reassuring smile before leaning back down for a much gentler kiss.

“I’m sure. Do you?”

“Yes, David.” You looked around at the common area of the cabin before speaking again. “But maybe not here.”

“Y-yeah.” He stands up and offers you his hand. Taking it, you quickly pull him into your room.

It didn’t take long for you to find yourself beneath him, gasping and whimpering as you made slow, languid love to each other. His lips moved from yours to your neck, leaving a fiery trail of kisses that sent shivers down your spine, and as he brought you to your peak, you called his name in a breathy moan, quivering around him. David followed suit soon after.

“W-wow.” He panted.

“Yeah. Wow.”

The two of you take a moment to compose yourselves and clean up before falling into bed again, holding each other. You were still naked- why bother with clothes after all that anyway? David kissed your head tenderly before pulling the blankets over the two of you, bringing his arm around you again once they were on. Facing him, you take a moment just to gaze into each other’s eyes.

“That was amazing.” you tell him. “I didn’t expect you to know your way around so well.” You wink and he blushes, giving you a sheepish smile.

“Uh, beginner’s luck?” He gave you an awkward, toothy chuckle as his words sank in.

“David, you’re a virgin?”
“I was, I guess.” He gave you another tender smile before he kissed you. “I’m glad it was you.” You blushed and put your forehead against his.

“I am, too. You were wonderful.”

The two of you fall asleep that night wrapped tightly in a loving embrace.

Chapter End Notes

Some of you eagle eyed readers may have noticed the other fic out now. Sing You Sinners is SOWK's sister fic and will be home to all future explicit NSFW content. Why the separate fics? Because I know not everyone is into it and some of the entries are shorter than the length of a normal chapter. ◕‿◕ See you again Sunday!

Campe Diem!
You feel David’s arm still wrapped around your midsection when you wake up the next morning. When you try to reach for your phone, he pulls you back to him in his sleep- a muffled “No” coming from between his lips. You let out air through your nose in a loving chuckle before you roll to face him.

He was still sleeping peacefully, a neutral expression on his face. He had total bed head which you thought was adorable, and you ran your fingers through it like you had done the night before. You watched as a small smile came over his face at the contact- even asleep he seemed to enjoy your touch. You let him sleep a little while longer before kissing him.

“Well,” he says as you break the kiss, “that’s probably the best wake up call I’ve ever had. Good morning.”

“Morning, Davey.” You place your hand against his cheek which he covers with his own. “How did you sleep?”

“Better than I have in a long time.” He kisses you on the forehead and you giggle. Sighing, he closes his eyes again briefly before speaking. “As much as I’d love to stay like this, I think we need to get ready for today.”

“Do we have to?” you plead.

“You know we do. Come on, time to get up.”

You watch as he sits up, chest still bare from the night before and the blanket resting just above his waist. You hadn’t noticed it last night, but he had a slight V that lead down below the blankets. As he turned away, you watched the muscles in his back move beneath his skin unintentionally showing where his hidden strength came from. You couldn’t help but stare.

God he’s sexy.

David eventually noticed you staring and you quickly looked away, blushing as you drew the covers closer to your chin. He blushed at the realization that he’d just caught you checking him out before moving to collect the clothes that had been thrown to the floor the night before. He tossed you your shirt and averted his eyes as you put it on, keeping his gaze away while you got dressed for the day. When you finished, you turned to give him the same privacy only to find his boxers still on your side of the room. In the heat of the moment, you didn’t notice the pattern- little pine
trees on a light blue background. You giggle slightly as you grab them, and with your back still to him, you hold them up. “Looking for these?”

David turned towards you and blushed a deep red when he realized what you were holding, absolutely mortified. You toss them over your head and he catches them, hastily putting them on. “Uh, y-you can look now.”

Turning back around, you see him standing there in his boxers rubbing his arm awkwardly and trying not to look you in the eye as he turned into a strawberry-colored mess. Your heart skips a beat.

*David why are you so cute?*

You help him gather up the rest of his things before he makes his way to the shower. As he does, you finish your usual morning routine and make your way to the common area. You heard him humming the song he wrote about camp in the shower as you passed the bathroom, giggling to yourself as you did so. Settling yourself on the couch, you pick up the paper you’d left lying forlorn on the cushions the night before; it was Space kid’s art of you and David. It was really cute—a childlike drawing of the two of you holding hands against a blue background.

David stepped out of the bathroom dressed for the day and made his way to you, wrapping his arms around your neck from behind as he bent over to lean his chin on your shoulder, smiling at the little picture of you two.

Before long, you made your way to the mess hall for breakfast. The campers filed in after, like usual. Nikki and Neil all sat at their usual spot having a conversation as Max made his way over.

“You ever notice how centaurs have two rib cages?” Nikki asked as she put another bite of pancake in her mouth.

“Now that you mention it,” Neil said as he rubbed his chin, “I haven’t really ever thought about it.”

“What are you idiots talking about now?” Max asked as he took his seat. “You know what? I don’t care. What do you think they’re doing with it?”

“Doing with what?” Nikki asked as she drank her syrup.

“Our writing! God, it’s like I’m talking to a wall.”

“Eh,” Neil said, “I’m not super concerned about it. What’s the worst they can do? Read it?”

“Yeah,” Nikki agreed, “considering what happened, it as a pretty light punishment. You gonna eat that?” She pointed to Max’s pancakes before grabbing one off the top of his stack.

Max just scowled and looked towards you and David as you ate, watching with disgust as you giggled at David’s stupid face.

“Geez Max,” Neil said, “this has you way more worked up than it should. Is everything ok?” He reached his hand out, but Max swatted it away.

“I’m fine. Just sick of this stupid fucking camp and it’s stupid fucking counselors. Probably stupid fucking counselors at this point.” He turned back to his tray and begrudgingly ate his breakfast while Neil and Nikki gave each other a concerned look.

*Ahem*.
A small noise caused you and David to look away from each other only to find Preston standing at the end of your table.

“Good morning Preston!” David said cheerfully, “How’s our future Tony-winning actor doing this morning?”

“I’ve come to ask about critiques for my writing. Seeing as it was based on the two of you, I’m ready to hear the honest truth about how you felt. Let me have it.” He seemed way too excited about this.

“Uh, Preston,” David says, “we haven’t read any of it. And we’re probably not going to.”

“What?” The campers had all turned to your table, some furious, others relieved.

“You mean you made us go through all that, and you’re not even going to read it?” Harrison asked.

“You tricked us!” Nerris yelled.

“N-now campers. We never said we were going to read it,” David clarified, “only that we would confiscate it. It was merely a way to try and get you to see things from our point of view. Kind of embarrassing to have a private moment shared?” His smile seemed tense.

“My art. Vasted!” Dolph said, upset.

“Wait,” you say as you look out over your campers. “Do you...want us to look at it?”

Half cried yes, half cried no. Preston had jumped onto the table and grabbed David by the vest. “ALL MY EFFORT IS NOT GOING TO WASTE!!!!” He shook David violently before you pulled him off.

“Oooookay, this was not at all what I was expecting,” you say as Preston struggles in your grasp.

“What’s the matter?” Max asked as he strutted up to you, “Can’t handle the pressure suddenly on you for a change? I knew you wouldn’t go through with it- it was just an empty threat to try and get us to feel bad about something you should be thanking us for.”

“Max, that’s not-”

“Shut up, ______. I thought you were different, but you’re just as incompetent as David. Neither of you have any idea how to run this stupid place anyway, even your punishments are half-assed. I’ll bet you haven’t even come up with a way to save it, even though it doesn’t deserve being saved!”

“What did I even do?” You were confused as to where Max’s sudden anger had come from.

“That’s the problem, you haven’t done anything. All you do around here is act like you know what your doing and fawn over David all fucking day. And if it wasn’t for us, you wouldn’t even be doing that. All you are is another shitty counselor at this shitty summer camp that no one fucking cares about, so how about you just do us all a fucking favor and just leave! ” Max huffed before turning and slamming his way out of the mess hall, leaving everyone standing quiet, shocked and confused.

You blinked a few times, still not sure that just happened. Realizing you still had your grasp on Preston, you quickly let him go. “Uh sorry...Preston I-”

“No no, it’s ok,” he said, more reserved than usual.
“I think you should all head to your morning activities. Breakfast is over.” Your voice was small and it didn’t even feel like you speaking. It was more like autopilot had taken over in your brain.

The kids all slowly made their way out of the building, leaving you and David alone.

“Well that was...something. Are you ok?” He put his hand on your shoulder and your face fell.

“I think I’m going to take the day off.” You walk out the door without giving David a chance to try and change your mind.

Once you were outside, you booked it into the woods traveling as deep as you would allow yourself. You made it past Nikki’s obstacle course from the Camporee, past the tree that almost took your life, crossed the path to Sleepy Peak Lookout and found yourself at the side of a large chasm, the bottom having been swallowed darkness as you looked down into it. You found it fitting to have wound up here- the chasm in front of you matching the pit that had seeded itself in your stomach.

You sat on a fallen log that was resting on the ground and paused for a moment before you just started sobbing. You’d thought Max was your little buddy- someone who you trusted and who had trusted you. His words were still buzzing through your head as your body was wracked with sobs.

_He’s right. I haven’t done anything except be a burden to this camp. Maybe I should just leave. Would anyone even miss me?_

You continue to cry into your hands as your thoughts make their way through your head.

_David would miss me. But he’ll be home soon. The camp is going to shut down anyway so he could probably get on ok without me being here. It’s not like I’ve been a big help anyway._

You make your way from the log to the ground and curl yourself into a tight ball, wishing you could disappear.

_I should have never come here._

The morning activities pass quietly. David did his best to maneuver through all the camps, but it was difficult. He didn’t know what to do with your campers, as he hadn’t really had a chance to interact with them in the morning. He wasn’t hungry during lunch, as his appetite had been replaced with worry. You were still missing- he hadn’t seen you since you’d left that morning and he hoped you hadn’t gotten hurt. He didn’t know what he’d do with himself if you’d been hurt.

As he continued to look for you, he spotted Max near the shore of the lake skipping stones across the surface. David walked to him, determined to find out the cause of his outburst.

Max turned when he heard footsteps approaching, glowering when he saw it as David. “What the hell do _you_ want.”

“Max, I’m very disappointed in your behavior this morning. I think you really hurt _____’s feelings.”

“No shit. That was kinda my goal.”

“But why? You’d been making such good progress this summer! I thought you and she got along!”

“Because she can’t fucking do anything! I thought I made that point clear!”

“Max,” David said gently, “we both know that’s not true. Now why did you get so angry this morning?”
“David! Open your fucking eyes! The only thing she’s done so far is get kidnapped, go on a date, and get the crap kicked out of her.”

“She saved my life, Max.”

“NO. I SAVED YOUR LIFE, DAVID. I was the one who had to get you from the fucking dungeon and bring you back. If it wasn’t for me, you’d both be dead. Listen, you like her. Big fucking whoop. But have you ever sat and thought about the fact that maybe you only like her because she’s the only person that’s willing to give you the attention you want? God knows no one else is willing to put up with you, because everyone else fucking hates you,” Max panted, his rant over.

David stood there silently as he watched Max turn back to the water. His eyes were cold and his hands clenched into fists. He breathed in deeply before speaking. “Max. I don’t mind much about what you say to me, I think I’ve made that clear. But _____? She does. And I think she’s done a lot more around here than you want to give her credit for, even if she doesn’t always succeed. But bringing in our relationship is a low blow, Max. I didn’t think you’d go for something like that. You want to sit here and be angry? Fine. Be angry. But don’t try and pin it all on us.” David walked off leaving Max staring at the water’s surface.

“I wasn’t talking about your relationship,” he whispered. But David was too far away to hear.

Chapter End Notes

Hey yeah Max quick question what the fuck?

Y’all want some motherfuckin uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuhhhhhh ANGST?

Campe Diem!
By the time the afternoon activities were over and you still hadn’t returned, David was beside himself. He had looked all over the camp for you and had no idea where you’d gone. He knew he was probably overreacting, but with dusk approaching soon, he didn’t want you out when animals would be. As he paced by the counselors cabin, he was snapped out of his thoughts by someone tugging on his shirt.

“Hey David? Where’s _____? I haven’t seen her since this morning.”

“Oh, hello Nikki! I’m not sure where she is, but I’m sure she’s doing ok.” He did his best to give her a smile, but it looked more like a grimace.

“Oh no! Is she missing? I can help find her!”

“Nikki, that’s not-”

“Oh ooh! It’s a mystery and it’s up to us to solve it! Don’t worry David! You’ll have eyes in the sky searching for her! TIMOTHY AWAY!” As she said it, a large hawk came flying down and grabbed Nikki by the arms, carrying her off over the forest.

“NIKKI!” David cried into the air frantically as he watched her fly away.

You sat by the chasm for hours, just crying. You didn’t think Max’s words would have hurt so much, but every time you think about them, it felt like another knife going through your heart causing you to wince as fresh tears spill from your eyes. It took a long time to figure it out, but you finally realized why it stung so bad: it wasn’t because you thought yourself incompetent or unloved, (you moved past your pity party long ago) it was because you realized you loved Max. Love . There’s that fucking word again. Was it just trying to make you miserable this summer? What did it have against your poor heart? You grabbed a rock and chucked it into the cavern next to you, listening as it tumbled down the side of the dark walls.

A rustling noise in the bushes caused you to look up from where you sat. You realized that it was quickly getting closer to you the louder the noise got. You stood up, chastising yourself for staying out so close to dusk in the middle of the woods as you got ready to run away from whatever was currently traipsing through the forest at this time of day.

Please be a squirrel, please be a squirrel, please be a squirrel, please be a squirrel. Your heart pounded as you watched the bushes in front of you rustle.

“...Muack.” You watch as a small brown creature makes its way out of the bushes. It’s yellow bill protruded from its face as it walked forward and it’s dark brown tail was flat, like that of a beaver.
“Muack,” it vocalized again.

You sighed in relief. “Oh thank God. It’s just a platypus.”

“Yeah but aren’t they poisonous?” A voice next to you said. You screamed and the platypus ran away, back into the bushes.

“Woah! Don’t have a cow man. It’s gone!” You turned toward the source of the voice. It was a young boy about eleven years old with dirty blonde hair and soft blue eyes. He was wearing white high top shoes and blue pants covered in light blue triangles. A purple flannel poked out beneath a yellow camp shirt, but you didn’t recognize him as one of yours.

“What are you doing out so late anyway? It’s almost dusk! All kinds of crazy stuff happens at dusk.”

“I...lost track of time. I’ve been having a rough day.” He seemed familiar, but you couldn’t place him.

“Wait a second,” he peered at you for a moment, looking at your shirt, “are you from Camp Campbell?”

“Y-yeah I’m a counselor.”

“Far out! I was a camper there a long time ago!” He smiled up at you, but his words threw you. He could not have been more than eleven. Twelve if you were going to push it.

“Uh kid, who are you exactly?”

“Oh gosh, I haven’t introduced myself yet!” He smiled and held out his hand. “Hi! I’m Jasper!”

Max sat on his cot looking up at the scratchy walls of his tent thinking about the day. He was troubled, more so than usual anyway, and couldn’t figure out what to do. Part of him wanted to go out and look for you but another part of him was still angry. He wanted to talk to David, but also knew that David probably didn’t want to talk to him. He was angry at that, too.

“Me and my big fucking mouth,” he grumbled as he rolled onto his side. It wasn’t his fault you were going to collect the writings. How the hell was he supposed to know you were going to do that? Then, just once he’d gotten over the fact you were going to read them, you say you weren’t?

He folded in on himself as an angry frown made its way across his face. “She’s probably just lying so she doesn’t have to deal with us.” He didn’t believe it, but it’s what he was going to tell himself for the time being, mainly because he wasn’t ready to admit to himself exactly why he was angry with you.

Max sat up on his cot and looked around. Neil’s bed sat in the other corner, neat and tidy as always while Nikki’s was empty. Why she slept in trees he’ll never know. The coffee maker and his mug were at the back of the tent, sitting in front of Neil’s blackboard. Reaching over the foot of his bed, he opened his trunk and pulled out the old, ratty teddy bear that was inside.

Clutching it to his chest, he breathed in the scent of stale cigarettes that had long infused itself in the bear’s fabric. Even though it probably shouldn’t be, the scent was comforting to him as it brought him back to a time when he didn’t have to put up his jaded facade for people. And God damn you for being the first person to really see beneath it.

“Jasper?” you ask shaken to your very core.
“That’s my name, don’t wear it out!” He gave you a cheesy smile and finger guns.

“But you- you’re-”

“Dead? Yeah, these things happen.” He shrugged as he said it, like it was no big deal. “But check this out!” He took his arm and pushed it through your stomach, his hand now through your back. Where his arm was, an icy abyss had formed. “Pretty rad, right?” He looked up at your terrified face and pulled his arm out. “Uh, sorry. I don’t usually see new faces around here so I get kind of excited when I do. My bad!”

You dropped to your knees sick to your stomach, clutching where he’d grabbed you.

“Uh, hey!” he said, trying to diffuse the situation, “If you’re from Camp Campbell then maybe you can help me out?”

“W-what do you mean?” You managed to pull yourself into a sitting position, still not fully recovered from having an arm through your stomach.

“Well, you see. I’m stuck! I can’t leave this realm until my body finds peace! But the weird thing is, I thought I’d found my closure last year. I don’t know what’s going on, but,” he seemed hopeful, “do you think you can help me find my body?”

What the fuck. Did this ki- ghost kid just ask me to go full fucking Dora the Explorer for his dead body?

“Wh-where is it?” you ask. This day can’t get any weirder.

“____________!” You heard Nikki’s voice above you, elongating your name in hopes that you’d respond. You turned back to Jasper, but he had disappeared. “_____! There you are!” Standing up, you look back to the tree line and see Nikki being carried by a large hawk. Swooping over the tops of the pines, she landed in front of you.

I stand corrected.

Nikki ran over and gave you a hug, wrapping her small arms around your legs. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you! You’re really good at hiding!”

“Uh, thanks Nikki. I think.” You tousle her hair as she looks up at you, her smile being replaced by a confused look. “What are you doing all the way out here anyway? You’ve been gone all day!”

“I’ve just been...thinking about things.”

“Oh you mean like about what Max said earlier?”

You sigh. “Yeah.” You sit down again and bring your knees back into your chest. Nikki sits with you, looking up at your despondent face.

“Hey, for what it’s worth, Max is always like that. I don’t think he really likes anything.”

You just shrug your shoulders so she keeps trying.

“But the rest of us do! You’ve taught us a lot this summer! You showed us how to dance, how to play ukulele, taught us how to scuba dive. But then you’ve also showed us how to do the hard stuff like be a leader and apologize when you need to! You fought for us when no one else could and didn’t give up, even when it was tough.
“Camp Campbell has changed a lot since you got here, but I think in a good way. We’re happy here with you, and David is too.” She gave you a huge smile before placing her hand on your arm. “No matter what happens at the end of this summer, I’m sure that we’ll all keep being good friends. The camp is cool and all, but it’s really the people that make it awesome.”

You pull her close to your side and gave her a big hug. “Thank you, Nikki. I think I needed that.”

She stood up and offered you her hand. “Ready to go home?”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

“Alright! TIMOTHY! AWAY!”

All of a sudden, you found yourself being picked up by a pair of large talons as you watched the ground get farther and farther away. You were scared at first, but as you flew above the trees you felt your worry and heartache get left behind in the chasm while you were carried towards the sun.

Chapter End Notes

It’s ya boy Jasper making an appearance! He’s a pretty rad ghost.

Also, I have an announcement. This will be the last Wednesday update possibly for the fic. Because of my school schedule, I won’t be able to update on Wednesdays like I have been during the summer. Fear not though, for Thursdays have the perfect opening for me to do so! So updates will, starting next week, be Sundays and Thursdays!

Campe Diem!
As you and Nikki were dropped back into camp, David immediately made his way over to you.

“Oh thank God you’re ok.” He wrapped his arms around you, holding you close. “I was worried.”

“Yeah, I’m ok. All thanks to this little rugrat.” You pick Nikki up and let her sit on your shoulders as David takes you by the hand and leads you to the mess hall. Neither of you see her eyes grow wide.

You put Nikki back down before walking inside. The campers were all there already so they warmly welcome you back to camp, waving and smiling as you made your way to the serving window. You get your food and make your way to your usual spot with David at your table, greeting the campers as you do so. Looking around, you take note that Max is visibly absent from dinner, but it didn’t exactly surprise you, either.

David seemed somewhat protective of you, staying close as you walked through the building and ensuring you had one of every food group on your plate before you sat down.

“Oh mom. I’ll be sure to eat all my fruits and veggies tonight,” you say as you sit.

“Malnutrition is no laughing matter,” he says matter-of-factly, “now eat your peas.”

You laugh at his seriousness before turning back to your tray. You put your spoon in the peas and remember feeling the icy chasm of Jasper’s arm return in your stomach, making you lose whatever appetite you would’ve had. You drop your utensil, alarming David.

“Is everything ok?”

“Y-yeah,” I’m fine. I just only saw your dead friend from like fifteen years ago in the forest, “just… not hungry.” You clear your throat and push the tray away from you.

“_____ , what’s wrong? If this is about Max-”

“It’s not Max,” you say, perhaps a little too fast. “I think I just need to go to bed. Been a long day you know?”

“Well alright. I’ll be in in a little bit.” He covers your hand with his. “You know you can talk to me, right?”

“I know.” You squeeze his hand gently. “I’ll see you soon.”

David watches as you walk out the door, concerned until his attention is ripped away. “NURF PUT THE KNIFE DOWN!”
Max is kind of hungry but doesn’t dare leave his tent. He tries to sleep, but his mind just won’t let him relax. Eventually he gives up and resumes staring at the ceiling of his tent, irritated at every little thing that was happening around him. He hated this. This was exactly why he didn’t put any strong positive emotions toward anything. All it lead to was this shitty feeling of being lost.

“Oh, there you are Max,” Neil said as he walked into the tent. “Have you been here all day?”

Max didn’t answer, he only continued to look at the ceiling.

“Well, in case you wanted to know, dinner is over, but I’ll bet we could sneak some pudding cups easily enough if we get hungry later.”

“Is tweedle dumbass back?” he asked out of the blue.

“Oh _____? Yeah, she’s back. Why?”

Max didn’t say anything else before rolling off his cot and putting on his hoodie.

“Max? Where are you going?” Neil asked.

“To fix shit, like I always do.” With that, he exited the tent.

You sat on the couch of the counselors cabin still shaken from your encounter with Jasper. How the hell was it even possible? The rational side of you tried to argue that there was no way it happened and that you’d fallen asleep while in the forest, but then the memory of him sticking his hand all the way through you came back and you knew it wasn’t a dream. No way.

You stand up to try and stop yourself from shaking as you pace across the floor. From the corner of your eye, you spot the stack of works the kids had made of you and David waiting to be looked over.

Well, if he isn’t going to. You grab a few pages off the top and sit back on the couch hoping to distract yourself from the day. You immediately recognize the first few sketches to be Dolph’s- his art style jumping off the page in its distinction. He had doodles of you and David from various points during the summer. You recognized you and he dancing after Neil gave you his chocolate, the two of you sitting around the fire and playing your respective instruments, holding each other after you got back from the Woodscouts- it was all there. He had also doodled things that didn’t happen like the two of you in a rowboat, David holding you titanic-style at the bow of a large ship, sharing a milkshake in 50’s era clothes. All the sketches had little hearts around yours and David’s heads- it was cute. You smiled as you looked it over- these kids had been way more invested in your relationship than you realized.

Grabbing the next paper, you saw it was a story Nerris had written about you and David, but in a fantasy setting. You were the hero who had to rescue Prince David from the evil rogue, Daniel. It was a short story, but had a cute ending where you kissed David and lived happily ever after. You decided to tackle Preston’s memoir next, it should be interesting at the very least.

You got a few pages in when you heard the door open. Looking up, you expected to see David standing there, but were confused when you didn’t. Putting the memoir down, your view was no longer obstructed from viewing Max in the entryway.

“Oh, hey Max,” you say dismissively before you return to your reading.

“Wait,” he said, “you ARE reading them?! What the FUCK? David said you weren’t.”
“David has a tendency to talk for the group when he means to speak for himself. I’ve never said I wouldn’t read these.”

Max stood silently- you had him there.

“Listen Max, if you’re here to make me feel like shit, I can assure you you did a great job of it earlier. Do you need anything else?”

“.........I’m here to apo-” he choked on air. “I’m here to apolog-” he coughed. “I’m heretoapolo-” sputtering, he put his hands to his stomach. “I’m here,” he panted, “to apologize. Jesus Christ that sucked. My mouth tastes weird. Is your mouth supposed to taste weird?”

You sigh and put Preston’s writing down. “What did I do, Max? All summer I thought we were getting along and then this morning, boom- you hate my guts. What the hell?”

“I don’t hate you. That’s the problem.”

Oh. That was not what you were expecting to hear.

“Have you read mine yet?” he asks, looking down, away from your eyes.

“N-no. I haven’t. Do you not want me t-”

“No. I do. Right now.” He walked over and sifted through the pile until he spotted his own handwriting. Grabbing it, he handed it to you and sat on the couch, knees to his chest. Furrowing your brow, you begin to read.

“Ma-ax!” I hear Mom’s voice calling me back in from the yard. I drop my ball and head in to find her at the counter making lunch.

“What’s cookin good lookin?” I say, flashing her a smile.

“Oh so you’re a little womanizer now?” she says with a smile that lets me know she’s kidding.

“Hey, you’re the one raising me,” I say as I take my place at the table.

“I think that’s your father talking.” She ruffles my hair and puts a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in front of me. “Grape jelly,” she says. She knows it’s my favorite.

“Honey, I’m home!” Dad says as he walks in the door. Mom moves over to give him a kiss and I gag.

“You guys are gross.”

“You guys are gross.”

“Sorry kiddo,” Dad says, “but life is pretty gross sometimes.”

I smile and roll my eyes, he always says that when she kisses him.

“How was work?” she asks him. I sit and listen as they talk to each other. It was like this every day, them being gross but happy with their grossness as I sit and watch them. Dad eventually comes to sit with me.

“How are you today, Max?” he asks.

“I was fine until you and Mom got all gross.” I cross my arms and look away. Dad laughs and ruffles my hair, just like Mom.
After lunch we all go play catch in the backyard. Dad’s a better tosser but Mom is way better at catching. Between the two of them, we manage to get a decent game going.

Later that day, we all make and eat dinner together before watching a movie. I end up falling asleep on the floor as they sit on the couch.

Even though I can’t feel it, Dad picks me up and carries me to my bed and tucks me in with Mr. Honeynuts at my side. Mom follows him into my room and they quietly say their goodnights before closing my door. They’re happy. I’m happy.

You look at Max as you finish reading. He was still tucked into himself tightly as his head rested on his knees, eyes staring forward.

“Max… you didn’t have to give me this,” you say gently. “I was just looking for stuff of David and me. Not…memories?”

Max drops his chin from his knees and replaces it with his forehead. You watch as his body starts shaking as he does his best to keep his tears silent. You put your hand on his back while he cries, trying to comfort him. He’s been through a lot, you didn’t need him to tell you that. You knew he was just a kid who’d been dealt a shitty hand in life and he didn’t deserve it.

“I don’t. Hate you,” he said through his sobs. “I don’t hate David either. And that’s the fucking problem. You assholes made me care about you and now look.” He suddenly sat up and threw out his arms. “I’m going to lose both of you along with a place that actually feels kind of like a home to me! God knows my parents don’t fucking care about me enough to actually make where I live feel like one.” He goes back into a ball again. “Do you get it now?”

“Max…” You didn’t know what to say. “But why this memory?”

“BECAUSE IT’S NOT A FUCKING MEMORY!” he yells. And suddenly it clicked.

You were Mom. David was Dad. And Max? Max was Max in the life he wanted to live. The life he deserved to live. Tears sprang to your eyes as the realization hit you: all Max had wanted was someone to really understand him- to be happy, and you’d almost unknowingly taken that opportunity away from him.

“I’m…sorry,” he said. “I shouldn’t have yelled.” You just grabbed him and held him tight as you cried, never wanting to let go. Eventually you felt him return your hug as he sobbed into you. You had no idea what you were going to do with the poor kid, but you knew that right then, you were his mom. You’d stay his mom for the rest of your life if he needed you to. You loved Max like he was your son because at this point he was, and you knew he loved you back.

The two of you sat and ugly cried for a solid twenty minutes before you felt him let go. “Fuck. See? This is exactly why I don’t get attached to things.” He said as he pulled away. You looked at him to see him giving you a bit of a broken smile, but a smile nonetheless. “If you got fucking snot in my hair, you’re dead to me.”

“Boy, look at what you did to my shirt,” you joke through your subsiding tears. “If there’s snot then we’re even.”

Max laughs with you before you pull him into another hug. You feel him wrap his arms around you as you hold him. “Max. I don’t know what’s going to happen after the summer is over, but I want you to know right now that if you ever need us for anything, David and I will be there for you. Ok?”
He nods his head and you release him, setting him back on the couch next to you.

“You look like shit,” he says.

“That makes two of us,” you fire back, and Max gives you a genuine smile. “Welp, I think I’ve had about as much emotional garbage as I can tolerate today. Wanna watch a shit movie?”

“Are you and David fucking idiots?”

“There’s my Max. I’ll get the popcorn.”

Chapter End Notes

Anyone a Futurama fan? The title song was used in the end credits of one of my favorite episodes and I never forgot it.

Also, double upload today because it's the last day of summer for me and I'm sad about it. I need fluff to distract myself lmao.

Campe Diem!
This chapter's title was inspired by Arms by Christina Perry. Check it out here!  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeW0Sl0tNS8

See the end of the chapter for more notes

David got back to the cabin later than he had intended, but he knew you’d understand once he explained the whole ‘Nurf using Dolph as a hostage for pudding’ situation. He figured you might be asleep by now and he didn’t blame you- you’d had a rough day. A small, selfish part of him was sad to know you probably were though, because it meant another long, sleepless night for him. Sure, the sex had been great (amazing, actually, a voice tells him, causing him to grow a bit flustered at the memory) but he liked sleeping with you in the purest sense of the term. Being near you made him feel safe at night. The thought to just crawl in next to you crossed his mind, but he quickly shoved it out of the way- he’d feel like he would cross a line with that.

Speaking of crossing lines, his mind drifted to Max. David was still upset with him, though not as much as earlier. He was still trying to figure out just what had gotten into him- Max didn’t usually lash out without reason, especially not at you. It was so out of character, and he hoped you hadn’t been too hurt by it, which is why he had to blink a few times to make sure he knew what he was looking at once he actually entered the cabin, because there on the couch was you and Max watching TV like nothing had even happened. There was a large blue bowl of popcorn in between the two of you and you both laughed at the stock sound of a woman screaming as it came through the speakers. You noticed him first.

“Hey David.” You gave him a small wave as he stood in the doorway. Max nodded in his direction as he put another handful of popcorn in his mouth.

“Max? _____? What’s-”

“We eloped, remember?” you tell David.

“Yeah,” Max continued, “we’re just getting back from the honeymoon.”

David just sighs and shakes his head, a confused but relieved smile on his face. You wave him over and scoot a bit so that he could have room on the couch with you and Max. He takes his spot in the corner and puts one arm behind the back of the couch, giving you the chance to rest yourself in his side. Max just rolls his eyes. “Could you not.”

You smirk at Max before you pull him on your lap and wrap your arms around his stomach.

“AHHHH WHAT THE FUCK.” He struggles and you laugh as he tries to get away, your grip only tightening as he squirms.

“You idiot!” you laugh as you grab the popcorn.

“I WILL. FUCKING. END YOU.” You ignore his death threats and set the bowl of popcorn in his hair- its puffy nature holding it quite well. Max stops and looks up his new accessory in confusion before he looks back to you. “I hate you.”
“Sure you do. Popcorn?” You hand him a few pieces from the bowl and he begrudgingly accepts them before pouting and turning his attention back to the screen, no longer trying to get away from you.

David watches you and Max interact, happy that whatever had happened between you two was over. He may never really understand how you and Max bonded so quickly, but he was glad you had each other. He grabs some popcorn out of the bowl on Max’s head and pops it in his mouth as the movie continues on.

“Seriously David? A little help here?” Max gestured to the fact he was still on your lap with popcorn in his hair.

“Sorry Max, I’ve got no control over her. You’re stuck.” He chuckles and reaches for the bowl again.

“You guys suck,” Max says, so David removes the bowl from his head.

“Better?”

Max rolls his eyes and crosses his arms and you giggle at his seemingly sour attitude. You knew he was enjoying this, even if he would never admit it. Turning your head to look at David, you give him a loving smile which he returns. Slipping his arm from behind the couch to around your shoulder, he pulled you a little closer to plant a small kiss on your forehead. You smile and sigh, closing your eyes and resting your head on David’s shoulder.

I could get used to this.

Before too long, you heard a slight snoring coming from your arms. Looking down, you saw Max fast asleep leaning against you as he slowly breathed in and out, face illuminated by the soft light of the television. You smile warmly and run your fingers through his hair causing him to stir slightly.

David watches you tenderly as you continue to focus your attention on Max. He was proud- no, that wasn’t quite right. Pride wasn’t what he felt in the moment, not the word he was looking for. This was love, pure and simple. All he wanted to do right then was grab the both of you and tell you how much he loved you, but he restrained himself, instead giving you a kiss on the cheek. You gave him a small smile and looked at him from the corner of your eye, causing his stomach to flip in the best way possible.

Slowly, you got off the couch still holding Max in your arms and carried him into your room. David followed close behind, unraveling the blankets so you could tuck him in. Placing Max gently in the bed, you put the covers up around his shoulder and watched as he curled up into them. David placed his hands around your waist and you wrapped your arms around his neck, standing silently as you watch Max sleep peacefully.

The two of you quietly make your way out of the room, closing the door softly behind you. Making your way back to the common area, you begin to gather up the popcorn that managed to spill out of the bowl while David turned off the television, enveloping the room in the quiet embrace of the night. Eyes adjusting, you managed to set the bowl and its contents on the table before you felt a pair of arms around your waist.

“Hey,” David said as he gently pulled you into him.

“Hey,” you whisper back. Reaching up, you pull his head down and kiss him, your mind flying
away from you. Nothing else needed to be said, and so it wasn’t.

Making your way down the hall, David holds the door open for you. You kick off your shoes and climb into bed, David following soon after. You breath him in as he holds you, happy in the purest sense of the word.

Chapter End Notes

I just really love this chapter ok?

Campe Diem!
This chapter's title was inspired by Clair De Lune by Debussy. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvFH_6DNRCY

David woke up before you the next day, groggily turning off his alarm. You didn’t even seem phased by it as you continued to sleep away the early morning. He watched you for a moment as you slept: eyes closed, face buried halfway in the pillow as your hair lazily framed your face. It was one of the most beautiful sights he’d ever seen. He gave your forehead a light kiss before moving to get ready for the morning.

When he returned to his room, he found you awake, scrolling through your phone as you sat up in bed. You hadn’t noticed him yet- you had your eyes glued to the screen as you took a minute to catch up on current events.

“Good morning!” David said cheerfully, startling you just the slightest bit.

“Oh, good morning David! How’d you sleep?”

The two of you sit and talk for a bit, discussing both the events of the previous day and current events of the world. It was pleasant being able to talk to him so casually and you were grateful that despite your change in relationship status, you and David had remained friends. You considered him your best friend, actually, as he was the person you trusted everything with- hopes, dreams, fears, feelings.

Which is why you felt so guilty about not telling him about Jasper.

When he’d asked where you’d gone, you told him the truth- beside the chasm. But when he asked about why you were so shaken by the time you got back, you lied and told him it was from your flight. He seemed to buy it, which made you feel worse, but how exactly were you supposed to tell him that the ghost of his childhood friend still haunted the camp?

You and David were interrupted from your conversation when Max made his way into the room, eyes still closed, but awake.

“Good morning Max!” David greeted him with the same enthusiastic tone he had greeted you.

“How are-”


“I feel you Max," you explain, "but the QM isn’t making coffee for campers this summer. You’ll have to get your own.”

“God. Fine. See you during breakfast.” He turned and left the room, leaving you and David alone again. He spoke after hearing the main door of the cabin close.

“So you worked everything out then?” he asks.
“Yeah. We talked some stuff out. He and I are all good.”

“Well that’s great! I’ve always said communication is the most important part of a healthy relationship.” He had closed his eyes and held up his finger as he spoke.

“I think I have to agree with you there.” You catch him off guard with kiss and before he can react, you scamper back to your room.

The days that followed were the best you’d had at camp all summer. The rest of Wednesday was dedicated to scuba camp where you were able to get the campers into deeper water. You were excited to see how much they had improved. Ered was absolutely the leader in the activity, excelling at all the things you taught her. She was advancing through her training almost as quickly as you would teach it, and you recommend she get a license after camp. She seemed to really like the idea.

Thursday you’d propositioned David about blacksmithing camp and he went all in. The first session was just Neil and Nurf who showed the campers the process of how to create a cast and heat the metal safely. David watched in awe of the two and how they worked together so well. He was just as proud of them as you were, and the campers seemed really interested in continuing with the new camp.

Friday was theater camp, and Preston had cast Nurf and Ered as the leads in his newest production “Love Lost.” It was about two people who get lost on a mountain journey and fall in love only to never see each other again once they were rescued. David was crying by the end and you gave the kids a standing ovation. It was a little rough, but you found the idea to be really unique. You hoped Preston wrote more original plays rather than just sequels to Shakespeare or Broadway- his creativity was really able to shine through when he let it.

You and Max were hanging out a bit more during what little downtime you had. It wasn’t everyday- he still spent most of his time with Neil and Nikki, but he did seem happier at camp. David was only slightly emotional when he’d notice Max smiling.

Speaking of David, you and he were still getting along just great. When you were around the campers, you did your best to stay relatively neutral, acting like the friends you were and saving most of the romance for when you were alone. Neither of you had said anything of love to the other since that day, but much like how an outsider could see that the two of you were flirting at the beginning of summer, that same person could see now the love that was between you, even if it was being left unsaid.

You loved every moment you had the chance to spend with David, but the nights had quickly become your favorite. The mornings were nice- every day you would wake up to a different flower sitting on the nightstand next to you and you’d smile knowing it was David who had put it there, but nights? Nights were special. Nights were when you got to really sit and talk with him about everything from camp to people to life itself. Nights were when you were able to reflect on your feelings and let yourself go. Nights were when you were able to curl up with him and sleep peacefully through the night as you held each other, inseparable as the world around you made its slow march towards the morning.

Saturday, you and David spent the day with Nerris who continued in her endeavor to teach you how to sword fight. She was a great teacher, and you loved how passionate she got when she was in character, but she seemed a bit upset with you when she realized you were going easy on David- you couldn’t find it in your heart to really go after him, foam sword or not. Nerris, on the other hand did not hesitate to land blow after blow until he learned how to perry.
“Finally,” she said after he got it. “If this was a real sword fight, you’d have been dead a long time ago!”

“Sorry Nerris,” he said, “I guess I’m just too much of a lover to fight.”

“Yeah yeah, whatever. Ready Serpia?” She waved David out of the way and tossed you his sword before taking her stance.

“Ready, Lady Nerris.” You took your own position and she came at you. You fought well, but ultimately she was able to knock the sword out of your hand, ending the fight.

“Not bad, you’ve improved!” she said as she lowered her weapon.

“Thanks Nerris! I-” you were cut short as she smacked you in the stomach with the side of her sword, forcing you to take a knee.

“NEVER ASSUME THE FIGHT IS OVER!” she cried as you wheezed, trying to catch the breath that had been knocked out of you.

“A-alright now Nerris,” David said, “I think that’s enough. You’ve proven your skills quite thoroughly.” He helped you off the ground and you were able to get your breath back.

“That’s quite the lesson learned, Nerris,” you say, “but I think I have one to teach you. Learn to pick on someone your own size!” You picked her up off the ground and she laughed.

“Unhand me you fiend!”

“Don’t worry Lady Nerris!” David said. “Your trusty steed is here to save the day!” He took her and put her on his shoulders before running off through the camp, both of them laughing the whole way.

That night, you and David sat on the docks to admire the illustriousness of the sky above. The moon was its old crescent, ending its cycle so that it could become new once again in the coming days. You heard David chuckle beside you.

“What?” you asked with a smile.

“Oh, it’s silly,” he said, looking slightly embarrassed.

“So? Silly is good. I like silly.”

“Well it’s just that, when I was little, I used to think that the new moon was just the moon’s way of falling asleep. I’d miss it when it was gone, but I’d sit and tell it that I understood that it was tired.” He chuckled and rubbed the back of his neck. “See? I told you it was silly.”

“I think it’s rather cute, Davey.” You scoot closer and lean your head on his shoulder.

“Naw, it’s pretty silly.” Space kid’s voice made the two of you jump suddenly, but he continued on, not noticing. “The new moon is just the moon lining up with the sun which darkens the surface from our point of view.”

“I thought it was from the Earth’s shadow?” David said.

“Naw,” Space kid answered, “you’re thinking of a lunar eclipse. It’s a pretty common mistake, though.”
“Huh,” you say. “Learn something new every day. What else can you teach us, Space kid?”

His eyes got wide as he plopped himself down between you and David, spouting off every fact about the moon he possibly could. “Some people say it’s even tied to different kinds of magic!”

“Magie?” Harrison had now appeared behind you, “I can tell you all about that!”

“Oh please Harrison, the only kind of magic you can do is a party trick or two.” There was Nerris, you were wondering when she would show up.

“Now campers,” David said, “you know we appreciate all the different magical arts here at Camp Campbell.”

“Even though it doesn’t exist,” Neil had joined you.

Nerris and Harrison just rolled their eyes and took a seat on the dock next to you and David, while Neil sat to the side, dangling his feet off the wooden planks.

“Aww the moon,” Preston had begun to make his entrance, “the universal symbol of love!”

“Ja!” Dolph had followed him, “Come now Neil, zer’s got to be somezing magical about that!”

“_____! Back me up on this!” Neil said.

“Sorry, Neil,” you say as you delicately place your hand over David’s. “but even I think there’s a little magic in the world.”

“TRAITOR!”

You and the campers all laugh.

“What’re you guys all up to?” Ered said as she made her way over.

“Hi Ered!” David said. “Just a little bit of moon appreciating going on over here!”

“Oh cool,” she said as she took a seat on one of the raised posts that help hold up the dock. “I dig the vibe it’s giving tonight.”

“Eh, it’s alright,” Harrison said, “but the full moon is what’s best for rituals.” He’d started to pull something out of his vest but stopped when Nurf spoke up.

“Too bad the full moon can’t stop you from being a huge nerd!”

“Aw come on Nurf!” Nikki had popped out from behind him. “The moon can be cool. Right Ered?”

A soft wind blew her hair around. “Totally.”

“I thought you were over your stupid Ered obsession already.” There was Max.

“I was never obsessed,” Nikki said nervously.

“You got on the ground and tried to take a bit out of my neck.”

“To be fair Max,” Neil said, “you did go shirtless after like, three hours without a counselor.”
“Wait when was this?” you ask.

“Last year’s take over,” Nerris explained.

“Thanks for putting me right side up this year,” David said, “and for not lighting me on fire. Again.”

“No problem,” Harrison said with a snap of his fingers. No one saw, but a small puff of flame came out of it. He quickly swished his hand in the water.

“So last year you traumatized David, this year I traumatized you. Am I next then?” you ask jokingly.

“We can probably make it happen,” Max said. “Pick your poison.”

“Well, I’ve heard the koolaid is pretty good.”

You all laugh again before turning your heads back to the sliver of moon that hung onto the sky by its final thread. It would disappear tomorrow night, hiding in plain sight from the untrained eye unaware of the effect it had on the land. Because the moon did have its magic, no matter what anyone believed, and you were about to learn that first hand. Your first lesson was starting much sooner than you realized.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! Ready for Sunday? (°_°) Wonder what that lesson is gonna be....

Campe Diem!
As David was getting changed into his pajamas, you were reexamining the corkboard that held his pictures. Your eyes were glued to Jasper’s, and you were trying to come to terms with the fact he was still around. Your face was scrunched in concentration as you stared at the young boy who was immortalized by much more than just a picture. David noticed your pensive state and came to stand next to you.

“Camp Campbell has always been pretty cool, huh?” He flashes you his award winning smile as he proudly places his hands on his hips.

You don’t respond- you’re too deeply lost in your thoughts.

“Is everything alri-”

“David? What happened to Jasper?” The words were out of your mouth before you could stop yourself.

David froze up and you immediately felt lousy. It was obviously a topic that haunted him, but you had to tell him what you knew, or at least what you thought you knew. If what Jasper had told you was true, there was something that had happened at Camp Campbell, and you needed to figure out what it was. If you didn’t, you knew it was going to eat away at you forever as you wondered what might have been. But, looking back to David, you knew that maybe it was ok if you never knew what happened.

“I’m...sorry David. You don’t have to-”

“We had a fight. I...I ended up choosing the camp over him as my friend. I was so enthralled with making Cameron happy that I turned my back on him. Literally. I haven’t spoken to him since. He’s probably still upset with me, even all these years later.” He grabbed his upper arms and scrunched up his face. Taking a few deep breaths, he looked at you with sad eyes.

You didn’t say anything. You just pulled him into your arms and held him close. He didn’t cry- he had no tears left for Jasper. Not because he didn’t care for him, but because all of his tears had been spilled years ago.

“Jasper was always Campbell’s favorite, there was no contest there. He was the absolute best of us.” Looking up, you saw David looking back through time- his face torn between sadness and sympathy. Something else was there too, but you couldn’t quite place it. Fondness perhaps? You pull away from each other after some time, and you return your gaze to the blond child in the picture.

*No wonder he’s lost.*
You clutch the area where his hand had passed through you seemingly out of instinct, and David takes notice.

“Yeah, it kind of makes me sick, too.” His voice was sad. Mournful. “It’s getting late, we should get some rest.” He takes the hand that wasn’t currently over your stomach and gently pulls you towards the bed, but you knew you wouldn’t be able to sleep that night. You take your spot next to David sitting up with your knees drawn into your chest. The pensive look you’d had earlier returned.

“I wouldn’t worry yourself too much,” David said, “it happened a long time ago. There’s not anything we can do about it now.”

“But… but what if there is?” You had to tell him.

“What do you mean?”

“David when I was in the forest I…I saw Jasper.”

“You WHAT?!” He shot up in bed and looked at you, shocked. “He came back to camp?! Why didn’t you tell me!”

“Because it’s not exactly what you think. I met Jasper. Or, his spirit anyway. He said something about being trapped but able to move off of Spooky Island and he was confused but strangely ok with being dead and-” you were cut off by David looking absolutely done.

“If this is a joke, it’s not funny. I expect this from the campers MAYBE, but not from you.” Frustrated, he laied back down and turned away from you.

“David I swear to God I’m not making this up! I KNOW what I saw out there. He stuck his hand through my stomach for crying out loud! He was dressed in the same clothes he had on in the picture and spoke like he was still stuck in the 90’s. He-”

“Stop!” David sat up again, facing forward but not looking at you. “Just, stop ok? I don’t know what you’re trying to do, but it’s cruel. So please stop.”

There was a tense silence following David’s words. Both of you sat there staring straight ahead at the door.

“I think you should sleep in your room, tonight.” You swallowed hard but got up and left his room without another word. You were right in the fact you wouldn’t be able to sleep that night, but you didn’t think it would be because of this.

Hours pass, and you felt every second. Your loneliness and regret ate away at you as you lay in bed, churning your stomach and threatening to make you sick. You’d hurt him— the one thing you never wanted to do and you did it. You didn’t think an apology would make things better or worse in this case because on the one hand, if you apologized it would have made it seem like your intent was to pull a terrible, horrible joke on him and if you didn’t, it would seem like you didn’t care about David’s feelings. It was a lose-lose situation either way.

You waited in your bed until the first rays of sunshine made their way through the crack in your curtains. You’d expected to hear David shuffling around in his room, but when the only sound you were met with was the muffled songs of the birds beginning their morning arias, you figured he may not make an appearance that morning. Groaning slightly, you make your way out of bed and slowly get dressed. Your somber expression mimicked the color of the shirt you wore around your neck, and you debated taking it off for the day. But, you decided that, even if it was small, having
a little bit of David was better than having no David.

_Funny_ you think. _I had the same feeling while he was in the hospital, only now I’m the one who drove him away._ You sigh before making your way to the mess hall, miserable from your lack of sleep and emotional state. The campers made their way in before too long sleepily waving good morning to you but wondering where David was. You told them that he wasn’t feeling well and it seemed to pacify them— all except for Preston who kept sneaking glances at you as you sipped on your coffee.

“Geez Preston,” Nikki said, “stare any harder and you might just look right through her.” She took a bite out of her oatmeal. “What’s got you so worked up, anyway?”

“Her face- I know that look. That’s the look of heartbreak.” He watched the way your face drooped slightly as you looked into your coffee mug before artificially perking back up when you looked out over the campers. “Something’s not right.”

“Do you think they broke up?” she asked, horrified.

“No! And keep it down.” He put his hands over her mouth. “It’s not a break up, but maybe a fight. Ered!” He whisper yelled her name.

“Oh sup Preston?”

“When I say to, I need you to take a picture of our counselor and send it to the Flowerscouts. I need a second opinion on something.”

“No problem, dude.” She pulled her phone out and faked a selfie with he and Nikki.

“Alright, and….now!” As soon as he said it, Ered snapped the picture. It had captured a moment when you dropped your mask right before you took another sip of coffee- you looked quite forlorn.

“What do you want me to ask them, exactly?” Ered asked, one eyebrow raised.

“Ask if they think there was a fight. They’ll understand.”

“Aaaaaand sent. I’ll let you know when they respond.”

“I hope they’re ok,” Nikki said, “I wanted to be in the wedding! Timothy would carry me over the audience while I throw rice at them.”

Preston face palmed, “The rice is AFTER the ceremony, Nikki!”

After breakfast, you went to help Neil with an experiment with dry ice and water, as he wanted to make fog for his ghost story tonight.

“I don’t think ghost stories should be a thing tonight, Neil. David’s feeling a bit…sensitive to the subject right now.”

“What? Oh come on, it’s the perfect night for it! The new moon puts the forest in total darkness and if David gets so scared he can just, oh I don’t know, plug his ears or something!”

“Do you believe in ghosts, Neil?”

“…yes. Yes I do.” He pulled a face you’d never seen him make before. One that perhaps knew much more than he was letting on. You decided to not bother him about it.
“Hey, if it’s going to be so dark tonight anyway, why are we making fog? No one will be able to see it.”

“...shit.”

You move onto Nerris next, unaware that Preston and Ered were currently discussing you in private.

“So like, the Flowerscouts responded and…” her face was uneasy.

“Yes? What is it?”

Ered handed Preston her phone so that he could see for himself.

- **Total fight. Looks pretty bad. ~Sasha**
- **Yeah, it might be a deal breaker if it’s not resolved. V_V Erin**
- **Wow! I haven’t seen a look like that since Taylor Swift and Taylor Lautner ^v* Tabii**
- **Or Taylor Swift and Harry Styles ^v* Tabii**
- **Or Taylor Swift and Calvin Harris ^v* Tabii**
- **Yeah, things don’t look good. They really need to talk it out if they’re gonna stay together. ~Sasha**

“I was afraid of this,” Preston said.

“What do you think happened with them anyway?” Ered asked

“I’m not sure, but I’ll get to the bottom of it.”

“Hey Preston, sorry I’m late, Nerris had a bossfight. Oh, hey Ered!” You’d made you way over to help Preston begin his newest production. He hadn’t told you what it was yet and you were dying to find out. “You here to help us out?”

“Naw, I just came to ask Preston if there could be a spy in the new play. Spies are dope. Anyway, later!” She gave you a salute and walked off with her hands in her pockets.

“Alright Preston, what’s up your sleeve this time? I’ve been psyched to see what you come up with!”

Preston sighed and sat down on the stage patting the area next to him. “Come, sit my dear. There’s something I need to speak with you about.”

“Uh, sure Preston,” you sit next to him, “what’s going on?”

He sighs slightly before speaking, “In every great romance, there’s the inevitable argument that threatens to tear the lovers apart. But, the lovers are always able to overcome their differences by talking things out. Now I don’t know about you, but I think the ‘misunderstanding’ trope has been done to death and needs to retire like the washed-up diva it is. But, in real life it’s much harder to talk things out. I understand.”
“...is this about your new play? Because if you want feedback I-”

“No! I’m asking what happened with you and David!”

“W-what are you talking about, Preston?” you ask nervously.

“I can spot an act from a mile away, you should that by now. The others may not have seen your mask slip this morning, but I did.”

You sigh and pinch the bridge of your nose between your thumb and forefinger. Of course he did.

“Yes fine! We’re going through a rough patch right now.”

“I know it’s hard, but you have to talk things out with him! Nothing will get better until you do.”

“It’s a bit more complicated than that, Preston. I’d love if the solution was as simple as ‘talk to him.’”

“What do you mean?”

How can I put this in a way he’ll understand. “Ok so you know how Hamilton publishes the Reynolds papers because he thought it was the right thing to do even though in hindsight it was one of the worst decisions he ever made?”

“Yes?”

“Well, I published my own papers and told David something I probably shouldn’t have. Now, even if I try to apologize it’s either A: he’s mad at me because he thinks what I did was intentional or B: I don’t apologize and he thinks I’m a horrible person.”

“Oh, I get it.” Preston stood up and pointed a finger at you, suddenly irate, “YOU CHEATED ON HIM!”

“WHAT? NO! I WOULD NEVER!”

“Then... he cheated on you?”

“No! No one cheated on each other! It’s just a situation that wouldn’t have come around had I just kept my mouth shut. I’m going to have to find a way to prove what I said was true, but I may never be able to.” You put your head in your hands and streak your finger through your hair, tugging on it slightly. “My Maria is a lot harder to confront.”

Preston places a comforting hand on your back as the two of you sit there silently.

Chapter End Notes

Some lessons are learned the hard way.

Welcome to hell everyone, I’ll be your guide.

Campe Diem!
David finally made his way out of his room by lunch, waiting in the mess hall for everyone to arrive. He gave everyone his usual cheerful greeting as they made their way inside, even giving you a small wave. His smile faltered for just a moment, though, and you could tell he was having a rough time looking you in the eyes, so you turned away so that he wouldn’t have to. Grabbing your food, you make your way to Max, Nikki and Neil’s table instead of your usual spot.

“Hey guys! Mind if I sit with you today?” You do your best to give a smile that seemed genuine. They moved to give you room and you took the seat next to Max.

“So, finally sick of David?” Max asks.

“N-no. I just...wanted to eat with you guys today. I always eat with him so I thought a change would be nice.”

“So you guys aren’t fighting anymore?” Nikki asked anxiously.

Are you. Fucking. Kidding me.

“It’s not a fight,” you relent, “it’s a...well I’m not really sure what to call it. But I messed up. Bad.”

“What did you do?” Neil asked.

You laugh darkly, “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“Try us. We’ve seen all sorts of stupid shit go down at this camp.” Max said.

“Yeah,” Neil agreed, “I’ll bet there’s not a single thing you could say that would even be remotely surprising.”

“Fine, fine. Neil,” you turn to address him, “you told me earlier that you believe that there’s a possibility that ghosts exist, right?”

“Yes? What does-”

“Seriously Neil?” Max cut him off. “After we agreed to never speak of last year again?”

“Wait,” you say, “what happened last year?”

The three of them stare into their lunch and shudder. “You don’t wanna know,” Neil said.

You give them a curious look before continuing, “Ooookay? Anyway, I…. kind of met the ghost of David’s dead childhood friend in the woods, and when I told him he got really upset.”

Well, that got their attention.
“Wait,” Max said, “you met Jasper?”

You were shocked and dropped your voice. “You’ve met Jasper?”

The trio all look to each other before looking back to you. Their faces were uneasy.

“Let me get this straight,” Neil said. “You met Jasper and then told David about it? You should’ve known that was a terrible idea! Even we didn’t tell him!”

“What was I supposed to do? David and I are a team. It was killing me to not tell him what I knew!”

“Well,” Nikki said, “we might not be able to help you make David feel better, but if you want we can go on a ghost hunt!”

“Nikki, that’s a stupid idea. We did that last summer, remember?” Max didn’t seem to be super excited about it.

“Oh come on, Max. I’ve got a good feeling about this one! Plus, I got a new pocket theremin!” She pulled it out of her pocket and started to play while Max slammed his head on the table, groaning.

You stared into your lunch, silently freaking out. So they’ve met him, too. You weren’t crazy- you actually met a ghost in the woods. A lost spirit. A child who met a terrible fate. The kids gave each other uneasy looks.

“You ok?” Neil asked. “You have that “I think I’m going to go crazy” look in your eyes.”

“The ghost hunt is on. We leave before the campfire. Do NOT tell David.” You stand up and walk away, lost in thought.

“God. Damn it.” Max slammed his head on the table again.

The tension between you and David remained through the rest of the day and into the late afternoon. You were actively avoiding each other as the kids ran around the camp enjoying themselves. It gave you a small bit of happiness to see everyone interacting despite the knife in your heart that was currently stabbing itself over and over with every beat.

Soon, it was time for the mixer. You had collected the scouts’ fan works of you and David when they arrived, and it had been awkward for everyone involved given the circumstances, but you took them and added them to the pile in the counselors cabin. It was a quick escape from David and you didn’t really want to go back out, but if you were going to get to Spooky Island and find Jasper, you knew you were going to have to.

As you exited the cabin, you found Max leaning by the door waiting for you.

“Are you seriously going through with this stupid ghost hunt thing? You have to know that it’s pointless. Even if we do find him, what are we going to tell David? This is going to work about as well are your idea to tell him in the first place.”

You shrug. “All I know is that I don’t know what else to do.” You continue walking and Max follows, hands laced behind his head. You’re silent as you walk, thinking about what you’re going to do if you actually do manage to find Jasper. How will you get him to David? Or David to him? Ghost physics weren’t exactly your forte- you weren’t even sure if it would be possible for him to manifest himself for longer than a few minutes.
Making your way back to the main area of camp, you helped David set up the logs for the fire. The silence between you was deafening- all you wanted to do was cry and tell him how awful you felt for hurting him. It was killing you to see him this way.

“David, I-”

“Not now,” he said softly, “I’m...I’m not ready to talk yet.”

Fuck. That one hurt. You do your best to blink back tears, not trying to make conversation happen again. He walked away as soon as it was finished, leaving you to your thoughts and misery.

With the moon having hidden itself away, you waited until the cover of darkness had taken its place over the camp before sneaking away to the docks, waiting for Max, Neil, and Nikki to arrive. The night was cold and you shivered while you stood there. Looking to the sky, you saw only darkness where the milk light of Luna usually shone, casting an eerie shadow instead of her soft glow. You frowned, wishing that she was full, but the sky was as empty in her absence as the hollow that was sitting in your heart.

You were brought out of your contemplative state when you heard the trio from behind you. Turning, you found an excited Nikki, an amused Neil, and a less than interested Max walking toward you.

“Ready to catch a ghost?” Nikki exclaimed as she bounced her way down the dock.

“More than I think you know, Nikki.” You gave her a high five when she got to you before helping her step into the boat.

“Science magazine, here I come,” Neil said as he followed suit.

“Let’s just get this over with,” Max groaned as he got in.

You were about to step in yourself when you heard someone clear their throat behind you. Turning around, you see a rather confused David standing on the dock. “Guys? What’s going on? Don’t you want to be with the others?” He cocked his head and pointed back to the camp ground with his thumb.

“Hey David!” Nikki said. “We’re going on a ghost hunt! Wanna come-” You threw your hand over her mouth, but it was too late because when you looked to David, you saw his face go from shocked to disappointed.

He sighed. “Kids, head back to the campfire. I need to talk to ______. In private.”

“But she’s not kidding about it!” Neil cried. “We’ve met him too! Jasper is over on Spooky Island right now! If you’d just-”

“Neil,” David was exhausted, “please stop.”

“David.” Max was uncharacteristically serious. “I know it’s sounds impossible, but it’s true. We know where he is and what happened to him. He told us all of it. If you just-”

“ENOUGH. CAMPFIRE. ALL OF YOU.”

The kids all looked at each other anxiously before getting out of the boat. As you watched them walk away, you felt like you were going to puke. Every emotion you had felt over the past day decided to make an appearance in your stomach as it seethed within you. Even with David’s back
to you, you could feel the hurt and impatience radiating off of him.

Fuck.

Once the kids were out of sight he turned to face you, and you immediately shrank beneath his gaze. Hair having fallen to the wayside, his usually soft eyes had turned into hard, unwavering pits of unforgiving indignation. There was a long silence where you and he just stared at each other, unmoving in the cold night. You did your best to try and meet his eyes, but you couldn’t do it—not with the way he was looking at you now. A small clap of thunder rumbled quietly in the distance.

You had to speak. “What can I—”

He put his hand up and closed his eyes, shaking his head back and forth. “I think you’ve done quite enough.”

Meanwhile, Max, Neil, and Nikki had just made their way back to the campfire, slightly shaken by their experience. They took their seats and gazed silently into the fire, worried expressions sitting on their face.

Harrison was the first to speak up, “Is everything ok? You guys have been gone a while.”

“Yeah,” said Nurf, “and where are the counselors?”

The three remained silent, eyes glued to the flames in front of them as they danced away the darkness. The kids of Lake Lilac were beginning to get uneasy.

Sasha spoke. “Is this because of their fight?” Suddenly the kids all turned to her, surprised to hear the news.

“What fight?” Nerris asked.

“We don’t really know,” Preston said. “All I know is that she told him something awful and they haven’t spoken to each other since.”

The trio remained quiet—there was an unsaid understanding that there was no way David would believe you unless you had proof. And, without Jasper making an appearance, there would never be any. Neil finally found his voice, “They’re...talking it out.” Even he didn’t convince himself.

The kids were quiet with worry— they’d come to really enjoy seeing you and David together. It was like a big family, but if you split up what would happen? Would things around camp ever be the same? No one spoke. No one even smiled. It was a silent awareness that things were going to change tonight—they could feel it in the air as it grew heavier with each passing minute.

“Aww geez,” a new voice came, “what’s with all the long faces?”

Everyone turned in the direction of the unknown speaker and watched as a young boy about their age stepped out of the bushes. He spoke again, “Hey wait a minute, Flowerscouts? Woodscouts? What are you doing here?” He came and sat where you and David usually would, confused as to why so many different people were in his camp.

“I’m sorry, who are you exactly?” Pikeman asked.

“Yeah,” Erin said, “we’ve been doing this for like a month and I’ve never seen you before.”

“Oh well, my name is Jasper! Who are you guys?”
“Edward Pikeman, Cedar scout, first class. These are my associates Snake and Petrol.”

“I’m Sasha and this is Erin and Tabii—”

“SPELLED WITH TWO I’S.”

“Wow,” Jasper said, “I can’t believe how much things have changed since I’ve been here! It’s totally tubular.”


“Like, no one has said that since the 90’s” Sasha added.

“Well, I still think it’s the bomb.” Jasper argued.

The kids all snickered again. Jasper rolled his eyes. “Look, I’m looking for one of the counselors. Do you know where she is?”

There was another uneasy silence at his words. “Woah, what’s the 411 on that?”

Neil started to answer, “Our counselors are…”

“They’re fighting,” Max finished. “May as well call it what it is.”

“Fighting? Well that’s no good. I need their help!”

“Maybe ve can help!” Dolph suggested.

“……………Is no one going to say anything about—” Jasper was cut off by Max.

“You get used to it. Now what could you possibly need help with?”

“Well, I’ll tell you what I told her- I’m still stuck! I can’t move on from here, even after last year.”

“You and me both, kid.”

“Wow you too? You know, I had my suspicions when we met last year, but you even fooled me! You’ve got some seriously wicked control over your corporeal form.”

“Wait,” Snake said, “corporeal form? What are you talking about?”

“It’s easier just to show you I guess. Toss something at me.”

With a suspicious expression, Snake picked up a small rock and tossed it at Jasper, only to have suspicion and curiosity turn to horror as he watched the rock pass right through him.

David put his hand down and took a deep, shaky breath as he steadied himself enough to speak. “It was one thing to say it yourself, but to bring the kids in on it? That’s despicable. Do you think I’m stupid or something?”

“David of course I don’t—”

He raised his voice, “Then why are you doing this! I thought you would have understood that this is a sensitive issue for me! I thought you were better than that. God, you had me fooled, well done.”

“David—”
“Don’t, ____, just don't. I have no idea what you’re trying to do, but it’s mean. If your goal was to make me hurt then congratulations, you succeeded.”

“David I don’t know how to make you understand that I’m not lying. Why would I about this?” You were desperate, “Jasper is still here! He spoke to me, David. He said he needed help finding his body!”

“And even if that were true, do you really think that you could find it?” His voice dropped and he turned his head away. “He’s gone and he isn’t coming back. So don’t say stuff like he is. You never even knew him. You didn’t- you didn’t like him like I did.”

“He’s still here, we have the chance to help him!”

“NO HE ISN’T, HE’S GONE.” David yelled. He actually yelled at you and you felt tears starting to form in your eyes. David seemed to be crying as well. “He’s gone.”

You made your way over to hold him but he pushed you away. "Please don’t touch me,” he said through his tears. “I can’t...I can’t be near you right now.” He steadied himself again. “I don’t think you realize just how much you’ve hurt me with this stupid joke, ____. And I don’t think I can handle it.”

“What-what are you saying.”

“I’m saying I think it’s over. If you can’t stop whatever it is you think you’re doing here, then I don’t want to be with you. I can’t do that to myself.”

The world shattered as you stood there, dumbfounded. You saw the fragments of broken memories flying passed you as you felt yourself fall into a deep black pit, swallowed by its inky tendrils as wind rushed passed your ears. The sky was slowly getting farther and farther away as you watched fragments of your relationship with David float along by you. You saw your first meeting, the excitement on your face when he texted you for the first time, sitting with him in the cafeteria while he told you about the deer you’d spotted, playing various games as you laughed and sat on his couch, dancing with him both in and out of class, seeing the look on his face when he first got to camp, embracing him when you’d come back from the scouts, regaining your breath after you’d fallen from the tree, him singing on stage at the Camporee, your first kiss, the anguish you felt as he was loaded into the ambulance, him crying with joy at the kid’s cards, the passing glances you shared after he told you he loved you, you comforting him in the night as you held each other close, the tender moment you’d shared on the couch with he and Max. You saw it all before it crumbled and flew up away from your flailing body as it plunged deeper into the abyss.

“Please, at least say something.” David’s words brought you back to the dock. He had shrunk in on himself, wrapped his arms around his stomach and turned his face away from you as tears silently fell from his eyes. Another distant rumble of thunder echoed over camp.

You were about to answer when you heard a scream coming from the kids, ripping yours and David’s attention away from each other and towards the direction of the fire. Without any words the two of you sprinted over to find petrified faces staring at a startled Jasper.
Campe Diem!
“Oh my God,” was all David could manage as he looked at the familiar figure standing in front of him.

“Oh, hey?” Jasper wasn’t quite sure how to deal with the attention. He was used to people being afraid of him, being a ghost and all, but this was the most amount of people he’d ever told at once.

“Ok, everybody calm down. Jasper’s just a camper who died via explosion years ago. He’s just stuck among the living until we can free him,” Max said, trying to keep the peace.

“Wait!” Jasper said, confused, “I thought you were dead too?”

Max shrugged. “Only on the inside.”

“Yes,” Pikeman said, gaining his ability to speak back, “it’s time we take our leave. PETROL!” The name was barely out of his mouth before Petrol picked he and Snake up, booking it to their boat.

“Us too! Let’s go ladies!” Sasha and the Flowerscouts made a few quick, terrified ‘excuse me’s’ as they passed by Jasper and the campers before sprinting to their own boat.

“Hope you guys work whatever it is out!” Tabii cried as they hauled off towards their camp.

“Well that was unexpected,” Jasper said, “but at least I still have my home skillets to-” the campers all shrieked and ran as fast as they could toward the mess hall, leaving you, David, Max, Neil, and Nikki at the fire pit.

David dropped to his knees, mouth agape- it was actually him. Not a simulation or a hologram or a prank. It was Jasper . He was there and David wasn’t sure how to process it. Sure, he’d liked Jasper when he was a camper but as he grew older he’d managed to find some sort of closure. But new wounds were reforming where old ones had healed as he took in the sight of him.

Jasper looked to the two of you as you stared at him, no one really knowing what to say. You tried to start the conversation. “Uh, hey again Jasper. I- uh...It’s nice to see you again?”

David slowly turned to look at you, tears in his eyes. “You really weren’t kidding.” He turned his attention back to his childhood friend, unable to say anything else.

“Good to see you too, uh, sorry I don’t think I ever got your name.” Jasper rubbed the back of his
head, slightly embarrassed.

“_____.” You give him a small smile, “And I think you know this one.” You nudge David slightly and he quickly scrambles to his feet.

“Hey Davey,” Jasper says quietly.

David’s voice was caught in the back of his throat. There was no way this was actually happening- he had to be dreaming. Any second now he was going to wake up next to you and none of this will have ever happened.

But he didn’t, because he wasn’t.

“Wow Davey, long time no see! You look great!”

“But you’re dead?” David blurted. It was the only thing that was able to come out of his mouth. Jasper just shrugged.

“Yeah, I get that a lot.” He turned his attention to you, “Do you think you’ll still be able to help me?”

“What do we need to do?”

Thunder rumbled again, louder this time.

“We need to get to Spooky Island. It’s where the real me is.”

Max, Neil, and Nikki looked to you all with varying levels of excitement and nervousness etched into their faces. It seemed like they wanted to come along, but you couldn’t let them. It didn’t feel right.

“Guys,” you say, “I’m going to need you to sit this one out. I think… I think this is something David and I have to do alone. Please, try and help the others come to terms with this?”

They nodded in understanding before heading to the mess hall.

And so, you soon found yourself in a rowboat sitting next to a ghost child while crossing a lake, the love of your life who had just broken your heart staring between the two of you absolutely stupefied.

“So-o-o-o Davey,” Jasper said, trying to break the awkward silence, “You…. became a counselor? That’s pretty cool.”

“Y-yeah! I like it here. The place grew on me, you know?” He was still tense but at least managed some conversation.

“And you _____? What brought you here?”

“Oh well, David did actually. When he told me the camp needed a new counselor I decided to volunteer. We’re-” you cut yourself off before you could say dating, and friends couldn’t seem to find its way out, either, “co-workers.”

David watched your face fall and he couldn’t help but feel guilty. You had been telling the truth the whole time and he ended things because of it. You couldn’t meet each other’s eyes as you continued to paddle, and the awkward silence returned until you hit the shore of Spooky Island.
“Come on,” Jasper said, “I’ll show you around the place.” As you all stepped onto the shore, he began to lead you through the small thicket. You popped out in front of what looked to be a large mansion in the middle of the island. An old worn out mailbox had C. Campbell written on the side in fading letters. Why someone would need a mailbox on an island you’d never know.

“This way,” Jasper lead you around the side of the mansion and to the back where there was a large hedge maze. It was mostly well-kept except for what looked to be person-shaped holes running through about half of it. They were older and had almost been reclaimed, but still allowed you and David to see straight through to where they began. “I’ve never been able to find my way through here,” Jasper said. “Every time I try, I get spit out right where I began. I think if my body is anywhere it would be there. I’ve searched everywhere else for it!”

You look into the person-shaped hole and feel a slight breeze hit you in the face. It was cold and carried the scent of rain with it. Looking up towards the sky, you found that there were no longer any stars, just a thick blanket of dark clouds threatening to release their storm at any moment.

“Well, better get a move on, then,” you say as you make your way into the maze. Jasper tentatively follows you, nervous to see if he’ll get spit back out like usual. David hesitates.

“David?” you ask gently, “You coming?”

“W-we may need tools. Is there a shed?”

“Yeah,” Jasper says, “right over here.” He makes his way back over to David and the two walk off out of your line of site. You did not like this- you were alone in the middle of a haunted maze at fucking midnight while a storm was trying to rear its ugly head.

Those two need to hurry.

Luckily, they were back before too long with a pair of shovels. David handed you one and Jasper took the lead as he guided you through the maze. The tall walls of holly branched out every which way as you passed through it- the red berries sticking out of the green bushes looking like small splats of blood. You shivered as another breeze chilled you to the bone, but you pressed on, determined to help Jasper.

Suddenly, Jasper stopped walking. “End of the line, buckaroos. If I go any farther, I just get thrown right to the beginning. You’ll have to go on without me.”

“Do you have any idea what we’re even looking for?” David asks.

“No. I was killed in an explosion in that cavern and the next thing I knew, I was a ghost. I thought I’d have been able to find bits and pieces of me but there was nothing!”

“Explosion? What are you-”

“I’ll have to explain later. Right now, I need you guys to help me out.”

You and David look at each other, uncertain if you could to this. “We’ll do our best, Jasper,” you say.

“Don’t worry dudes, I’m sure you’ll figure it out!” He gave you a thumbs up before disappearing into thin air. You and David headed deeper into the maze just as the first drops of rain began to fall.

The more dead ends you hit, the more frustrated you got. The rain was pouring down in buckets
from the sky, drenching the two of you as you stumbled blindly through the hedges. You were freezing, exhausted, bitter, and adamant about finding the body. David was silent as you would grumble your way through dead end after dead end, lost in his own thoughts. After what seemed like the millionth false positive, you drop to your knees and start screaming out of frustration and anguish. David places an understanding hand on your back as you curl into a ball, sobbing into the mud.

“I can’t do this,” you weep. “David I can’t do this.”

“Yes you can. I know you- you can do anything you set your mind to.”

“Oh don’t give me that age-old bullshit, David.” You roll yourself from a ball into a sitting position, splaying your legs out in front of you. “We’re never going to find him- it’s hopeless. What if he isn’t even in here and we’re just on a wild goose chase? I can’t do this!”

David plants his shovel in the ground and picks you up from beneath your armpits, setting you on your feet. He plants his hands firmly on both of your shoulder and looks you dead in the eyes, “And I’m saying you can, _____. You’re resilient. You’re tough. You’re strong. And right now, we need those things to help us with this. Jasper needs you. I need you.”

You blink a few times before closing your eyes and taking a deep breath. You give David a steadfast gaze when you open them and he releases you, both of you now ready to face the challenge again. With the wind whipping your hair and the rain unrelenting in its ferocity, you double down in the speed at which you traverse the maze- determination now coursing through your veins.

You were going so fast that you didn’t notice the stick jutting its way out of the ground, searching for someone to trip. It found its victim in you as you fell straight into the mud.

“Are you ok?” David was immediately by your side.

“Yeah, I think so,” you say as you rub where your shin had hit the ground. It was tender- probably a bruise. David gave you his hand and pulled you to your feet. “What did I even trip on?”

Examining the area, you see the small flat assailant protruding from the ground. You reach to pull it out of the ground, but it immediately feels wrong- was that leather?

You tentatively pull the handle out of the ground revealing the old, rusty knife it was attached to. Yelping in surprise, you quickly drop it like it had burned you and place your surprised hand over your mouth as you watch it clatter to the ground.

“Oh my God- David do you think?” One look at his crestfallen face told you everything you needed to know. Without a word the two of you begin to dig into the wet, flooded soil- covering yourselves in mud and forming blisters from the rough wooden handles of the shovels. You dug and dug and dug until you were nearly waist deep in the Earth trying to uncover her terrible secret. And soon, you found it.

You heard David’s shovel hit something solid deep in the dirt. With anxious faces, the two of you drop to your knees and begin removing the dirt out of the way with your hands, sure of what you were about to see but still unprepared for it. Finally, when it had been revealed, you and David choked back sobs at the bones of the young boy that had sat in the ground for over a decade. His clothes had deteriorated only slightly, but the yellow camp shirt and blue triangle shorts were unmistakably present. There was no time for consolation, as the rain was threatening to fill the hole you had dug and rebury Jasper for God only knows how long. You pulled yourself out of the hole
and David handed him to you piece by piece until Jasper was once again above the Earth, still trapped by his immortal bindings.

David climbed out of the hole and stood next to you while the two of you stared at the body. You felt him gently reach for your hand which you clasped silently, standing there as the rain poured down on you and thunder made itself known yet again.

After what felt like an eternity had passed, David reached down and began to gather him up, prompting you to do the same. Carrying Jasper in your hands, you slowly made your way back through the maze- instinct seeming to guide your way in the darkness as the rain began to recede. Once you’d found your way out, Jasper stood at the exit waiting for your return. Noticing your faces and the items in your hands, his expression changed from content to shocked.

“Get out,” he said, “you guys found me? ”

You and David didn’t say anything as you laid his bones out in front of him, you couldn’t find the words. There were no words. David at the very least found his voice once Jasper had been laid out properly.

“We found you, Jasper,” David said with a tearful smile. “We found you.”

Jasper put a hand to his face and found that he was crying- he didn’t even know he could do that anymore. David knelt down and put his arms out which Jasper ran into. The two shared a moment. It was brotherly, though you weren’t sure who was playing the roles of the older and younger brother. Both looked so small despite the age difference.

“Jasper,” David whispers, “I’m so sorry. None of this would have happened if I’d had just listened to you. Can you ever forgive me?”

“Of course I forgive you, Davey! I’ve been trying to tell you for so long! We were both pretty bad friends that day, so, I’m sorry too. But I just have one question before I go,” Jasper said.

“Anything,” David replied.

“Tell me, were the Star Wars prequels as good as everyone hoped they’d be?”

“Even better,” David lied. Jasper deserved his last moments on Earth to be happy- he didn’t need to know.

“Radical,” Jasper said as he pulled out of the hug. The three of you looked to the sky as the soft blush of the sunrise began to peak over the trees- a beautiful contrast from the storm that had thrown its rage at you in the night.

“Wow,” Jasper whispered. “You know, you never really know how much you miss the sunrise until you haven’t seen it for almost fifteen years.” He turned back to you and David, “I don’t know how I’ll ever thank you.”

“You don’t have to, Jasper,” David said as he wiped a tear from his eye.

Jasper gave a small smile and turned back to the sunrise. With his last exhale, you watched as he disintegrated into the morning air, finally free.

Chapter End Notes
As much as I loved season 3, these two needed better closure. Jasper can rest easy now.

Campe Diem.
Davey had just finished celebrating Mr. Campbell’s genius idea of turning the camp into a Camp Camp and was riding back in a boat towards the shore.

“By the way, Davey, where did Jasper end up?”

Davey rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. “That square has something against you. Said something about ‘showing everyone’ how ‘evil’ you are. What a load of hooey, am I right?”

Cameron’s eyes widened. “He said what?”

“Yeah he said a bunch of stuff about gathering evidence before disappearing into a cave. Real smart move after last time.” He looked away angrily. Cameron grabbed him by the vest.

“Davey, I need you to listen to me very carefully. What cave was it?”

“I-it was one off the path! I told him not to go in because you’d said not to but he went anyway! He had a camera and stuff!” Davey was surprised by Mr. Campbell’s sudden intensity.

Cameron’s mind was moving a mile a minute. If those pictures get out he was as good as dead, but he couldn’t make Davey suspicious. As dumb as the kid was, there was a chance he could become disillusioned, just as Jasper had.

“Well, we won’t let one bad apple ruin the bunch now will we? We have a camp to save, Davey, and I’ll need your help!”

“Wowie Mr. Campbell! You really need my help?”

“Of course! You’re the best camper, remember? I have a very special job for you to do while I run a few errands.”

“Anything for you Mr. Campbell!”

Cameron began to scheme a bit more as the ride continued. He was going to have to find Jasper of course- he couldn’t be allowed to leave camp with that camera, and Cameron would stop him by any means necessary.

Once they returned back to camp, Cameron lead Davey into the mess hall.

“Alright, Davey. I have a few ideas of my own for what to add to camp, but I want you to think up some. Any kind of camp you think kids your age would enjoy write down! Then, you can make
“Can do!” He gave Cameron the camp salute before taking a seat at the nearest table and frantically began writing down his ideas.

“Good!” Cameron said, “Just write down whatever pops into that little head of yours. No wrong answers!” Cameron slipped out of the mess hall and rushed back to the docks. He had to find Jasper before it was too late. How was he supposed to make money if he was in jail?

Making his way back across the lake, Cameron smelled the unmistakable scent of gunpowder. That was strange— all the dynamite had been hidden away in the cave. It only got stronger as he made his way closer to the island, and as he ventured through the brush, he soon found out why.

The cavern, along with everything that had been in it, had been destroyed— including Jasper. Cameron vomited at the sight of the boy’s burnt and mangled body in the ground in front of him, horrified. Cameron was no stranger to death, hell he’d caused a few of them, but never a child. That was too far, even for him. But, Cameron knew he had to cover this up—if the fact that a child had died on his watch got out, he was done for. There would be a fortune of legal fees as his parents would surely sue! He would have to figure that part out later, right now he had to take care of the body.

Carrying the young boy around the back of his house, he weaved his way through the hedge maze he’d thought was a good idea when it had been planted. Even if he’d never once ventured into it, he figured it was at least good for something in the end.

Burying Jasper had been more of a hassle than he originally anticipated, but when it was over, Cameron felt that the poor kid deserved something to show where he was. Cameron stuck his knife above the spot where Jasper was buried as a small grave marker. A reminder of the dangerous games he played and how it can affect others. Maybe he’d leave flowers, but he doubted it. He’d never used the maze before, and he was going to avoid it even harder now.

He needed a drink.

Making his way into the library of his lavish home, he pulled a large book off one of the high rising shelves. Upon opening it, it was revealed to not actually be a book, but a hiding place for some of the finest scotch the world had to offer. It wasn’t something he drank often, but right now, after what he’d witnessed, he figured he’d earned it. As he poured what was probably more than what would be safe into the glass, he glanced up at his family’s crest as it hung above the mantle. It was a proud display— a large yellow and black shield with two crossing swords beneath it symbolizing the strength and sharp-wittedness of those who had come before him. But right now, Cameron felt neither of those. He felt weak and dull. Shattered. He took a sip and stared into the fire, his shadow cast long behind him.

Cameron eventually made his way back to camp where he found Davey still sitting at the table, a pile of pamphlets sitting next to him.

“Check it out Mr. Campbell! I made a whole bunch of pamphlets for the camp!” The young boy was proud of himself and Cameron’s plan was working perfectly.

“Great job Davey! I knew you wouldn’t disappoint me! Now let’s see what you’ve got.” Cameron had to admit, some of the ideas were decent. He could tweek them just a bit here and there to make them really stand out to people (see: scam them) in order to get the numbers he needed to keep the place open.
“Hey, Mr. Campbell? Did you happen to see Jasper while you were over there? I need to talk to him.”

Shit. Cameron couldn’t have the kid asking too many questions- it would lead to answers. So, Cameron did what he does best. He lied.

“I did! He said he wanted to go home and his parents came to pick him up about an hour ago.” He looked around the room to see if anyone was listening.

“He...went home? Oh...” Davey seemed really upset. “Did he mention why?”

“Uh, something about a...fight?” Cameron tried, and Davey looked down, saddened.

“That makes sense. Gosh, I was a real jerk today. I shouldn’t have said what I did. Now he’s gone and it’s all my fault.”

Cameron placed a hand on Davey’s back. “It really is, Davey.”

In the present day, you and David were silently rowing back to camp to call search and rescue. It was decided that he would be the one to talk to the specialists while you talked with the campers- he’d gone through the rounds with them due to Campbell so many times it was routine at this point. First name basis, even.

There were a million thoughts running through your head right now, but it would all just be meaningless noise if you spoke them aloud. There was nothing that could be said to even begin to fill the intense silence between you, so you both just let it sit.

David helped you out of the boat and onto the dock when you arrived, but he didn’t release your hand once you were on the planks. You gave each other concerned frowns before you pulled him into a tight hug. It was the most comfort you were going to be able to muster given the circumstances both pertaining to Jasper and your relationship, so you both just stood there, eyes open as your arms wrapped themselves around the other.

You weren’t sure how long you stayed like that. It could’ve been thirty seconds, it could have been thirty years, but you eventually felt David begin to pull away from you. You let him go, but held onto his hand for as long as possible before he was too far out of your reach, even holding your arm out for a short time after. You turn away from his direction and look out over the lake, watching as its surface began to sparkle a little more with every passing minute as the sun continued to rise, unaware of the ordeal that occurred in the night. You’re brain had completely shut down, unable to process anything that happened in the last 24 hours. You didn’t know what time it was, or how long you stood on the dock, or why the Quartermaster was currently speeding across the lake, half naked from the waist up and rushing to his store. You didn’t question anything- nor did you want to question anything.

Eventually, you managed to turn yourself around and autopilot your way to the mess hall. You stepped inside and saw the campers all huddled together in the far corner passed out and sleeping on top of each other. Kicking the door closed, you press your back to the wall and slowly slide down onto the floor, splaying your legs straight out in front of you once your butt hit the wood.

A few of the kids stirred from their sleep to find you at the door, staring at your hands like they weren’t your own. You were a mess- hair everywhere, soaking wet, muddy as all hell, and absolutely broken. The campers slowly woke each other up and made their way over to you, doing their best not to startle you. Soon, they surrounded you in a semicircle, watching you with worried eyes.
“Guys,” you say, not looking up from your hands, “we….can’t speak of this. Ever.” You didn’t want them to bottle up their emotions, but for your own sanity you had to be selfish. Just this once. They all nodded in understanding.

You sent them to their tents and gave them the day off before making your way to the counselors cabin.

David made all the phone calls and got search and rescue to where Jasper was. He gave all the information he could to the agents he’d become so familiar with over the years. He obviously didn’t tell them what actually happened, they would never believe it. He just told them he found something sticking out of the ground while looking for worms to teach the kids how to fish and they seemed to buy it. He left you out of the situation entirely- he’d done enough to your mental state for a lifetime.

Once he finished with all the paperwork and watched as Jasper’s bones were carried out of the camp, it was nearly dusk. He knew it was going to take a while, but not this long. He still needed to talk to you about everything, but he had one more stop beforehand.

David poked his head into Max, Neil, and Nikki’s tent slowly, finding them all laying on their cots engaged in different activities. Nikki and Neil were playing cards and Max was listening to music.

“Uh guys? Can I interrupt?”

“Oh hey David,” Nikki said, “come on in.”

He did so and took a seat on Nikki’s unused cot. His eyes were still wide from the events of the past day and he wasn’t sure that he was going to be able to process it for some time. But he did need to talk to these three.

“I just...wanted to thank you. For last year. You were faced with a really difficult situation and you came through for me. I appreciate it.” He smiled. “I’m not really sure what to do next, but I thought that you should all know that Jasper… moved on.”

“You didn’t know he was dead, right?” Neil asked. “How?”

David sighed. “I think deep down I knew but I never wanted to admit it to myself. But now that he’s gone, really truly gone, I think I can finally move on too.”

“Did he tell you how he died?” Nikki asked.

“Something about an explosion?” David said. “It wasn’t exactly a topic of conversation but… you mentioned he told the three of you?”

“Do you really want to know?” Max asked, sitting up and facing David.

“I do. I think it’s important for me to know.”

The three campers all looked to each other, but eventually managed to get the story out. David winced at the realization Jasper had died in an explosion- what a horrible way to go. He felt awful but grateful that he was there for Jasper in the end. He’d made things right, even if it had taken fifteen years to do it.

David was emotionally drained from the conversation- he wasn’t even sure he had any energy after the beginning of the day, and wanted everything to be over. He thanked the campers again and made his way to the counselors cabin where he found you at the table, vodka in hand.
“Hey,” he said, exhausted.

“Hey.” You take a swig straight from the bottle. “I’m drinking away my feelings. Care to join me?”

“...yes.”

Chapter End Notes

Man oh man things are interesting right now. Ever wonder what David's like when he's drunk?

Campe Diem!
This chapter's title was inspired by Liquor Store Blues by Bruno Mars. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUlQEI7WKmU

“And THEN,” David said in his drunken state, “HE’S ALL LIKE ‘OH, DON’T WORRY DAVEY, IT’S ONLY MILDLY PAINFUL FOR ABOUT A DAY.’ I WAS WRITHING FOR A WEEK.”

“That’s fucked, dude.” You take another drink from the bottle, grimacing at the taste. You think you’re done for now and set it on the floor next to you. David, on the other hand was a different story entirely.

“H-eey, if you’re not gonna, gimmie. I can still… remember things.”

“D-david, have you ever been drunk before?” You lean back into the corner of the couch and put your arm over your reddened face.

“Nooooooooo.” It was elongated, but not sarcastic. “I’m a good boy, I don’t drink or smoke or anything.”

“That’s going to be a hell of a hangover.

“I’m f-fine. Watch.” He tried to stand up, but immediately plopped back onto the couch. “See? I’m fiiiiiiine.”

“David, allyoudidwasstandup,” you slur. Yeah, you were definitely done.

“That’s what I was going for. Now gimmie.”

“No, David. I’m cut *hic* ting you off. You’ve had enough.”

“Aaaaaaaahh. You’re a bad influence on me, you know?”

“So what? Learn to loosen up a little every *hic* every once in a while.”

“I’ll show you loose!” He stood up again, successfully this time, and started waving his arms around and moving his hips side to side. You laughed at him.

“David, what the fuck are you doing?”

“I’m being loose.” He kept going with his weird dance and you kept laughing at him. You clapped when he sat back down on the couch, applauding him on his dance skills.
“Thhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhank you.”

You close your eyes for a moment and sigh only to hear David giggling from his corner of the couch.

“W-what?” you ask when you open them. He was giving you some serious puppy-dog eyes.

“You’re cuuuuute.”

“Daviiiiid. Don’t.” No, you were both too drunk for this.

“I’m serriouuuus.”

“So am I.”

He sighed and leaned back into the couch. “What are we?”

“I don’t kn-know anymore, David.”

The room was quiet for the first time since you started drinking.

“Listen, David,” you say after some time, “we’re going to feel like shit tomorrow so we’ll tag team it. I’ll take the morning shift, you take the afternoon. I’ll...see you tomorrow.” You stagger back into your room leaving David alone on the couch.

_Like shit huh?_ He thinks as he grabs the bottle. _Already there._

You were true to your word the next morning and somehow managed to get yourself out of bed, even if you felt like you wanted to die. You took some aspirin and managed to get yourself looking decent at least clothing wise. Your face looked like shit, but there was nothing you could really do about that.

Making your way out of your room, you found David slung over the couch, snoring loudly. You noticed that he was still clutching the bottle in his unconscious state and you rolled your eyes, scolding yourself for not taking it away when you’d left. You haphazardly throw a blanket over him before trudging your way to the mess hall, the sunlight harsh against your sore eyes. You winced once you were inside- every little noise piercing your ears like a dagger. The Quartermaster doesn’t even need to ask and showed you mercy in your coffee that morning, making it taste absolutely heavenly. You weren’t sure what was in it, but knew better than to ask.

You noticed that most of the kids were absent from breakfast that morning, and you didn’t blame them. It had been a rough day for everyone involved. You were actually kind of glad they weren’t there to see you that morning- you’re sure you wouldn’t be able to handle questions right now.

As soon as you finished your coffee, you looked up to find Max sitting next to you.

“How many days in a row am I going to have to tell you that you look like shit before you do something about it?”

You smile- his brash view of the world a welcome change in pace. “And a good morning to you too, Max.”

“What’s got you all fucked up today? You know, aside from the whole ‘ghosts are real’ thing.”

You smirk and let air out through your nose, “You want the real answer?”
“Lay it on me.”

You look him dead in the eyes, “I’m hungover as fuck right now.”

“Shut up,” he says with an impish smile.

“Oh want me to really blow your mind? David’s currently sleeping his off. We got absolutely wasted last night.”

“Well done Newbie,” he says as he pats you on the back, “I won’t lie- I’m impressed.”

You shrug, proud of yourself in a twisted way.

You work through the morning a bit differently than normal- opting to gather everyone up for yoga instead of their individualized activities. It was pleasant- no talking, no stressful movements, everyone just having the chance to sit and relax for a while. The kids seemed to enjoy it, too and you assumed they were grateful for the opportunity to relax for a bit. God knows they haven’t had the chance, even with their day off. You made sure everyone was in for lunch before you made your way back into the cabin.

David hadn’t moved an inch since you found him this morning, still snoring away and starfishing his limbs over as much of the couch as he could. You take pity on him and get him some aspirin and water ready before you wake him up.

“Daaaaaavid,” you do your best to make it as gentle as possible, this wasn’t going to be fun for him. “Daaaaaavid.”

He slowly opens his eyes and immediately groans in pain. You winced, knowing that it was either from his head or his stomach, but probably from both.

“What...happened last night?” he asks you.

“Check your hand.”

David is confused until he realizes he’s holding a half empty bottle of vodka in his hand. “Oh Jesus.” He sits up and rubs his temples with his hands, trying not to concentrate on his headache.

“Here.” You hand him the medicine and cup of water to make sure he takes it.

“Thanks,” he says after he gets it down. He leans back and groans again, miserable. “I can’t remember anything from last night. Why do people find this fun, exactly?”

“David for as drunk as we were it wasn’t for fun. It was to drown our feelings in alcohol.”

“...right.” He blushed a bit, embarrassed. “Do you remember anything?”

“I remember you going on a drunken rant about Cameron and then doing a weird ass dance after telling me I was a bad influence on you.”

“...I’m never doing this again.”

“I don’t blame you.”

David tries to stand up but stumbles a bit, so you catch him. He steadies himself before running a hand through his hair. “What time is it?”
“It’s noon. I’m tagging out- I recommend something low impact for the day. Also, you need a shower.” You give him a small smile which he returns. Things almost feel normal for a second.

“_____ I-”

You put your hand up to stop him, but give him a weak smile. “We’ll talk when neither of us are hungover.” With that, you disappear into your room.

David, at your discretion, made his way into the shower, allowing the warm water to rush over him. He felt awful- not just because of the alcohol, but because he’d hurt you. All you wanted to do was help and he was too blind to see it until the proof was right in front of him. He tried to tell himself that it was an unusual situation- scratch that this was beyond unusual. This was a borderline impossible situation that somehow happened anyway- and that he reacted like anyone would have if it turned out that it was just some cruel prank. But even so, he felt crummy, and he knew you did, too. He leaned his head against the shower wall and closed his eyes, sighing as the steam rose up to meet his disheartened face.

Once he reached the mess hall, he felt a little better physically, but he was mentally still a mess. Most of the kids were finishing up their lunches and heading outside to prepare for the afternoon activity. All except for Max who smugly sauntered up to David.

“So, Mr. Hangover, how is everyone’s ray of sunshine today?”

David sighed. “Max, please. Not now.”

Max smirked and crossed his arms, “Oh I get it, you don’t want to let anything about your drunken night of fun slip. Well don’t worry, your girlfriend didn’t say anything too embarrassing.”

Well that did it. David slammed his head onto the table and started sobbing, wrapping his arms around his head to try and block out the rest of the world. This was not the reaction Max was expecting.

“David holy shit it was a joke, relax.”

“I broke up with her,” David whimpered. Max was taken aback.

“You WHAT? DAVID WHAT THE FUCK?”

“I didn’t know!” he sobbed.

“God damn it David, just when I thought you couldn’t be any more of a fuck-up, you pull this shit! It’s like you’re just one big fucking mistake after another- do you know that? Now you’ve gone and fucked everything up. Again. Like always. I don’t even know why I’m surprised at this point!”

Max ranted and raved for a bit longer as David sat there, despondent. He eventually found the strength to look at Max whose rage had subsided.

“I thought you could have at least done one thing right, David. I guess I was wrong.” Max ran out of the building, leaving David to his misery.

By the end of the day, everyone around camp had heard the news about you and David and they were heartbroken. It seemed like a cruel twist of fate for them- everything had just gotten better and now it all came crashing right back down, worse than when it began. Now what were they going to do? Moral reached an all time low at Camp Campbell that day and there was nothing anyone could do to stop it.
Chapter End Notes

Yikes, things don't look great right now do they?

Campe Diem?
i'm crazy/it's raining

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by i'm crazy/it's raining by Bill Wurtz. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dfyswlszyhg

Yeah like, the dude who made the history of Japan/the entire world makes really good music?!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You had woken back up some time later from your nap and were currently waiting for David in the common area. You were anxious for him to arrive but also wanted him to get there faster. It was torture with every passing second he wasn’t there- you kept thinking of ways to apologize but every one just seemed flat and insincere.

Finally, David stepped inside and you stood up off the couch. You didn’t know why you did, but it just felt right in the moment. Now though, as he walked over, you just felt dumb. He stood before you silently- an unreadable expression on his face, and you both stared at each other until you broke. Wrapping your arms around each other, you sobbed- each of you getting out as many emotions as possible as the last few days were finally released. The cabin was filled with the sound of your wails as you and David cried into the other, not letting go for the world.

“David I’m so sorry,” you whispered through your tears. You just kept repeating it- your brain wasn’t letting you think of anything else to say and you weren’t about to try and force it to.

“No, I’m sorry,” he said softly, “I’m the one who broke it off.”

“But only because I pushed things too far.”

“Because you wanted to help someone.”

“But I hurt you, David!”

“And I hurt you too, _____.

You held him tighter and you felt his grasp get more desperate as he bawled, taking in large gasps of air when he was able.

“Take me back. Please.” He was begging and it just made you feel worse. It was all you wanted to do, but you couldn’t. Not yet. The wounds were still too raw for you to be able to get back with him.

“David,” you breathed, “I can’t.” Your voice was barely a whisper as it came out of your mouth, unwilling to comply with what you needed to say- wanting to say what your heart was commanding.

Your embrace lasted only a while longer until you pulled away to sit on the couch. David sat next to you and buried his face in his hands, still sniffling. “You must hate me,” he finally said.
“David, of course I don’t hate you. I just…need some time. I think we both do.”

He didn’t say anything more as he sat with his head in his hands, absolutely heartbroken.

“Hey,” you say, trying to lighten the mood a bit, “remember at the beginning of summer when we had a minifight?”

He nodded.

“Remember how I said that you didn’t even yell and that you did better than I would’ve in your shoes?”

“Y-yeah?”

“You reacted a lot more like me this time. But, I would’ve sworn a lot more,” you admit and he gave you a single, weak chuckle.

“I guess I did.” He pulled his head out of his hands to give you a small smile before leaning back against the couch. You follow suit and rested your head on his shoulder.

“I really can’t blame you for your reaction, David. It was completely reasonable, given the circumstances. I mean, if someone told me they saw the ghost of their dead friend I wouldn’t have exactly been inclined to believe them, either.”

“I…I guess. I still can’t believe it to be completely honest.”

“Me either.” The two of you sit in silence, thoughtful frowns on your faces. It really was unbelievable what you’d gone through with Jasper, and only the two of you would ever know what happened. “Poor kid had been stuck there for so long. I can’t even imagine.”

“I know.” He seemed uncomfortable with something. “_____, is it selfish to say that I was glad to see him? Just one more time?”

“Maybe a little but I think it’s ok. I’d want to see you, too.” You blushed at the realization of what you’d said and David did too. You looked away from each other. “S-sorry.”

“No d-don’t be.” He sighed and looked towards the ceiling. “Can we at least start over? As friends?”

“Friends?”

“Yeah.”

You pause for a moment before responding. “Yeah.”

Your journal was filled with your tears as you poured your damn heart out into it. Everything that had taken place within the last few days you forced yourself to put down. You were probably going to bury this damn thing in the future- it was either going to tear your heart to pieces when you went to reread it or fall into the hands of someone who didn’t need to be reading it. Either way, you didn’t know why you were even writing in it anymore- all it did was force your pain and anguish back to the surface of your already shredded mental state. Why were you doing this to yourself exactly?

Because it’s an escape you answer yourself, writing through your tears. It’s become the only thing that I can even begin to think of that’s kept me sane this summer. What the fuck. What the fuck.
WHAT THE FUCK. You fill up a solid page and a half with your profane statement, as it was the only thing you really felt in the moment.

Everything had been going just fine. How did it come to this? You reread everything in your journal you’d written this summer thus far, laughing and crying over every mess you’d managed to find yourself in. It really was a mess- this whole summer was a big fucking mess of your physical and emotional endurance, and you were at your absolute wits end about it. Part of you wanted it to never be over while the other was so unbelievably done with everything, all you wanted to do was go cry in a hole for several weeks to try and get over it all.

And of course, your heart was once again not speaking with you for your decision to not take David back. You argued with it saying that it was just going to end up getting hurt again if you jumped back into a relationship with him, but it wouldn't listen. It wanted to get hurt it seemed, and you had to protect it as best you could until you were ready to let it go again.

You were happy to remain friends with David you supposed, even if your heart was doing its best to try and destroy you from the inside out for not jumping at the chance to take him back. It was better than nothing, and maybe with time you would be able to fall in love with him all over again.

Fuck. There’s that word again. Love? What do you have against me? Do you not want me to be happy? Is that it? Am I just your plaything to make miserable at any given point in time? You’re doing a great job if it is. Really phenomenal. Proud of you.

You sigh. What even is love, anyway? It’s a chemical, obviously, but why do we make it? Reproduction? Probably to an extent, but humans can reproduce without the need for love- it’s just instinct. Laziness? Again no because again love isn’t needed to reproduce- pleasure would fill that hole. (Heh, fill that hole.) You chuckle sardonically at your own juvenile humor.

But what is love needed for in its purpose? Does it even have one? I understand maternal and paternal love- it’s there to ensure offspring survive until they’re able to function on their own. But romantic love? If anything, it seems like it would be a hindrance to the human race, with it making you only wanting to mate with one person for extended periods of time and everything. But I guess swans are doing ok in that regard. Maybe I’ll ask one to tell me about love someday.

You close your journal and fall asleep, your dreams taken over by the most beautiful swans you’d ever seen.

You wake up the next morning to find a small yellow rose bud sitting on the nightstand beside you and your heart skips a beat.

“Quiet, you,” you grumble as you take the delicate flower in your hand. It smelled sweet and put a smile on your face when you inhaled its floral scent. For the first time in a long time, you felt ready to face the day, not just struggle through it, barely hanging on until you could quietly release your feelings into your journal.

As you got ready, you had an internal battle that lasted longer than you cared to admit about whether or not to put on the small blue shirt David gave you. On the one hand, he had given it to you before you had started dating, but it had become too much of a symbolic attachment to him for you to see it as a friendly gift. Instead, you put it in your back pocket, not having the will to take it off of your person completely.

David was currently sitting in the mess hall waiting for you to arrive. It was strange to be alone- he’d gotten so used to walking in with you he’d actually held open the door for someone who wasn’t there. He sighed sadly as he looked out the window, lost in thought. He’d had his heart
broken last summer by Bonquisha and it had left him a complete mess for a week, but this? This was even worse because he’d done it to himself and was putting you through what he’d felt last year. David wouldn’t have wished that kind of pain on anyone, but now here he sits- the perpetrator of two broken hearts. He wanted nothing more than to hold you again. To call you his. To wake up and see your peaceful sleeping form beside him, face not yet disturbed by the trials of the day.

But for right now, all he could do was wait and hope that you would be able to heal enough to take him back. You’d told him that you didn’t hate him which gave David some relief, but it didn’t mean that you would want to be his again, and that killed him. But, if waiting was what he had to do to get another chance, then he’d wait his entire life and then some just to be able to hold your hand again.

He loved you, after all.

Chapter End Notes

Well, here we go again I guess.

Campe Diem!
You walked into the mess hall and spotted David in his usual spot. He gave you his signature grin and you returned it with your own small smile. Maybe this wouldn’t be so bad- you knew how to be friends with David, all you had to do was be yourself. But even the thought of being near him made you a bit nervous, regardless if you were hurt or not.

*Back to square one, I guess* you think as you grab your food and take your seat across from him. It was slightly awkward at first, but before long the two of you managed to ease into a conversation. Like normal. But not.

When the campers made their way in, they tentatively got their hopes up as they watched you and David casually chatting away over breakfast- had you gotten back together? You both seemed so normal, talking like nothing had even happened. It got them excited.

“So,” Harrison said, “do you think they got over it?”

“Maybe?” Ered replied, shrugging.

“It seems like they’re back to normal.”

“Yes,” Nurf chimed in, “I think they really managed to work past whatever it was that was troubling them.”

It really was the question on everyone’s mind during breakfast, but no one dared ask you out of fear that it might trigger an unwanted reaction. They knew you’d fought- that was obvious, and they didn’t want to send you into another frenzy. Whatever you had going seemed to be working for you, and they didn’t want to risk ruining it. But it didn’t stop their curiosity.

“Allright campers,” David said, now back to his usual cheery self, “I know thing have been a bit crazy around here for the past couple of days—”

“I think traumatic is a better description,” Neil said.

“- but I think that we’re all ready to get back into our activities! I know I am!” He gave the kids a huge smile and you couldn’t help but do the same.

“Today,” he continued, “we’ll be focusing on extreme sports camp. Hope everyone is ready for hang gliding!”

“Nice,” Ered said.

“Wait what?” you say.
“Yep! We have all the gliders in storage. It’s the perfect day for it! Good wind, bright sun-”

“David isn’t that a bit too extreme?”

The kids suddenly tensed up, and the atmosphere in the room changed from hopeful to anxious. You and David noticed.

“I mean,” David said, concerned, “if you guys don’t want to then-”

“ARE YOU GUYS BACK TOGETHER?” Space kid blurted before throwing his hands over his mouth. You and David looked at each other before you started to snicker.

“Man it never ends with you guys, huh?” you chuckle.

“Soookoo,” Nikki said, “yes?”

“Well, no campers,” David explained, “we’re...starting over.”

They seemed confused so you clarified. “We’ve decided to go back to being friends for now. We’re… not ready to get back in a relationship yet.” It was the lie you kept telling yourself, might as well say it out loud.

“But you’re not fighting anymore?” Neil asked.

“No,” you say, “we’re not fighting anymore.”

There was an audible sigh of relief from the campers before they made their way out to their morning activities. David held the door for you as you left, as small smile crossing both of your faces.

The morning continued on pretty normally. You and Neil successfully made a batch of ferrofluid and had fun changing its shape with magnets for the remainder of your time with him. Nerris gave you quite the challenge in your campaign by throwing a beholder lich at you, but you managed to take it out and she let you keep the eye stalks. You were pumped by your victory all the way to the stage where you and Preston bounced ideas off of each other for the last play of the summer. He wanted it to be a massive production- live fire, lasers, a full orchestra- but you managed to talk him into something more reasonable. You compromised with letting him make Space kid fly over the audience in the finale.

Meanwhile, David oversaw Harrison’s act as he continued to make things reappear. He was getting better and better at his illusions and at bringing things back. Today, he even managed to make a whole watermelon disappear only to pull it out from behind David’s ear.

Nurf and Dolph were similarly improving in their crafts. Dolph had moved from painting people and animals to still lives, and they were really good. David even thought they could get him into an art school if he wanted to. Nurf had done the opposite, switching from carving objects from nature to rough beginnings of people and animals. With Dolph as his prime subject, he’d made a few carvings of the young boy as well as a few dogs.

David let Ered and Nikki mainly take care of themselves and they liked it that way. It allowed Ered to have the freedom she wanted while still being within the confines of a camp while Nikki was able to explore and do as she pleased without someone breathing down her neck telling her, ‘Nikki that’s dangerous,’ or ‘don’t poke the raccoon with a stick.’ David would still tell her these things when he felt it was getting out of hand, but for the most part he trusted them to make the right decisions. For the most part.
Max was waiting on the stage when David arrived, still mad at him for what he’d done, but David
did his best to continue with the lesson anyway. He’d managed to put his guitar back together
properly so that Max could continue with his learning.

“Alright Max,” David said, “We’ve gone over most of the chords this summer so I think you’re
ready to move onto fingerstyle! Aren’t you excited!”

“No,” he said apathetically.

“Oh come on Max! It’s a really beautiful way to play the guitar, and I think you’re going to be
really good at it!” He seemed hopeful.

“No, David. I don’t want to learn how to play your stupid fucking guitar.”

“Max, I know you’re upset at me for what happened, but it’s no reason to want to quit learning!”

Max didn’t say anything else, he just crossed his arms and turned away from David who, in turn,
began to play.

He didn’t sing, he didn’t need to. The song was recognizable without lyrics- The Sound of Silence.
It was beautiful- David was right, fingerstyle was a great way to bring out the most in a guitar. He
didn’t play long, just enough to get Max to look at him again before setting the instrument to his
side.

“Max, music is a wonderful outlet for your emotions. I know it helps me a lot, but I won’t force
you if you don’t want it. But if you do,” he said, handing him the guitar, “try to write something. It
might just make you feel better.”

Max hesitated before gingerly grabbing the guitar, looking at it with a newfound perspective.
David smiled and stood up, ready to walk away.

“Wait where the hell are you going?” Max said.

He looked over his shoulder, slightly smug, “Oh, so now you want me to stay?”

“....fuck you.”

David kept walking away, proud of himself.

That afternoon, you, David, and all the campers took the gliders up to a small runway you’d never
seen before. It was grassy- the thin light green blades lazily swaying back and forth in the minimal
breeze there was. The kids were paired up and strapped in, seemingly really excited to do this.
Well, except Neil but he was with Nikki who didn’t really give him a choice to back out. Max felt
him- he had to glide with Space kid who was nearly flying around already in his excitement.

You wouldn’t lie, you were nervous as well. Not only because you were about to essentially jump
off a fucking cliff, but because you were going to be paired up with David. You knew you had to,
weight distribution and all that, but it didn’t make you feel better.

Ered and Preston went first, the former yelling in excitement, the latter screaming in terror. They
were followed by Nurf and Dolph who actually seemed enthusiastic about the situation. Harrison
and Nerris went next arguing whose magic would save them in the event of a crash- Harrison
arguing levitation and Nerris feather fall. Space kid made an indifferent Max charge forward as
they took to the sky- Max not really caring if this killed him or not, and Nikki followed suit only
Neil did care if this killed him.
Finally, it was yours and David’s turn to go. You braced yourself as you felt David running
towards the ledge, but your eyes refused to remain open the closer you got. You let out a small yelp
and latched onto him once you suddenly ran out of ground and were dangling over nothing.

“It’s ok,” David said gently, “try to stick your legs back.” You did as he said and felt a lot less
resistance to the wind as you flew through the air, but you still had your eyes clenched shut with a
tight grip on David.

“_____? Are you afraid of heights?”

“YES. Especially when falling to my death is an option.” It was harsher than you intended, but
you were terrified.

“Hey, I promise I won’t let anything bad happen. Plus, you’re missing a pretty great view.”

Slowly, you managed to open your eyes and look around you. David was wrong- pretty didn’t cut
it. The view was stunning. Below you was an ocean of dark green pines all clustered together in a
huge blanket that draped itself across the land. The purple mountains in the distance made a bumpy
horizon that the sun was shining over. You saw Sleepy Peak to your right as you glided through the
air- its large presence commanding attention from all who drifted past. You saw your campers all
buzzing below- their orange gliders strikingly different from the green beneath them.

“I’m going to get a bit closer to the campers alright? Hang on!” David tilted the glider slightly and
you felt it begin to drop in the air. At the same time, you felt your stomach launch itself into your
throat as you once again tighten your grip around him.

Soon, you and the campers were all gliding in a V with you and David at the front. You were
following the river back to camp- its blue water reflecting your group off its rushing surface. You’d
relaxed a little bit and were able to actually enjoy the experience once you realized you were
probably not going to die. Your heart was still beating like crazy, but you weren’t sure if it was
because of the adrenaline or because you still had your arms around David. You assumed it was a
little bit of both .

Eventually, everyone managed to land safely in the activity field and you and David helped get
everyone unclipped and back on the ground. Neil dropped to his knees and immediately started
kissing the ground while Space kid and Nikki ran around chanting, “let’s go again! Let’s go again!”
You chucked at their reactions.

Everyone spent the rest of the day discussing what they’d seen while in the air. Most wanted to go
again sometime, but you think you’d had your fill of extreme sports for a while if your heart rate
was anything to go by. You wouldn’t lie though, you did enjoy yourself while you were up there- a
birds eye view like that was hard to come by.

It didn’t hurt to be pressed against David either, a voice told you. You assumed it was your heart
and mentally told it to take a hike.

You and David spent the evening on the couch discussing the afternoon and making a plan for the
rest of the week. It was nice not having as much tension between you as you laughed and joked
with each other. Sure, there was always the underlying tension that you both still had feelings for
each other, but it wasn’t brought up. You were grateful for it.

Retreating to your rooms, you said your goodnights to each other before bed. Things were good,
maybe not perfect, but good.
But, things have a funny way of changing at Camp Campbell.

Chapter End Notes

GOSH SORRY THIS IS SO LATE. I 100% forgot it was Sunday RIP.

Wonder if things are gonna get better.

Or worse?

Campe Diem!
I Won't Give Up.

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by I Won't Give Up by Jason Mraz. Check it out here!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cNhpIzUreI

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Can everyone hear us?” Preston asked into the walkie-talkie.

“Rodger,” Pikeman said.

“Wait who’s Rodger?” Tabii asked.

“Good, so we’re all here,” Preston says.

Your campers were gathered in a single tent illuminated by lantern light as they spoke to the scouts about their predicament with you and David. While your campers were happy with the fact that you’d stayed friends, there was no way they were going to walk out of camp this summer without seeing the two of you back together. Therefore, they were back with the scouts for one more last ditch attempt to make it happen.

“Why are we doing this again?” Max asks, unamused.

“Because Max!” Preston said, exasperated. “We have to make them realize they still want to be together!”

“Yeah because that went real well last year with Bonquisha.”

“Hey,” Sasha said, “that was Tabii’s fault.”

“IF THAT SKANK HADN’T TOUCHED MY MAN-”

“Tabii, please.”

“So,” Pikeman said, “what’s the plan?”

“Well that’s the thing,” Nikki said, “we kinda don’t have one?”

“Yeah,” Neil continued, “that’s why we called you guys. We can’t think of anything.”

“Well, what have you tried so far?” Sasha asked.

The campers gave their accounts of their attempts from earlier in the summer, none being super successful but all still believing that their contribution was the best.

“Well have you tried-” Pikeman got cut off by Max.

“Yes. Christ. If you can think of it, we’ve tried it on either these two or Bonquisha and none of it worked. This is stupid and pointless and I don’t know how no one else can see that. Trust me, I speak from experience.”
“You’re all looking at it from the wrong angle,” Snake said suddenly. “It’s not a them issue, it’s individual. If you want this to work you have to find a way to make each of them get passed whatever is blocking them. Mental hurdles.”

“What are you saying?” Nikki asked.

“I’m saying that you need to find a way to recreate why they got together in the first place. Or at least something similar.”

“So we have to recreate their first date?” Sasha asked.

“Exactly. But you need to do it sooner than later. If we wait too long, we’ll lose the moment.”

“Geez Snake,” Neil said, “you seem to know a lot about relationships.”

“Yeah,” Pikeman agreed, “where’d you even find the time to learn about this?”

“Just…. try to get them alone,” Snake continued, “preferably somewhere they know well.”

“What about the Sleepy Peak Lookout?” Nikki gasped excitedly. “Guys! I’ve got a plan!”

The rest of the week was spent with you and David running the camp like normal during the day while the campers worked out the details of the plan during the night. Space kid collected the flowers and Preston wrote the invitations while Neil and Harrison gathered a blanket and picnic basket. On Friday night, the kids stuffed it full of food they thought was romantic- spaghetti, strawberries, Neil’s chocolate, and a bottle of red wine Max snagged from Spooky Island. Ered had a small speaker that she loaded up with love songs chosen by the Flowerscouts. Nurf and Nikki scoped out the perfect place for the picnic blanket so that you and David would be visible from the trees, and Dolph took the flowers Space kid collected and arranged them into a small bouquet, a boutineer, and a corsage.

Nerris slipped the invitations under yours and David’s door Saturday afternoon while you were out. They were set to meet ten minutes apart so that you and he wouldn’t see each other while you got ready or while you walked across the camp. It was imperative that you didn’t see each other until the time was right. The corsage would be set outside David’s door before he left and the boutineer outside yours once he did.

Upon entering your room later that day, you saw a small brown piece of paper in the floor. Picking it up, you found that it had the following message:

Dearest _____,

I know we have gone through our troubles and wish to make things right. My heart still yearns for yours and if you would be so inclined, I’d like to offer a date to rekindle the flame that has died between us. Meet me at the entrance to the Sleepy Peak lookout at 5:30 if your answer is yes.

Sincerely,

Your Love,

David.

P.S. Let’s make this semi formal?

You stared at the message over and over before you started giggling. Your giggling soon turned to
a laugh which turned into a full on guffaw. You immediately knew there was no way this was from David- this was not only Preston’s handwriting but his prose as well. You were interrupted from your laughter by a small knock on your door. Opening it, you found a rather giggly David standing there.

“Did you get one, too?” he asked as he held up his own invitation.

“Yep.” You return the gesture and the two of you snicker slightly, letting out a small contented sigh near the end. “Do you want to play along?” The words were out of your mouth before you could stop yourself and David blushed.

“A-are you sure? You don’t have to if you don’t-”

“I think it’ll be fun. See you in a bit.” You winked and closed your door leaving David standing there looking like the love-struck fool he was.

As soon as your door was closed, you clutched your smug heart and started to freak out. You’d just agreed to a date. A date. Weren’t you trying to start over with him? Your heart didn’t care, it was reveling in its small victory over your head- the first one it had achieved in a long time. It practically threw you around the room as you got prepared.

You slipped on the one dress you’d brought to camp and looked at yourself in the mirror to make sure it looked alright. It was a simple dress- white with a blue floral pattern that covered it from top to bottom. Wide straps covered your collarbone but left your shoulder bare while the v-neck cut kept things playful but modest. The skirt reached to your knees and flared out when your twirled around making it very fluid when you moved. It hugged your waist nicely giving just the right amount of attention to your curves to make them stand out, but not so much to make them the only thing you noticed.

You decided to leave your hair down- you were so used to having it back that it would be a nice change of pace. As for shoes, you realized that you didn’t have any that really matched the tone, so you just threw on your sneakers- you didn’t think David would mind.

David. Your heart leapt into your throat wanting to cry his name from the rooftops but you swallowed it back down. It didn’t care. It just kept fluttering around in your chest as you finished tying your laces. At the last second, you wrapped the little blue shirt around your neck to complete the look.

Stepping out of your room, you looked down to find a small boutineer at your feet. It was comprised of a single red rosebud surrounded by little blue forget-me-nots wrapped in red ribbon.

_They really went all out on this._

Picking up the small flowers in your hand, you make your way towards the entrance of the hike. You were nervous, but your heart was ecstatic as it pulled you forward. You were doing your best to reason with it, but it did _not_ want to listen to you- it was done listening to you. It was going to do what it wanted today and nothing was going to stop-

_Oh._

Both you and your heart stopped short at the sight of David casually leaning against a tree. He looked happy- a peaceful expression on his face as he gazed towards the tops of the trees while they danced slowly in the wind, and if that wasn’t enough, he was all dressed up. Instead of his usual camp attire, he had a lavender button up with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows underneath
an eggplant purple vest. Black slacks ran down his legs to meet his shiny black dress shoes. The purple color of his shirt complimented his red hair perfectly as well as added a deep contrast to his small yellow neckerchief. He was dashing.

Thump.

You went rigid when he looked at you, folding your hands in front of your body and unable to take a step closer. You were sure you were blushing like crazy which caused him to do the same. The two of you just looked at each other for a moment- taking in the sight of the other in your awestruck states.

Eventually, you closed the gap between the two of you to find yourself standing in front of him, still red in the cheeks.

“H-hey,” you manage to stutter out.

“Hi…” he says back.

“You look...amazing, David.”

He blushes deeper and give you a sheepish smile. “Thanks. You do too.”

You both look away from each other briefly until David speaks up again, “I think I’m supposed to give you this?” He pulled out a small corsage.

“I think so, since I’ve got this.” You show him the small boutineer.

He gently slipped the small bouquet of red roses and forget-me-nots onto your wrist and you pin the rosebud on the lapel of his vest.

“Feels like prom,” you say softly.

“I uh, never went.” He gives you a slightly awkward laugh before offering you his arm. You gladly take it and begin to walk side by side down the path to the lookout.

Nikki watches the two of you from her tree perch. “The birds have flown,” she whispers into the walkie talkie, “prepare the nest. I repeat, the birds have fly prepare the nest.”

“Nikki,” Dolph asks through the speaker, “why are you speaking like that?”

“Because it’s a stakeout!”

Dolph rolls his eyes and lets the others know you and David are on your way. They quickly get to work setting out the red and white blanket along with the small wicker basket. Once everything has been set up, they retreat back into the bushes. Nikki drops from the trees next to them and takes her own position just as you and David reach the end of the line.

You see the small set up at the same time and giggle to each other slightly. It was simple but quite endearing to see. You dare even say romantic.

Thump thump.

You take your seats on each side of the picnic basket and begin to look inside, wondering what the kids could have come up with. You and he laughed at the chocolate and smiled warmly at the strawberries. The spaghetti was a pleasant surprise but neither of you saw the wine coming. You lean in to whisper in his ear, “Five bucks said it was Max.”
“I think we need to sit the kids down and make sure they know the laws about underage drinking and the consequences that come with.”

“You mean like getting blackout drunk at a summer camp?” You smirk and he chuckles.

“Yeah, like that.”

He finds the glasses that were resting inside and pours a little of the wine in each.

“So you like wine now?” you ask him playfully.

“Yes. I’m actually a complete snob. Watch.” He sniffs it and swirls it in the glass, a posh look taking over his face. “Yep,” he says, “it’s wine.”

You snort and laugh giving him a playful punch on the arm causing him to get a huge smile on his face. Making you laugh was one of his favorite things to do.

You eat the strawberries first. They were fresh and sweet- you wondered where the kids had found them as the nearest store was in Sleepy Peak. Maybe the Flowerscouts?

You were brought out of your thoughts as David held up a strawberry to your face. You were about to grab it when you realized he was trying to feed it to you.

\[Thump\ thump\ thump.\]

You blush but slowly take a bite out of the sweet red fruit, your face taking on its color as you did so. David was suddenly self-conscious.

“S-sorry, was that too much?”

“N-no, it’s ok. But now you have to return the favor.” You hold out a strawberry of your own and he takes a bite, bashful.

“I think that’s enough strawberries,” he says with a small smile as he rubs the back of his head.

Preston and Nerris were practically dying over you and David as they struggled to keep each other quiet. Max just rolled his eyes.

You had to eat the spaghetti rather carefully due to your dress, but you managed to finish it with no damage done. Nikki was disappointed to have not seen a spaghetti kiss like from that dog movie, but Neil told her that she should’ve used one plate instead of two.

“I won’t lie,” you say when you’d finished, “I’m impressed by your cooking, Davey.” You give him a wink. He blushes and you begin to backtrack. “Oh that wasn’t a-”

“N-no it’s just…. you haven’t called me Davey in a while. I’ve... missed it.”

\[Thump\ thump\ thump\ thump.\]

Now it was your turn to blush. “I...guess I haven’t, have I?” You manage a weak smile before moving the basket that was between you, replacing it with your own body to sit a little closer to him. There’s a small lull in the conversation as the two of you sit there gazing out at Sleepy Peak. It was calming.

“Ered,” Preston commanded, “cue the music!”
Suddenly from beside you, you heard a faint beat coming from inside the basket. You and David looked at each other and smile before he stands and offers you his hand. Taking it, you feel yourself press against him as you begin to dance slowly.

“*I found myself dreaming*

*In silver and gold*

*Like a scene from a movie*

*That every broken heart knows*

*We were walking on moonlight*

*And you pulled me close*

*Split second and you disappeared*

*And then I was all alone.*

As you continue to dance your way across the lookout, you let yourself completely melt into David’s arms. He tentatively pulls you just a little bit closer to him and you look up-eyes full of pure admiration. He returns the look before he completely wraps his arms around you, embracing your form as you move back and forth in time with the music.

“*In the blink of an eye*

*Just a whisper of smoke*

*You could lose everything*

*The truth is you never know*

*So I’ll kiss you longer, baby*

*Any chance that I get*

*I’ll make the most of the minutes*

*And love with no regrets.*

“So David,” you say as you dance, “I’ve gotta ask. Is this a date?”

He smiles. “Do you want it to be?”

“Yes.”

“Then yes.”

“*I’m gonna love you*

*Like I’m gonna lose you*
I'm gonna hold you
Like I'm saying goodbye
Wherever we're standing
I won't take you for granted
'Cause we'll never know when
When we'll run out of time
So I'm gonna love you
Like I'm gonna lose you."

The song fades out and you just look into each other’s eyes. God you wanted to kiss him. So you did.

You feel like a huge weight had been lifted off your shoulders when you pressed your lips against his, and everything else faded away from you. It was much different from your first kiss which was tender and passionate. This? This was home. David was your home- he’s where your heart was. Where it belonged. And you had a feeling you were where his heart belonged, too.

*I think it’s time* your heart tells you, and for the first time in a long time, you agree with it. Pulling away from his lips, you stretch yourself to his ear and whisper into it.

“I love you, David.”

“I love you too, ____.”

Chapter End Notes

Me screaming: IT’S ABOUT DAMN TIME.

TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH READER DAMN.

The song you and David dance to is "Like I'm gonna lose you" by Megan Trainor ft. John Legend. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DC8FsIdVi9Y

Campe Diem!
You and David hold each other close after finally being able to disclose your feelings to each other. He plants another long, freeing kiss to your lips which you more than happily return. Your fingers find their way into his hair as your lips remain locked together. You never wanted it to end.

Without warning, he suddenly picks you up bridal style and swings you around the lookout, laughing joyously as you let out a surprised yelp. You soon joined in the laughter, wrapping your arms around his neck and pressing your foreheads together.

“Davey,” you chortle, “you gotta put me down!”

“Nope! Sorry, you’re mine and I’m never letting go.”

He kisses you again and you smile into it, palming his face in your hand.

“I love you,” he says as he pulls away.

“I love you too, you dork.”

He laughs again before planting small, quick kisses all over your face.

“Davey!” You giggle as his lips cover every part of your face. “The kids are still watching!”

“No we’re not!” Space kid yells from the trees behind you.

“SPACE KID!” everyone yells, but you and David just chuckle.

“You guys can come out,” you say. “We’ve known the whole time.”

Slowly, your campers begin to make their way out of the trees and bushes, looking a bit nervous.

“Relax, guys,” you tell them, “you’re not in trouble. I don’t think we can even be mad at you this time.”

“I think we should actually be thanking you,” David said. “Without this whole little set-up, well, who knows?”

“But,” Dolph begins, “How did you figure it out?”

“Well for starters,” you tell them, “maybe don’t have the kid who wrote a memoir write the invitations.”

“Preston!” they yell.
“Hey!” he defends. “It’s not my fault no one else here understands the fine art of poetry!”

“So you’re not mad?” Space kid asks.

“No,” David said, “We’re not mad. Plus,” he adds, “it wouldn’t have really been a date without you all spying on us. Now would it?”

The kids chuckle awkwardly and try not to meet your eyes.

“Alright kids. This was all good fun but ten’s a biiiiiit of a crowd,” David says.

“Yeah so scram or else you’ll be reciting the fanfiction this time,” you joke.

The kids run off down the path to camp, laughing and cheering triumphantly as they did so. Max hesitates for a moment, slightly concerned.

“Are you sure you’re back together?” he asks.

You give David a gentle look and he sets you back on your feet, allowing you to walk over to Max. Kneeling down to his level, you place a gentle hand on his shoulder, “We’re sure, Max.” You pull him into a hug and feel him slowly return the sentiment before pulling away.

“Good, you’re worse apart somehow than you are together. Like I said, love is stupid and you don’t find people stupider than the two of you.”

“Max,” David scolds slightly, “we’ve been over this. Love isn’t dumb.”

“Oh no, love is completely fucking dumb,” you say, and David and Max look at you, surprised.

“What?” They ask in unison.

“Yeah no, love is stupid and always leads to pain on way or another, but,” you look at Max, “maybe that’s ok? Maybe love exists to remind us that we’re human. To remind us that there’s always going to be bad with the good. That nothing is perfect. But it doesn’t have to be perfect. Love can be whatever it wants- stupid, beautiful, sincere, painful, but in the end it’s something that we can all relate to in one way or another. Maybe love just is.”

“Or maybe you’re just blowing smoke out of your ass,” Max smirks and you laugh, ruffling his hair.

“Maybe.” You stand up and make your way back to David who takes your hand in his while you lean your head on his shoulder. “What do you think, Max?”

“I think you two are disgusting and I’m going back to camp before I vomit.” He turns to walk down the path and you watch him go, a thoughtful smile on your face. David puts his arm around your shoulder and gives you a kiss on the cheek, causing you to giggle once again.

You stand on the ledge arms wrapped around each other as the sky changed into its familiar orange hue, signaling the end of another day at camp. You loved it here- everything about it made you happy, even the stuff that was hard to look back on. You think you finally understood why David loved it here so much. It wasn’t the area or the experiences or even the campers. No, he’d told you that first night without even realizing it- it was the heart that made the place so great. Camp Campbell didn’t need anything fancy or modern to make it enjoyable, it just needed the spirit of the campers who were willing to put forth the effort to make it a place where they wanted to be. It just needed a little love, and you’d certainly found it here.
You’d found it not only in David, but in the campers as well. You loved them for the fact that they were so different in their own unique ways. You loved them because of how passionate they were about their activities. You loved them for all their flaws and victories- what made them truly your campers.

You found love within yourself, too. Camp Campbell had changed your entire perspective on life from the moment you stepped out of the car to now as you watched the light of day begin to fade away. You’d been through more than you would have ever realized- more than you had even imagined would happen and yet, despite everything, you were still standing strong.

Sighing, you lean into David as the sun sets in front of you casting the silhouette of your shadows on the ground, growing ever longer with each passing minute.

“It’s getting late,” he says, breaking the silence, “we should head back.”

“Just a bit longer?” you ask softly. “Please?”

He looks at you as you gaze over the area and falls for you all over again. It’s the little moments like this that David lived for- ones he hopes he’ll get to have with you forever.

“Oh,” he says gently, “just a little longer.”

The comfortable silence returns as he holds you close, pressing your head gently to his chest. You turn to complete putty at his gentle touch and let yourself melt into him, content. Safe. Warm.

*Love.* You don’t think you’ll ever really understand it, but you no longer feel like you need to. It didn’t need to be understood, it just needed to be felt and enjoyed by those lucky enough to experience it, and you were happy to comply.

A small wind blew through the area making you shiver in low light of dusk. David tightens his grip slightly before pulling away to look you in the eyes.

“Ready?” he asks.

“I think so.” You smile sheepishly as you say it and the next thing you know, you’re in his arms again as he carries you down the worn forest path.

Chapter End Notes

This was one of my favorite chapters to write oh my gosh.

Campe Diem!
You woke up the next morning wrapped in David`s arms, warm and safe. Fluttering your eyes open gently, you found that David was already awake, softly playing with your hair as he watched you sleep.

“Good morning,” he says quietly before kissing the top of your head.

“Good morning.” You move closer to him, enjoying the warmth he radiates both physically and through his tender smiles. “Do we have to get up?”

He chuckles at your reluctance of the morning, “Yes, ______, we have to get up. We have the mixer today, remember?”

You pout and cover your head with blankets. “Noooooo. I don’t wanna.”

David rolls his eyes and pulls the blanket back, revealing your still sleepy face doing its best to retreat into the pillows. He giggles at you.

“Whatchu laughin at?”

“You. You’re cute, you know that?”

You blush and try to bury yourself deeper into the pillows, but David cups your cheek and kisses you before you get too far.

“Come on,” he says. “Time to get up.”

“No.”

“Then you leave me no choice.” David gets out of the bed and rips the covers off of you, leaving you vulnerable to the cold air that had crept its way into the room.

“FUUUUUUUCK YOOOOOOOU,” you yell as you’re jolted out of bed by the cold assaulting every nerve in your body. “AREN’T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE THE NICE ONE?”

“I am! Now you are awake and ready to start the day!” He places his hands on his hips and gives you his usual toothy grin. “And it didn’t even take coffee.”

“If you ever do that again, I’m kicking your ass.” You were only half joking, but David laughs at your threat.

“We have a lot to do today! It’s always better to get started early on a task so that you can finish it faster! That way, you have all day to play!”
“Or, and hear me out on this, you procrastinate until the last minute and get everything done at once.” You’d formed some bad habits in your college years, but hey- it’s worked thus far.

David rolls his eyes good-naturedly before perking back up, “Camp Campbell waits for no man! Or woman! Or person! So let’s go!” He picks you up under one arm and carries you to your room, kicking the door open dramatically. The ridiculousness of the situation causes you to laugh.

“Davey put me down!”

“Only if you promise to get ready.”

“On second thought, no.”

He laughs and sets you on your feet before making his way to the door. “I’ll meet you in the common room.”

The morning was pleasant. You and David walked to the mess hall together hand in hand, stronger than ever. The kid’s spirits had been lifted dramatically, though they were a bit smug about getting the two of you back together. Preston had given you the second half of his memoir, claiming that it was an updated version. You didn’t have the heart to tell him you hadn’t even read through the first one. Things seemed to be back to normal, all until Nurf brought up the inevitable.

“So,” he said, “now that that’s all behind us, have we figured out a way to save camp yet? Because if not I’m going to be highly disappointed.”

Fuck. In the midst of everything else that had been happening, you’d completely forgotten that the camp was going to shut down. Looking at the calendar, you saw that it was already the end of July—camp would be over in just a few weeks. David seemed to realize it at the same time you did, nearly choking on his breakfast at the mention of your forgotten predicament. The kids looked to you and he expectantly.

“W-well you see kids,” he started, “we uh,” he looked to you for help, but you didn’t know what to say either. He sighed, defeated. “No. We haven’t.”

“So the camp is shutting down?” Nikki asked, heartbroken.

You and David look at each other. “If we don’t find a way to get the cash or prove that we can use the land then better than our competitors then, yes. It just might.”

There was a general notion of distress among the campers as they processed the news.

“But who’s going to help me level up?” Nerris said.

“Or discuss the world of theater at a level almost at my own!” Preston cried.

“Yeah! Who’s going to make me realize my actions are destructive?” Nurf said, slamming his hand on the table.

The campers all continued voicing their concerns about why they were worried about the camp closing. You felt terrible—these kids had come so far for so long! There had to be a way to save the camp.

“What if we had a fundraiser?” you ask.

You watch as the Quartermaster stuck his head out the serving window and glared at David, slowly
moving his hook across his neck menacingly.

“_____,” David says, his words quick and panicky, “you’ve got a beautiful mind but that’s a really, really bad idea.” The Quartermaster slowly pulls his head back in the window, still squinting in David’s direction.

**What the hell was that all about?**

“So,” Neil asks, “what you’re saying is is that we have no money, no way to raise it, and our only chance at keeping this place is proving that we can use it the best?”

“I’m afraid so,” you say.

“Who even are our competitors?” Harrison ponders.

“We did some research,” David said, “and it looks like we’ll be up against a lot of big name corporations who want to tear the place down and set up shop. And, if they get what they want then…” he trailed off.

“Welp,” Max said, “we’re boned.”

The rest of the crew seemed to share in his sentiment as their downcast faces looked towards the floor.

“Oh come on now, campers!” David said, trying to lighten the mood, “I know things look rough right now but let’s not let it get to us. In fact, I think we should all really double down on our activities for these next few weeks to show those guys why Camp Campbell is the best!”

“Yeah,” you say, “I’ll bet once they see how hard you all work, there’s no way that they’ll take this place away!”

The kids spirits seemed to lift just a little at you words, weak but hopeful smiles returning to their faces.

“We can talk about it more when the scouts get here,” David said, “but for now-”

“The scouts aren’t coming tonight,” Ered said.

“-what?”

“Yeah, said something about being scarred for life or whatever?” She shrugged. “Either way, they’re not coming.”

“...oh.”

The atmosphere was down again.

“W-well,” you say, trying to salvage the mood, “why don’t we have a family night instead?”

“Family night?” Nurf asks.

“But we’re not even related,” Nikki said.

“So what?” you say. “Family doesn’t have to be who you’re related to. It can be friends, pets, blood relations- anyone.”
“Actually,” Neil said, “by definition, family is who you’re descended from so it kinda is who you’re related to.”

You sigh. “But why does it have to be? I consider you guys to be a family- does it really matter all that much if we’re not related?”

“But I hate most of these people,” Max says.

“Well I think it’s a great idea,” David says. “Tonight will be a family night! Meet in here at six for fun, games, food and a family movie!”

The kids groaned unenthusiastically as they made their way to the activity fields. You give David a thankful smile as you walk out the door.

Regardless of their attitudes about the family night, the kids were really getting after their activities today. Neil managed to construct the beginning of a 100% solar powered car model- you let him handle the welding. Nerris ditched the DnD session to really double down on your swordsmanship, coming at you with all she had. Preston wrote and rewrote and rewrote parts of his script so that it would be perfect and you had to admit, by the third time around, it was sounding like a real production.

Harrison was making larger objects disappear and reappear, managing to even make a bewildered Dolph appear out of thin air. Dolph was working on a more abstract piece of art, but was disrupted by Harrison’s act. Nurf was starting to carve faces onto the models of people he would make out of wood. He also was able to create more complex metal castings moving from trees to things like buildings and animals. Ered worked on doing a full 1080 off her half pipe while Nikki was flying over camp with Timothy looking for wolves to talk with. Space kid was working on fixing the “challenger II”- he claimed that it would be ready to fly by the end of summer. And Max? Max was writing his song.

That afternoon was dedicated to dance camp in which you and David really pushed the kids (but not too far at David’s request) on coming up with their own routines. You’d taught them enough to where you think they could do it, but they seemed uncertain. Unconfident.

“Aww come on guys, we know you can do it!” David says, trying to encourage them.

“Maybe if the music didn’t suck so much,” Max said. “God what even is this shit?” You noticed he had grabbed your phone. “Trash. Trash. Absolute garbage. Oh my God you like them?” You snatched it away from him.

“Not cool, Max.”

“He does have a point, though,” Dolph said. “How are ve supposed to create when ve’re subjected to tastes zat are not ours?”

Well, they had you there.

“Alright, fine,” you relent, “you can use your phones.” The immediately pulled them out and started scrolling.

“BUT ONLY FOR MUSIC!” David added hastily. They rolled their eyes and soon the area was filled with their different tastes in music. They started to relax a little bit more with every step they added into their dances and after a while, each team had the beginnings of a short routine. You and David couldn’t be more proud of them and decided to make new routine of your own alongside them.
After the session was over, you and David got to work on setting up the mess hall for the family night. You did your best to make it as cozy as possible by moving the tables together into one large square reminiscent of Thanksgiving. In one corner of the room there were different board games: Candyland, Chess, Checkers, Boggle, Scrabble, and Life to name a few. David had wanted to put out Monopoly, but fearing for the safety of the camp you gently let him know that it probably wasn’t the best idea. On the wall opposite your table, you’d set up the projector that Neil had made and covered the area in as many spare pillows and blankets as you could find. You had Spirited Away cued up on your phone for after dinner. David had asked where you’d bought it from and you didn’t have the heart to tell him that you didn’t.

“A... friend is lending it to me,” you say, looking around the room.

“What?” he says, “I didn’t even know you could send movies like that! I’ll have to send Gwen some in the future.” David was genuinely excited to send her movies.

The Quartermaster had disappeared from the camp after lunch, so you and David took to the kitchen in order to make dinner. You ended up with turkey, mashed potatoes, carrots, peas, cranberry sauce (David was adamant about having it), rolls, and pie for dessert. You were proud of yourselves- it wasn’t every day you made a feast for a summer camp.

“Hey,” David said as he began to set the table, “I just realized something.”

“Oh?” Aw fuck he knows about the movies doesn’t he.

“This is the first big meal we’ve cooked together as a couple! I think that calls for a picture!” He took out his phone and threw his arm around your shoulder. “Say cheese!” He flashed his grin and you managed a small smile, too.

“One more?” you ask.

He gasps excitedly and lines the shot up again. “Say cheese! Again!” You plant a quick kiss on his cheek right as he snaps the picture, causing a small blush to find its way across his face. You grab his phone to look at it: your eyes were closed as your lips were pressed against his cheek in a small smile. It had caught David off guard, causing his mouth to open and eyes widen slightly in surprise, his face just the slightest bit red. You giggled and booped his nose, “Gotcha.”

His face turned a bit pink as he rolled his eyes, smiling. “Let’s finish setting up.”

When they arrived, the kids were still highly skeptical about the whole idea of “family night,” and didn’t try to hide their apathetic natures. It discouraged you a bit, but David did his best to assure you that they’d warm up to the idea eventually. You and he made your back into the kitchen as the kids congregated near the board games unenthusiastically.

“Alright, this sucks already,” Max said. “Harrison, you got any cards?”

“Only my trick deck,” he says.

“Can it be used for poker?”

“I mean, I guess but-”

Max snatched the cards out of his hands, “Who wants to be dealt in? This is gonna be a long night.”

While you and David were in the kitchen adding the last touches to dinner, you’d noticed that the campers had gone quiet. Too quiet. Poking your head out of the serving window, you find that they
were all gathered around the table, cards in hand. You were suspicious.

“Everything alright?” David asks. “You’ve got that look on your face.”

“What look?”

“The ‘I’m thinking something is up but don’t know what it is’ look.”

“Well, I don’t think they’re up to anything bad, but it’s so quiet. Do you mind taking a look?”

David exits the kitchen to find all the campers around the table. A few turn to look at him unenthusiastically before returning to their cards. “Heya campers! Whatcha playing? Go fish? Crazy eights?”

“No, David,” Max groaned. “We’re not playing any of your shitty card games.”

“Well then,” he says quizzically as he makes his way to the table, “what are you playing?” He answers his own question as he glances down at the table- each of the kids having a different amount of cash in front of them. “Poker!? You kids can’t be gambling! Everyone return whatever money you took from the others this instant!”

The kids all groan before doing as their told, grumbling as they hand each other what little cash they had brought to camp. David wasn’t angry but confused as to why they were so resistant to the idea of a family night, until he checked his watch. “Oh my gosh! No wonder you guys are grumpy, dinner is super late! Don’t worry kiddos, I’m on the case.”

“And I’m way ahead of you,” you say as you carry the turkey out of the kitchen. The campers eyes widen and you hear a collective grumble from their stomachs as you set it on the table in front of them. “Now,” you say, “who wants to help me bring out the rest?” You watch as their faces light up while they file into the kitchen, eager to see what else was for dinner.

One by one, the kids helped carry out the food and took their seats at the table while they served themselves. You and David took your own spots next to each other and helped pass it all around - maybe this would turn out alright. The kids lightened up little by little as they ate, filling the room with slight laughter and idle chit chat that soon turned into full blown conversations. You smiled as you watched them converse before you found yourself in on the action, talking and laughing with your campers as the food continued to disappear.

Soon, everyone had stuffed themselves and you decided it was time for the movie. You all lazily made your way over to the small pillowy nest you had constructed and wrapped yourselves in it, anxious for the movie to start. David made a few bowls of popcorn and set them in front of the kids. Dolph, Preston, and Space kid were in the front, laying on their stomachs wide-eyed and ready for the movie to begin. They were the most excited for the film- Dolph for the artstyle, Preston for the direction and story-telling, and Space kid because of the pretty colors. The rest of your campers were also excited for the movie as most had never seen it before. You were in the back with David snuggled under a single yellow blanket as it began.

About halfway through the film, you heard the door of the mess hall open and found that the Quartermaster had entered the building.

“Oh hey QM,” you say softly as to not distract the others.

“What all this?”

“Just a little family night,” David says, “care to join us?”
The Quartermaster looks at the screen and squints at Yubaba. “So that’s where you’ve been hiding,” he says as he shakes his hook slightly. He looks back to you, unperturbed. “Naw, I got something I gotta take care of.” He walks off, grumbling about a tontine.

“Oh, there’s leftovers in the fridge!” you call out as he leaves, earning you a resounding ‘shhh’ from your campers.

Sometime later, you feel David gently nudging your shoulder, “_____. Hey,” he whispered, “the movie is over.”

You slowly open your eyes to find the credits rolling and the music softly playing as the campers slept gently in the glow of the projector. They had all curled up in the nest of pillows and blankets during the movie, comfortably dreaming away its ending. Some were snoring softly- you saw Dolph sucking his thumb- and the reality of the situation really hit you. Despite everything, your campers were still just kids. You’d told them at the beginning of the summer that it was unfair to see them as just kids, but looking out over their peaceful forms, that’s what they were- kids. Kids that had all gone through hell and back in one way or another this summer, but who managed to pull through it all. They were your kids- David’s too, and you were damned if you were about to let any of them go.

“We have to save this place, David,” you find yourself saying. He jumped at the sudden seriousness in your voice.

“I know, but how?”

“I’m not sure yet, but these kids,” you whisper as you gesture to them, “they need this place.”

“I know.” He wraps his arm around you and pulls you closer as you lean your head on his shoulder.

“We’ll figure it out. I’m sure.”

“I hope so.”

The room was silent as you and he sat watching the campers forms slowly rise and fall with their breathing. You had no idea how you were going to manage to save this place, but you knew you had to, for their sake.

“We should get them to bed,” David whispered after some time.

“They’re already in bed, let’s just let them sleep here, tonight. Us too- I don’t want to leave them.”

“Isn’t that a bit...unorthodox?” David asks, slightly nervous.

“Isn’t this camp a bit unorthodox?” you ask, your smile making itself known in your voice.

David nuzzles his nose into your cheek, “I guess so.” He releases you momentarily as he lays on his back, hands laced behind his head as a makeshift pillow. You lay with him, resting your head in the crook of his shoulder and smile as he places one of his arms around you. It wasn’t long until you found yourself drifting to sleep once again.

Chapter End Notes

Here have a long as fuck chapter. How are they gonna save the camp this time around?
Campe Diem!
“...needs more here.....”

“...no.....let me.....”

“....David’s..........nice.......”

“.....No Max..........original?”

_What?_ You heard the voices of the kids near you as you began to wake up. Something smelled funny in a familiar way.

“Shh- she’s waking up.”

You open your eyes to find Max standing over you with a wicked smile and a sharpie in his hand. Your eyes went wide as you shot up from your place on the floor- last night slowly coming back to you. You looked to David whose face had been completely covered in drawings from the black marker. Stensled on glasses, ‘Nikki waz here’, some swirling designs, the word ‘loser’ on his forehead, and of course a penis pointing toward his open mouth.

The kids were doing their best not to laugh at you as you looked him over, unaware that your face had some new decorations as well. You rubbed your eyes and came back with two dark black smudges on your hands. The campers lost it.

“Oh haha, very funny,” you say, irritated. “You’re all on clean up duty for the day. You can start with the mess hall.”

They didn’t seem to mind much as they laughed and high-fived their way into the kitchen for cleaning supplies. You jostled David. “Alright, time to get up. We’ve been pranked.”

He moves his head side to side and squints before opening his eyes. When his face falls on yours, he stops and puts a hand to his mouth, stifling a laugh. You roll your eyes. “How many dicks are there?”

“Just one.”

“Good,” you say, “then we match.” You stand up and crack your back before heading to the counselors cabin, David not far behind.

You finally manage to catch a glimpse of yourself once you reach the bathroom. You had sharpie all over your eyes making you look like a freaking panda. ‘Tweedle-dumbass’ was written across your forehead while ‘pussies 4 life’ was on your cheek. You also had a penis near your mouth, on the opposite side of David’s. You huff and reach into the medicine cabinet for the rubbing alcohol.
“Aww come on, _____,” David says as he finds his way in, “it’s kind of funny, profane drawings aside.”

“Oh it’s hilarious,” you admit, “but it sucks to get off. I would’ve preferred shaving cream, personally.”

It takes a solid half hour to get all the ink off of your face, and even so your eyes looked like you’d been in a bar fight and lost. You sigh, knowing that’s as good as it was going to get. You make your way back to the mess hall and find that the kids had managed to pick up decently. The blankets had been folded and stacked in the corner along with the ignored board games, and the projector had been taken down. The tables had been replaced to their original positions and everyone was eating leftovers for breakfast. You smile, even if you were irritated with them, you knew they cared at least a little bit about this place.

“Mail’s here,” the Quartermaster said as he made his way into the building. He went around handing letters and packages out to all the kids and giving you and David the bills for the camp. It was pretty typical- water, electricity, sewage, but one caught your eye. It was from the Millers and seemed rather important.

“Hey David, what’s this?” You hand him the envelope and he gets a quizzical look on his face.

“I’m not sure. Last time we got one of those, the camp was closing due to lack of funding.” Opening it, David quickly scanned the letter and a hopeful expression took over his face. “_____, look at this! It’s good news!” You take the letter back and begin to read.

_Dear Campbell Counselors,_

_We regret to inform you that due to the lack of funds pertaining to the the summer camp ‘Camp Campbell,’ it will be closing at the end of the summer and auctioned off on August 13th. However, due to the fact that you seem to have greatly invested yourselves and the children in the camp, Camp Campbell will be given the chance to prove why its doors should remain open a week before the auction is to happen._

_Agent Miller and Agent Miller._

“August thirteenth?” You look to the calendar. The auction was only two weeks away. “David that means we have until Saturday to get this place ready!”

“Don’t worry co-counselor,” he says enthusiastically, “I’m sure everyone here is going to work extra hard in the next week to make sure that this place stays ours. We’ll show everyone just how great this place really is!”

You were uneasy. David had told you at the beginning of the summer that not everyone sees the beauty in Camp Campbell and it troubled you to think that people who didn’t understand would be coming to tear it down. You couldn’t even begin to think how David felt, but knowing him, he was optimistic about everything on the inside and out. You were so lost in your own thoughts that you didn’t feel him slide his hand over yours until he spoke again.

“It’s going to be alright. I know it.” He gives your hand a gentle squeeze before returning it to his side.

Everyone finished breakfast and headed out to their morning activities. You still were unable to shake your apprehension about the week ahead- these kids were going to do their best no doubt about it, but how would the outside world react? Would they even care about the place and how
much the people here cared for it? Or would they just think it to be another thorn in their side for when they wanted to move forward?

“_____. _____!” Neil’s voice dragged you back to the situation at hand. “We can’t get distracted here! Hand me that solar panel.”

“Sorry Neil, here.” You hand him the part and watch as he welds it to the frame of the car.

“I think that’s all I can do for now. We’ll need Ered to help with the engine, do you mind going to get her?”

“Sure thing!” You head off in the direction of Ered’s halfpipe, but get distracted by the sound of a large truck backing up near the front of camp. Curious, you make your way over to the mess hall to find the Quartermaster arguing with someone in a purple suit and yellow undershirt while a truck was slowly backing up into camp.

“Hey!” you call out as you jog over. “What’s going on?”

They don’t hear you and continue to bicker. The truck keeps backing up, getting closer to the flagpole.

“Wait!” you cry.

The truck hits the pole and knocks it slightly off its axis.

“Stop!” Finally, the truck drives halts the vehicle and the two arguing men turn to look at you as you make your way over. You look at the damage to the pole- it seemed relatively ok, just needed to be realigned.

“You.” The Quartermaster points at you. “Comeer and tell this no good sonofabitch that we ain’t leavin no way no how.”

“Please,” the man in the suit says, “in a few weeks you’ll all be gone and we’ll be here to clean up this mess.”

“I’ll turn you into a mess you-”

“Woah, QM,” you intervene, “easy.”

“And who,” the man in the suit asks, “are you?”

“I’m ____. What’s going on? Who are you?”

“Allow me to introduce myself.” He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a tan, sleek, glossy business card. “I’m Ron Dundee, head of Camp Corp.”

“Wait, the Camp Corp?” You were floored- David and Gwen had almost lost the camp to them last summer. What could he possibly be doing here now? Didn’t he know that it wasn’t exactly for sale?

“The very same.” Ron stands up tall and looks at his polished nails. His brown hair had been slicked back with a generous amount of hair gel and he smelled like expensive cologne. It made your nose crinkle a bit. “Now _____, was it? I’m sure you’re aware that this camp is going under at the end of the summer and I’m here to discuss a fair price for the land with the current caretaker. Can you point me in his direction?”
“Woah hang on a second. The land is going to be auctioned off- you’re not the only one after it.”

“Yes but, I think that we can come to an agreement beforehand to ensure that it, shall we say, falls into the right hands?”

“I’d argue that it’s already in the right hands.”

His smile twitches slightly, but is regained in an instant. “You can’t possibly believe that this place is actually worth something. Look at you! You seem like a smart person, so how about you help me help you, eh?”

You give him a single, dark chuckle. “Buddy, you’ve got no idea how priceless this place is.”

“_____!” Neil had wandered over looking for you, “I thought you were getting- wait, what’s going on?”

Ron’s eyes glance at Neil as he makes his way over and a small smirk takes over his face. “Oh, I get it. You’re in it for the kids! Precious.” He knelt down to Neil’s level, “And who is this?”

“Oh, I’m Neil. Who are you?” Neil points at him slightly, confused and a bit uncomfortable. Ron hands Neil his card and stands up again, waiting for the reaction. “Hang on a sec. Didn’t Camp Corp try to buy this place last year?”

“We did buy it, thank you very much. But because of a few certain campers, we had to sign the camp over. Now run along kid, the adults have business to discus.” He waved his hand dismissively, irking you.

“Neil,” you say, “I need you to run and grab David for me ok? It’s important.”

“No shit. This is bigger than I thought.” He ran off toward the amphitheater to find David.

“David?” Ron asks.

“Idjit,” the QM chimes in.

You sigh. “David’s the head caretaker here. He and I have been running the place this summer.”

“Excellent! Now we’re getting somewhere.”

Ron continues to talk about his ideas for the land like the look on your face didn’t tell him enough. There was absolutely no way you were going to give this place up- not after all you’d been through so far to keep it. Kidnapped, cheated, beaten, David hospitalized, not to mention all the other traumatic shit you’d experienced with Jasper and David. This guy really had no idea what he was dealing with.

“_____?” David’s voice broke your attention from Ron as you turned toward him. He was confused. “What’s going on?”

“Ah!” Ron said, “You must be David! I’m Ron Dundeer, new head of Camp Corp. The Campwells retired after last year and have entrusted me with the company. Nice to meet you.” He held out his hand which David accepted, a friendly smile on his face.

“It’s nice to meet you Mr. Dundeer. What brings you to Camp?”

“I’m glad you asked, David.” He pulled out a pack of cigarettes and offered one to David. “Care for a smoke?”
“Uh n-no thanks. I don’t smoke.”

Ron lights his and takes a drag before continuing. “You see, David, I’m here to help me envision my future for this place. It really is a great location you know. Perfect for my new headquarters!”

“Headquarters?” you ask.

“Of course! We take down the old buildings, cut away a few of the trees, get some new plumbing-it’ll be fantastic. Much better than the whole ‘camping’ aesthetic you have here” He gestures to the grounds with the cigarette. “It’s quite cute, but not exactly...modern.”

“Now hold on a second,” David said. “You don’t have the land yet! The auction isn’t for another few weeks!”

“I know I know but I was hoping we could come to a little arrangement beforehand. You know, I get the land, you fill your pockets.”

“You’re...bribing us?” you ask.

“Oh of course not! I’m merely asking to purchase the land before the auction begins. I give you the money and you outbid the competition for me. It’s a win-win situation! I’ll even throw in something for your troubles say, half a million dollars?”

You and David choked, mouths agape.

“W-would you excuse us for a moment?” David grabs your hand and drags you behind the mess hall to speak in private. “Oh my God.”

“David that’s a lot of money.”

“I know.”

“What are we gonna do?”

“We can’t accept it. I’d feel-”

“Dirty,” you finish and he nods.

The two of you wrack your brains trying to find a way out of the situation, but nothing really came to you. The only thing you knew is that you were going to have to turn the guy down.

“But they almost had it last year, David. He’s not going to let this go easily.”

“I know but we can’t take the money. The kids would be devastated and I don’t think I could forgive myself.”

You take a deep breath. “I couldn’t either, but we’re going to have to keep our guard up. Hewill come after this place again, you know that right? I need you to be strong with me.”

“I will. I promise.” He takes your hand and gives it a quick squeeze. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

You steady yourselves and make your way back to where Ron was waiting. He seemed to be indifferent to the Quartermaster’s glare.
“Welcome back!” he says. “Have you made your decision?”

“Y-yes,” David begins nervously. “I’m afraid we won’t be able to accept your offer.”

“Playing hardball, eh?” Ron smirks. “I can respect that. Fine, a full million for the land.”

“I don’t think you quite understand,” you continue. “We’re not willing to sell out for this place. It means too much to us and the kids.”

Ron looks between you and David for a moment before something clicks. He snaps his fingers and points at David, “I figured it out! You’re that homeless twink I saw out my window last year! No wonder you looked so familiar!”

“E-excuse me?” David stutters.

“Listen, you two are together, right?” He waves his cigarette between the two of you, the acrid scent wafting and polluting the crisp oxygen of the camp.

“Well, yes,” David begins, but-”

“So this place is your little romantic summer escape, then? I’m more of a Paris kinda guy but hey, to each their own.”

“No! It’s nothing like that!” David explains, flustered. “We work here!”

“But what if you didn’t have to? That money could do a lot of good for you two. A house, nice cars, maybe a honeymoon somewhere nice? Eh?” He winked and nudged David in the side.

Both of you blushed at that, but you hardened your gaze unwilling to let him talk you into it.

“Mr. Dundeer, I’m sorry but that won’t happen-” David says.

“What, cold feet? I understand how it is.”

David sighs, “Mr. Dundeer, we are not willing to make a deal. I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

His smile drops completely, “You’re serious? You would rather have the auction and lose the place for nothing rather than take a million dollars and live in luxury?”

“We’re not going to lose this place,” you counter, “because the auction isn’t even going to happen. Us and the kids are going to show everyone how great Camp Campbell is. We still have our chance to prove why we should and will keep this place out of the hands of people like you.” You scowl at him but he just rolls his eyes.

“Of course you will.” You watch as he gets in the passenger side of the large truck. As they begin to leave, they once again back into the flagpole only this time they take it out completely. You and David wince as it crashes to the ground, snapping in half.

Chapter End Notes

OOF
Ron's a dick.

Campe Diem!
Do You Remember

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by "Do You Remember" by Jack Johnson. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HEGXRqaod8

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Not long after the dust had settled from the flagpole, you found your campers gathered behind you.

“H-hey guys!” you say as normally as possible, “What’s everyone doing here?”

“We heard a big crash,” Nerris said, “and wanted to see what happened.”

“Yeah!” Nikki said, “But I was hoping for something cooler. Like a monster truck. Or Aliens!”

“Sorry to disappoint, Nikki, but it was just the flagpole getting knocked over,” you explained.

“Knocked over?” Preston questioned. “This was intentional?”

“I’m sure it was just an accident,” David said cheerfully. “These things happen sometimes.”

You looked sadly at the broken flagpole next to you. It was such a staple of the camp and you’d unconsciously grown rather fond of it, despite having been tied to it and held hostage in the beginning of summer. Now as it sits on the ground cracked in half, you can’t help but mirror its despondent appearance.

Something was glinting in the sunlight near the woodpile. Curious, you picked it up and found a brass model of Cameron Campbell’s head. Did it fall off the flagpole?

“Oh no,” David said sadly. “The figurehead! That’s been there since I was a camper.” He took it in his hands and looked at it sadly- an end of an era it seems.

“I can fix it,” Nurf offered. “It’s really not that hard.”

“You’d do that?” David asked.

“Uh, duh. It would be the way for me to show off my blacksmith skills at the end of the week. Let me see that.” David handed Nurf the small head. “Yeah, not an issue. This is a simple fix. I can have it done by Friday.”

“Oh thank you, Nurf!” David dropped to his knees and wrapped Nurf in a hug who rolled his eyes and pushed him away.

“Whatsoever. And maybe ask for my consent to hug next time? Man it’s like you don’t even think.”

“Oh, sorry Nurf.”

Nurf hucked the small head at David, hitting him in the stomach. Hard.

“OOPS, NICE CATCH.” Nurf snickered before walking in the direction of science camp.
“I think,” David wheezed while you helped steady him, “you should all head back to your stations for the day.”

Hours later, you were pacing the floor of the counselors cabin as David sat on the couch watching you. The whole interaction with Ron that morning had left you with a bad taste in your mouth and you weren’t able to shake your anxiety. It was like you were permanently standing on the edge of a cliff- the knot in your stomach just would not let go.

“Alright,” David said gently, “that’s enough. Come here.” He softly grabbed your arm and pulled you onto the couch with him, your legs now resting across his as he held you. “Talk to me.”

“I just….I can’t shake the feeling that the worst is going to happen. You know better than I do how amazing this place is but we both know that not everyone sees it that way. It’s a process and if they’re not willing to give the kids the time of day…” You sigh and he holds you closer.

“Hey, everything is going to be ok. It’s just the waiting that’s the hard part. I know it seems scary right now but I have faith in the campers and I know you do too. You said it yourself- once those people see how hard the kids work, there’s no way they’ll take the camp away from them.”

“I want to believe it, David. I really do. But if we’re really going up against people like Ron then-”

“No buts,” he says as he boops your nose, “I don’t want you to dwell on the ‘what ifs.’ No matter what happens, it’s going to be alright.”

You sigh and he holds you closer, comforting you in a way only he could. David always knew how to make you feel better, even if he didn’t mean to. Even being close to him made you happy- it had been like that since the beginning. You chuckle quietly to yourself.

“What?” he asks with a warm smile.

“Do you remember how we met?”

“How could I forget the best day of my life?”

You’d just taken your first steps inside the dance studio and immediately realized that you recognized no one. This didn’t usually bother you- you made most of your friends by talking with people in your classes to compare notes and the like. But this was a bit different. You were going to have to learn a whole new skill with someone you didn’t know and it made you a mixture of nervous and self-conscious.

“Hello class!” the teacher spoke. She was an older woman whose age was only given away by the grayness of her hair. “Welcome to our first meeting. As I’m sure you all know, this is a partner dance class. If you don’t have someone to dance with yet don’t worry. I’ll be happy to pair you with someone at the same skill level.” You’d heard good things about this teacher from your friends and so far she seemed friendly enough.

After most of the class had found a partner, you realized that there were only four of you that didn’t have someone to dance with and, after asking you and the others how long they’d been doing this, you were left with only one other beginner. He was a tall, lanky redhead who seemed incredibly optimistic about meeting a new person. He was a tall, lanky redhead who seemed incredibly optimistic about meeting a new person.

“Do you know how much a polar bear weighs?” he asked you out of the blue.

You blinked. “Well they’re bears and live in an extremely cold climate. The fat must add extra weight so… anywhere between five hundred to a thousand pounds?”
“Which is enough to break the ice. Hi! I’m David!” He stuck out his hand and you mentally facepalmed.

“_____ Nice to meet you,” you say as you shake his hand. “Sorry about that, I’m a bit of an environmental nerd.”

“Me too! What’s your major?”

“Natural resources. You?”

“Wildlife and botany!”

“Wow, and I thought my workload was rough.”

He shrugged. “A lot of classes crossover, it’s not so bad. I’ve never seen you before though, are you a freshman?”

“No, I’m in my third year. Are you?”

“Nope. I’m almost a grad student, I’m just...super late on my art credit.” He sheepishly rubbed the back of his neck.

“You and me both, buddy.” You laugh with each other. David seemed like a cool guy, maybe a bit awkward but then again, so were you. It was nice to know that he was a beginner too, and you had similar interests which was a plus.

The teacher called the class to attention and let everyone know how to get into position for the first type of dance- the east coast swing. You took David’s hand and felt as he rested his other one on your back. It was funny- you’d thought you were going to completely tense up when he touched you but you just...didn’t. It felt natural- like you’d been doing this all your life.

That facade quickly fell apart as soon as you started moving though, seeing as you both went in the same direction.

You giggle, “Wait, am I leading or are you?”

“I thought I was but you can if you want.” It was a genuine offer, not snotty or passive-aggressive as you would have thought.

You tried to start again but you both moved in the following position this time. Another small burst of giggles came from the two of you.

“Oh, you lead this one,” you say.

“Only if you get the next?”

“Deal.”

You managed to actually get started this time, and David gently guided you as best he could through the teacher’s instructions. That was until he stepped on your foot.

“Oh my gosh! I’m so sorry!”

“No no, it’s ok. I’m fine. Look, I can still walk and everything!” You playfully give him a quick strut and a reassuring smile before falling back into position. He sighs, relieved.
“Day one- break your partner’s foot. Check,” you joke, trying to get him to lighten up a bit.

He looks at you confused. “I’m no expert but I think the phrase is ‘break a leg.’”

You lost it. You had to break away from him to cover your mouth with your hand as a silent fit of laughter shook your frame. This man was a dork and you knew you were going to like him.

“...was it something I said?” he asks, slightly nervous.

“David, I meant that you stepped on my foot.”

“Oh. OH!” Now he started laughing. You both snickered as silently as possible with each other, but you were ultimately confronted by the teacher.

“I’m glad to see you getting along so well, but I do require some dancing in this class.” She gave you both a friendly wink and you apologized. David offered you his hand.

“From the top?”

“Sure.”

The rest of class went about as well as the beginning did. You and David were clearly showing off how much of a beginner you both were but made some awkward, stilted progress through the class, giggle fits and all. Soon though, the class was over and everyone began to go their separate ways.

“Well I think today went great!” David said as class ended. He had put his hands in the air as a double fist pump and gave you the biggest grin you’d ever seen. “I can’t wait for the next one, can you?”

“I had a lot of fun today too, David. I’m looking forward to dancing with you more often.”

The two of you unconsciously began to talk about your majors and interests as you walked out of the dance studio. You told him about how you’d been fascinated with the outdoors ever since you were little and wanting to become a researcher eventually. He mentioned working at a summer camp. It piqued your interest.

“Summer camp? That sounds pretty cool, actually.”

“It’s the best!” he said, eyes lighting up. “I love getting to work with all the campers- they’re all so unique! There’s Preston and Nikki and Nerris and Nurf and...” he continued to rattle off names of the kids and it was kind of adorable. He was obviously super passionate about the place hell, he made you excited about it and you’d never even heard about it until five minutes ago.

You take the turn to go to your next class and realize David had gone in the opposite direction. It made you a bit sad- you wanted to continue with your conversation.

“I guess this is a see ya later, huh?” you ask with a small smile.

“I guess so. Oh hey! Can I get your number? We should talk and meet up outside of class to practice our steps.”

“Yeah sure.” You give him your number but the clock tower rings, signaling that you were going to be late and cutting David off before he can give you his.

“I’ll text it to you. Don’t want to be late! Punctuality is important!”
You feel another small smile grace your lips. “Sounds great. See ya, David!”

“Later alligator!”

You sat in your small apartment later that afternoon going over your notes from the day when you heard your phone buzz. You assumed it was from your class friend, but it turned out to be a number you didn’t recognize.

- Hey this is David! Sorry it took so long to get back to you.

You grinned. You’d forgotten that he was supposed to text you.

- Hey David. No worries, just finishing some studying. Sup?

You and he ended up texting the whole evening away. He was just so easy to talk to. You shared your majors again, why you’d chosen it, where you were from, what classes you were in- it was really uncanny that you’d never crossed paths before. He had a lot of valuable knowledge in terms of what professors to take and who to avoid- information that he was more than willing to share with you.

Before you could even blink, it was midnight and you knew you had to get some sleep despite the fact that you could probably talk with David all night.

- Hey David, I hate to cut our conversation short but I gotta get to bed.

His message came in shortly after.

- Oh man, I didn’t even realize what time it was. Good catch! I’ve got an 8am tomorrow, too. Anyway, text you later, alligator.

Two can play that game you think.

- In a while crocodile

His next message came immediately.

- Another day manta ray.
- Hope you’re lucky rubber ducky

- Better swish jellyfish

- Bye-Bye butterfly
Damn, he had you. *Come on brain, think!* Suddenly, the perfect response came to you.

- *Hang loose mongoose*

You fell asleep that night with a silly smile and a single butterfly in your chest.

“Do you ever wonder where you’d be had we not met?” David asks you, bringing you back to the moment.

“Sometimes, yeah. My life would certainly be a lot more boring, though. I don’t really know where I’d be right now. Probably binge watching something.”

He chuckled. “Without you I don’t know where I’d be, either.” David leans in and gives you a soft kiss on the cheek. You smile and catch him before he can pull away—running your fingers through his hair as you return his kiss with your own. You feel him smile against your lips as he sighs contentedly.

“I love you,” you say as the kiss ends, and curl into him a little more.

“I love you too.” He rests his chin on your head and closes his eyes, both of you happy.

Chapter End Notes

- *Take care, polar bear*

- *Hey! Nice one! Wish I had thought of that. Goodnight, _____.*

- *Goodnight, David.*

Fluffy chapters are always great. But wanna know what else is great?

My excitement for the next like, 2 weeks oh my God. I can't wait.

Campe Diem ;)}
That week, you, David and the kids all put your noses to the grind in order to follow through with the last projects of the summer. You, Neil and Ered all got together and completed the solar car. It wasn’t easy—Ered and Neil had to make the engine completely from scratch as spare parts were not exactly lying around. Neil showed you how to weld while Ered tinkered away in the undercarriage, occasionally popping up covered in motor oil to ask for a new part to put in. Once it had all come together, it was time to test it. You and David were too large, but luckily Space kid volunteered.

You were nervous at first to strap him in, seeing as he’d never driven before, but he reassured you that his experience with space ships would make it seem like child’s play. Apprehensively, you stepped out of his way and allowed Neil to show him the controls. When he was finished, Ered waved a white checkered flag and Space kid took off—speeding around the activity field like there was no tomorrow. Everyone cheered as he made his laps, while Neil and Ered high fived excited to see the fruits of their labor coming to light.

Space came to a screeching halt in front of the campers who surrounded him, whooping and hollering for their new hero.

“Nice job little dude,” Ered said. “I think you’ve earned this.” She handed him the flag that had signaled his initial run. His eyes went wide and he tied it around his neck—now having two capes flapping in the wind behind him.

Nerris was next and demanded that you and David join her for another round of sword training. He was apprehensive about leaving Harrison, but she eventually talked him into it. Taking your stances across from each other, you raised your swords—each of you having a determined look carved into your faces.

David had gotten much more ferocious in his ability to attack and had you on the back burner for a moment—you thought he was actually going to knock the sword out your hand. You were countering with everything you had and your spirit of competition as burning inside you hotter than the summer sun.

“Come on Serpia! You can’t let him back you into the corner!” Nerris was watching with anticipation. “Pretend you’re fighting for your life! No—your love!”

*But I’m fighting my love* you think. *How am I supposed to—*

*Oh yeah.*
Doing your best to picture one of David’s beautiful green eyes an icy blue, you felt something else add fuel to the fire in your gut-rage. You regain your footing and land a harsh strike against David’s foam sword causing him to falter and putting you back on the offensive. You had him back pedaling across the small area next to the castle and were about to land the “killing blow” when you found yourself falling onto a wooden platform.

“Wait what?” you say aloud. You were no longer by the castle, you were on Harrison’s wooden stage. David looked as confused as you were until Harrison stepped out from behind the curtain.

“Ta-da!” He says, “And that’s how you get back at someone who ditched you for your mortal enemy.” He cast David a smug, sideways glance causing David to rub the back of his neck.

“Sorry Harrison. I guess I got a bit carried away.”

You were still bewildered as to how you even got there. “Harrison how did you-

“A great magician never reveals his secrets, remember?”

“Unless they’re about binoculars,” you cross your arms and give him a small smirk.

He was about to respond but a crashing noise in the underbrush forced you to turn your attention away from him.

“WAAAAAAAAHOOO!” Nikki screamed as she burst through the woods and into the middle of camp riding on the back of a massive elk.

“NIKKI!” You and David cried at the same time, running to get her off the animal, but the closer you got, the more apprehensive you felt- that was a large animal with sharp antlers that could kill you if it wanted. Doing your best to push those feelings aside for Nikki’s safety, you and David cautiously make your way over to the animal as Nikki stood triumphantly on its back.

“Nikki,” David begins, “I think it’s time to get down now.” You could hear the anxiety in his voice.

“Aww come on David, he’s friendly. Watch!” She pulled on the creature’s antlers and guided over to the two of you. Hopping off its back, she took yours and David’s hands and pressed them against the elk’s neck. It was course. “Do you guys wanna ride him?”

“I don’t think we should do that,” you say nervously.

“Nonsense. He knows his way around the forest better than anyone! Right Teddy?” Her eyes were shining as she spoke to the animal. It grunted softly before grazing. “See? At least let him walk you around the camp. Pleeееееase?” Her puppy-dog eyes were impossible to resist.

“Alright,” David said, giving in. “But only around the camp. You really shouldn’t be disturbing wild animals.”

Nikki showed you and David how to get on the animal safely and lead him around the camp with a small patch of grass. You had to admit- it was pretty cool.

“Now for the real fun,” Nikki said, suddenly. Without warning, she made a disturbingly realistic elk bugle and smacked Teddy on his hindquarters causing him to rear and take off into the woods with you and David on his back, screaming in terror.

David clutched to the animal for dear life as you wrapped yourself around him, closing your eyes
as you felt branches trying to scrape at your arms and face. Eventually, you found yourself
galloping across a large, open field. Lake Lilac was shining to the side of you, reflecting you and
David on its surface as you rode the Elk across the plane. Your nerves calmed themselves as you
relaxed your grip around David’s waist. He got less tense the longer he was on, too and soon was
able to gently nudge the elk in the direction he wanted to go in.

“This goes against so many rules!” he yelled as he turned Teddy back towards the forest.

While you and David were gone, Preston had gathered up all the campers to give them their roles
in his new play. You’d helped him with the final edit- a completely original story about love and
death (his favorite topics, you’d discovered) though, not romantic love. He really wanted to hit the
audience hard and decided to go in a direction that threw you completely when he first suggested it- a person coming to terms with the death of their parents who were never around while they were alive. It was an emotional tale and you wondered how much of his own history Preston had put
into it, not daring ask in case it was a sensitive subject. You’d done that enough this summer.

“Alright people LISTEN UP. We have a LOT of work to get done by the end of this week, so I
expect everyone to SHAPE UP. Take your places for scene one. And. ACTION!”

They rehearsed all the way up until you and David came crashing through the underbrush like
Nikki had- hair blown all out of place and covered in twigs and leaves. The elk seemed done with
the two of you and laid down in the grass, snorting. You took the opportunity to get off.

Through the week, you and David focused on what you thought would be the most influential
camps to show the public as a group: Scuba, blacksmithing, dance, and music. You thought that
they managed to show off all different areas and talents of the campers while at the same time
prove the skills they had learned in even the more difficult or unconventional aspects of camp. You
worked closest with Ered that afternoon while scuba diving- giving her challenges and missions to
see how well she could maneuver in tricky situations. She passed with flying colors.

Meanwhile, David worked with Nurf at the smithing station on coming up with new ideas and
molds for the new flagpole top. Nurf offered to remake Campbell’s head, but David turned it
down- he was over Cameron and instead suggested he make a mold of the sleepy pine.

“I still have the one you made me you know,” David told Nurf.

“Y-you do?”

“Of course! It’s one of my most prized possessions! I look at it every night and think ‘wow, that
was made just for me!’”

Nurf stopped what he was doing and let out a single sniffle. “C-consent to hug?” he asked.

“Oh come here you,” David said as he pulled Nurf into a hug.

Wednesday was dance camp and the campers had managed to complete their routines, set to
perform for each other. Most stuck to the tango, but others broke away from the mold like Ered
and Nerris who performed a contemporary hip hop style break dance and Nikki and Max who did a
fast-paced swing to ‘Sing Sing’ by Marianas Trench. You and David were brimming with pride and
excitement for your campers.

When it came time for you and David to perform your own routine, you surprised the kids with a
quickstep to ‘The One That I Want’ from Grease. You couldn’t stop smiling the entire time you
pranced across the stage- the high energy of the dance and the song matched you and David
perfectly, and when you looked into his joyous face you felt yourself being carried away again by your own butterflies. You accidentally kissed him at the end of the dance, much to the delight of the campers and the embarrassment of you and David, blushing as you took your bows while the kids cheered. Dolph immediately began sketching the encounter.

On Thursday, you gathered all the kids together for music camp and it was the best rehearsal you’d had all summer. Everyone was open to taking on a new melody or really sing out, brimming with a confidence they’d gained over the past few months. You cried that day- you loved these kids and you were so proud of them for everything they’d accomplished. No matter what happened, you knew these kids were going to be ok in the end. They were going to get out in the world and make something of themselves, they all had a well of potential that you and David had only begun to tap into. Who knows what else they could accomplish with just a little extra boost?

On Friday after the morning activities, you gathered all your kids together for a special project at David’s request: letter writing.

“I know that it always brings a big smile to my face whenever I get a letter in the mail.” David says with a grin. “So I thought we could all practice writing letters to each other! It’s a fun way to keep in touch when you leave back home!”

“But we have phones,” Max complained. “It’s so much easier to communicate. Watch.”

He texted something and you felt your phone go off.

- See? Way easier.

“First of all, how did you get my number? Second of all, come on guys! Sure texting is easier but there’s something special about getting a letter in the mail. We may be handwriting them today but they don’t always have to be- even a typed message is fun. It’s the thought that counts!”

“Exactly,” David said. “Now, each of you should have an envelope with our address in front of you as practice. You can write us a letter or use it as a template to write each other one. Or your friends back home. Or family members!”

“But writing sucks,” Neil groaned. “Can’t we just exchange phone numbers instead?”

“Sure,” you say, “after you’ve written at least one letter.”

“Welp, finished mine.” Max said.

“But writing sucks,” Neil groaned. “Can’t we just exchange phone numbers instead?”

“Sure,” you say, “after you’ve written at least one letter.”

“Welp, finished mine.” Max said.

“Really? That’s great!” David exclaims, “Would you mind reading it out loud?”


You rolled your eyes and ruffled his hair. “Nice try, Max but you’re going to have to do better than that. I expect at least five more insults.”

He grumbles but you catch a look of contemplation in his eyes as he picks up his pencil once again. The rest of the campers follow suit, taking care to write their letters. You and David helped answer questions when needed, but it seemed like most of them had things under control.

“Hey,” Nikki asked, “How are we even going to send these?”
“David and I will take them to the post office on the last day of camp if you’d like us to. If not, you can hang onto the envelope for future reference.”

After it was over, most of the campers returned their envelopes to you to send out once camp was over. The only ones who didn’t were Space kid who was going to hand deliver it to his uncle and Max who didn’t give an explanation, but you figured he had his reasons.

That night, you and your campers were all gathered around the campfire, ready and excited for the next day- the day you were going to prove to the world how amazing your humble little camp really was. As the s’mores were made and yours and David’s instruments passed around the campers, the sound of music and laughter filled the air late into the night. Finally, as the dark had settled gently over camp and the fire was beginning to burn low, David’s guitar made its way to Max.

“Did you ever end up writing that song, Max?” David asks him.

“I mean, I guess but-”

“Will you sing it for us!” David was ecstatic. You could see the stars in his eyes.

Max sighed and the group went quiet as he began to sing.

“Weakness is a disease that I can not bare.
And I often sit and I wonder what am I doing here?
So I put up my walls
Till I heard your calls
And I’d scream and I’d shout
Till you let me out because
Life really fucking sucks
It’s full of shitty people who only get by on their luck
But here within the forest I learned a thing or two
Yeah life sucks but maybe not because of you.”

The campers went crazy when he finished and you gave him a loving smile. He returned it with his own small smile and an eye-roll before quickly handing the guitar off to David.

“Well, I don’t think I’m going to be able to top that,” David says cheerfully, “but if you all don’t mind, I’d like to sing one more song before bed. I think you all know it.” He gave a wink and cleared his throat.

“OOOOOOOH

There’s a place I know
That’s tucked away;
A place where you and I can stay
Where we can go to laugh and play
And have adventures everyday!

I know it sounds hard to believe

But guys and gals it's true

Camp Campbell is the place for me and you!

“We'll swim through lakes and climb up trees;

Catch fish, bugs, bears, and honeybees!

There's endless possibilities

And no

That's not hyperbole!

Our motto's "CAMPE DIEM"

And that means I'm telling you~

“We've got: archery, hiking, search and rescue, biking, horseback, training that will save you from a heart attack, scuba diving, miming, keeping up with rhyming, football, limbo, science, stunting, pre-calc, spaceships, treasure hunting, bomb defusal, no refusal, fantasy, circus trapeze, and fights, and ghosts, and paints, and snakes, and knives, and chess, and dance and weights it's-”

A gunshot rang through the air causing the kids to scream and you and David to jump to your feet. Slowly, a large figure made its way into the low light of the fire before speaking.

“It’s Cameron C. Campbell.”

Chapter End Notes

HERE WE GO LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. SHIT'S GONNA GO DOWN.

But in all seriousness, be sure to read the warnings before the chapters in the next few weeks. It's going to be a RIDE.

Campe Diem?
Enter Sandman

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by 'Enter Sandman' by Metallica. Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CD-E-LDc384

WARNING! IN THIS CHAPTER THERE IS:
- Use of a gun, multiple times.
- Use of a gun on a child.
- Minor character death.

Alright, good luck.

“M-mr. Campbell?!” David exclaimed. “But- but you’re supposed to be-”

“I’m supposed to be what, David.” The founder’s words were slow and calculated. “You’re still trying to give me orders after I left? What do you think made me run away again in the first place?”

This was Cameron Campbell? The man who had been voted richest outdoors man of 1994? The creator of the camp that bared his name, and who tried to get David arrested?

“David? What is he talking about?”

Cameron’s eyes snapped to you. “Oh great, another newbie. Did you not tell your little girlfriend here that you own the camp, Davey? And that those tried to turn me into some third rate camp counselor?”

“Why are you here?” David asked, trembling in his place.

Cameron sighed. “Davey, I don’t expect you to understand the way a real man’s mind works, but I’m here to finish what I’d started. And since that blonde idiot couldn’t manage to get rid of you, I have to take matters into my own hands. I warned you that you hadn’t seen the last of me- it was your fault I went to prison. It’s your fault that I had to sign away the rights to this place. You and your stupid PARENTS day was the tipping point into a downward spiral that I refuse to let hit rock bottom. You ruined me.”

“Blonde?” David asked. “Y-you were the one who sent Daniel after me?!”

“Yes,” Campbell said, “I was. We crossed paths briefly and realized we had a similar goal for you. So I offered a bit of incentive. It’s just as well he failed though. If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.”

You couldn’t move. You were frozen in your spot out of fear, eyes glued to the pistol in Campbell’s large hand. The black instrument looked more like a toy in comparison.

“Do you have any idea what I had to do to get here, Davey?” Cameron continued. “Any idea how many people I had to step on just to find my way back? And let’s not forget the numerous agencies
that are after me because of your little stunt. You wanna know why I’m here?” He lifted the gun and pointed it straight at David. “I’d think that’s pretty obvious.”

Another gunshot. The kids scream and cover their heads and you looked to David, assuming the worst. He had curled up in on himself, trying to protect himself from a bullet that wasn’t there. Looking back at Cameron, you find that he was struggling to regain his composure after being hit with a chair. The Quartermaster stood behind him.

“I’LL HOLDIM’. GIT.”

You wanted to say no, but your brain wouldn’t allow you to.

“KIDS GET TO THE DOCKS.” You start grabbing and pushing the kids out of the area and towards to the docks. You and David follow closely behind, the Quartermaster’s and Cameron’s frustrated struggling fading behind you. You’d never run so fast in your life- pure terror and adrenaline coursing through you as you pushed your legs faster and faster across the camp.

You reach the dock and start loading kids into boats. They were your priority- they had to be. You would willingly die for these kids if it meant they got to live. David shared your sentiment. “Get to the scouts,” David says. “We’ll be right behind you.” He pulls the cord and sends the first boat off towards safety.

The second boat is on its way out when another gunshot rings through the air. Your stomach drops knowing two things: the Quartermaster was either dead or wounded and Cameron was on his way. You looked around desperately for another boat, but the only one there was was an old rowboat. You’d be sitting ducks in that.

Something wizzes past your ear and you flinch, turning to face Cameron charging in yours and David’s direction.

“DAVEY! THIS DOESN’T HAVE TO END BADLY FOR ANYONE BUT YOU. JUST GIVE UP.”

David froze and you grabbed his arm. “David we gotta swim for it.”

He wouldn’t move.

“David!”

Nothing.

“DAVID!”

Cameron was getting closer and closer- one foot already in the wooden planks. In an act of pure desperation, you tackled David into the water, forcing him out of his dazed state. The water was freezing and dark as it swallowed you and David in the night. You couldn’t see your hand in front of your face and had no idea how far from the surface you were, but you only had one thing on your mind at the moment: survive.

You grab David’s hand and force him to swim forward in the direction you thought was towards spooky island. Surfacing, you turned back to see Cameron raising the gun again and firing into the water, the bullets skimming next to you.

“David, we gotta get to Spooky Island, it’s our best shot. Stay as deep underwater for as long as possible and follow me.” Taking a deep breath, the two of you sink back under and swim again
towards the island, bullets raining on you from the surface.

Your campers watch in horror as you and David disappear under the water, gunshots still ringing through the air. Max removes his sweatshirt.

“Max,” Neil cries, “what are you doing?”

“Somebody’s gotta help them! We can’t just let Cameron kill them!” He puts on foot on the side of the boat but is dragged back in by the other campers. A resounding scream of ‘no’s’ came from them.

“Max,” Neil pleaded, “he’ll kill you. Didn’t you say you were already pretty sure he did that?!”

“AND NOW THAT THE PROOF IS HERE WE’RE JUST GOING TO ABANDON OUR COUNSELORS?” Max struggled against his friends.

“They told us to go get help!” Nikki cried.

“AND A LOT OF GOOD IT’LL DO THEM IF THEY’RE DEAD.” He managed to break free and jump into the water before the others could recapture him.

“MAX!” They screamed.

“What happened?!” Harrison cried from the other boat.

“MAX IS IN THE WATER!” screamed Nerris.

“I’LL BE FINE,” he called to the campers, “GET TO THE SCOUTS. MOVE!” As the boats puttered on without him, Max began his own swim to Spooky Island.

You and David managed to reach the shore and clamber out onto the island’s sandy beach. To your dismay there wasn’t another boat waiting by the dock that could get you and David out of the situation, so you hustled into the thicket to the mansion, hoping that there would be something there that could help.

Cameron had gotten into the rowboat you and David had abandoned and was currently making his way to the island himself. He fired a few shots when he saw your figures desperately running out of the water and cursed when you got away.

You and David found your way inside the mansion and did your best to barricade the door behind you. Pushing the bears in front of the windows and knocking over bookshelves and furniture against the door, you weren’t sure if it would hold but it was the best you could do on short notice. You look around the room for anything you could use as a weapon, but nothing was there to grab unless you were going to stop him with books.

“David, are you back yet?” you pant, terrified.

“I think so,” he says.

“Why did you never tell me you owned the place?”

“I-I thought it was obvious! I was the one who hired you and we had to set up everything! Stock the pantry, pay the bills. I thought you knew!”

You pause for a moment to take it all in. You’d never realized it but, in hindsight it made perfect sense.
“Listen,” you say, “we have to search this place. You go upstairs and I’ll search the-”

“No! I can’t leave you! What if he gets in?!”

“Then he has to find us both. David. We have to split up if we’re going to make it out of here alive. Bring back anything you find that might be useful- a baseball bat, a flare gun, scissors- anything.”

David bit his lip and looked around the room, nervously fidgeting with his hands. “But if we get separated and he gets in and finds you and- and- I CAN’T LOSE YOU TOO, _____!” He starts sobbing and you hold him close.

“You won’t lose me, David. I promise.”

He looks at you with a tear stained face before kissing you passionately. “I love you. So much.”

“I know,” you say as you cup his face, “I love you too. Now go. Find something that can get us out of this.”

He nods tearfully and races up the stairs.

Max reached the island soaked and freezing, but safe. Sneaking through the bushes, he stops dead in his tracks at the sight of Cameron at the door. He was throwing his weight against it as hard as he could, but it wouldn’t budge. Frustrated, he slams his fist against the frame, cracking it slightly.

“You can’t hide from a man in his own home, Davey! I’m not giving up that easily!” Cameron makes his way into the cellar.

With the coast clear, Max sneaks around the back of the house and climbs the garden terrace up to the broken window he’d been the cause of the previous summer. Once inside, Max slunk around the room looking for either you or David, but found neither. With no other option, he began to make his way downstairs. Upon hitting the ground floor, he realized why Cameron couldn’t get in from the front- you and David had completely blocked the entrance.

He still had to find the two of you not only to get you out of here, but now to warn you that Cameron was inside the house. He felt lost- he knew the ins and outs of the camp like nobody’s business, but he’d only had so much interaction here- most of it with a ghost! Max made his way to where the hidden lab entrance was only to find it still broken. He hoped that neither of you were down there, but his hopes were crushed as he heard footsteps coming from behind the wall.

Max quickly took a step back, just at the wall swung around revealing an incredibly irritated Campbell. “Oh it’s you. Great.” He pointed the gun at Max, “You’ve got a five second head start kid.”

He booked it but quickly heard shots being fired behind him. This was a fucking bad idea.

You were currently running deeper into the house- every twist and turn making you feel more and more lost. This place was absolutely massive and you had no idea if there was anything here that could even remotely help you. Door after door of empty rooms were the only thing that made themselves known to you- none of them having anything of use whatsoever.

You were ripped away from your task when the first gunshot sounded from upstairs. Throwing caution to the wind, you make haste back to the ground floor. Another shot echos from down the hall, and a scream of terror follows it. You immediately recognize that it wasn’t David, but you’d never heard that particular scream all summer. Who else was here? Continuing your frantic sprint towards immediate danger, you soon find the horrible answers to your question.
With his back pressed as far against the wall as he possibly could be, Max was panting wide-eyed and scared out of his fucking mind as Cameron stood in front of him, gun at the ready.

You watched helplessly as the trigger was pulled.

Chapter End Notes

GREAT GOOGLY MOOGLY IT'S ALL GONE TO SHIT.

And I know Cam seems a bit out of character but, this was written well before the end of season 3 so I'm just rolling with it.

See you Sunday ;)

Fortes fortuna iuvat.

Campe Diem.
A click. A terribly wonderful click came from the gun instead of a shot. He was alive. Max was alive. Taking the opportunity to move, you quickly scan the room for something. Anything.

Whatever prayers you’d said that night were finally answered. On the wall next to Cameron was a family crest adorned with two crossed swords beneath the yellow and black shield. You rush towards it, letting out a sonorous war cry once your hand hit the hilt. “NOT MY SON YOU FUCKING BASTARD.”

Campbell turned and was met with the blade of the sword slashing across his chest, ripping open his clothes and leaving a long red gash. He staggered backwards and clutched the area as best he could.

You grabbed Max off the ground and held him close to your chest, walking away from Cameron.

“Max what the fuck are you doing here.”

“I was here to help you! I couldn’t just sit by and let you fucking die!”

You sob into him. “Max. You idiot. You glorious idiot.” Pressing your face into his hair, you take a moment to compose yourself. “Let’s get out of he-”

Max feels your grip tighten significantly. “_____?”

You drop him onto the floor and look down to find the end of a steel blade protruding from your abdomen. It’s swiftly pulled out from behind you, knocking the wind out of you and forcing you to your knees. You clutch the area and fall on your side, Cameron standing behind you- the bloody sword in his hand. Max looks on in horror before dropping to his knees next to you.

“No. No no no no no. _____ get up. You have to get out of here.”

“Max,” you say as you feel your blood making its way up your throat, “run.”

“I can’t just leave you here!”

“Run!” You say a bit more forcefully. “Max please. Get David and run.” You feel yourself getting
weaker by the second- this was it. You never pictured it would end like this, but then again who does? The last thing you see is a tearful Max sprinting off down the hallway clutching your fallen sword before everything goes black.

Max didn’t know where he was going. His vision was clouded by his tears as he weaved his way through the maze of a mansion. He was so desperate to run that he didn’t even notice David until he ran headfirst into him.

“MAX?! What are you—”

“Cameron got her. He fucking stabbed her in the back. David we gotta get her. We gotta—”

“She’s gone, boys,” Cameron stepped into the room. “Nothing you can do for her now.” He seemed uncharacteristically solemn at his own words.

“YOU FUCKING SON OF A BITCH,” Max screamed. “YOU FUCKING MURDERED HER.”

“Quiet down kid. You’ll realize one day that some things are necessary to continue forward in life. It’s not fun, or pretty, but necessary.” Cameron looked at David. “Don’t you see Davey? Do you understand the consequences of your actions now? She didn’t have to die if you’d just taken her place. Now there’s going to be three more bodies to take care of. That kid was enough back in the day.”

David snapped. Cameron Campbell- the man he once revered as a father had just murdered you and admitted to the cover up of Jasper’s death. Now he was threatening Max. He couldn’t care less about himself at this point- this thing had taken the people David had loved away from him twice now, and he was damned if he was going to let it go.

He snatched the sword from Max’s hand, eye twitching in a rage the likes of which he’d never felt before. He’d seen red with Daniel but he saw everything right now. His senses were heightened to the point where he felt like he was going to explode if he didn’t move.

“So, that’s how we’re going to do this then?” Cameron asked as he held up his own sword. “Fine, we’ll have it your way—”

Cameron’s thoughts were cut off as David screamed and ran at him, slashing down hard when he reached him. Cameron blocked David’s blow and tried to return his own, but David parried it, landing a small strike on Campbell’s hand with the tip of his sword. David was relentless in his offense, barely giving Cameron time to block his attacks. Out of desperation, Cameron kicked David in the gut, sending him flying across the room. David clutched his stomach but forced himself to stand up straight. He did so just in time to block a potentially fatal blow from Cameron, countering but getting knocked back yet again.

David quickly regained his footing as Cameron continued his advance. David was now forced on the defense, doing his best to stay alive. One of Cameron’s blows was too fast for David and it earned him a sharp slash to the side of his body. David cried out in pain and Cameron knocked him down again, ready to end it.

Cameron got distracted by something hard hitting him in the back of the head. Turning around, he found that his own book ‘The Art of the Steal’ had been thrown at him by the small camper on the other side of the room. Pissed, he started on his way over, but didn’t get to far as he felt a sharp tip of steel rake itself across his back.

“We’re not done here, Cameron,” David spat. “Your fight is with me.” Thrusting again, David
stabbed the tip into the top of Cameron’s shoulder, causing the older man to yell in pain. Cameron swung the sword wide as he turned around but David was prepared. He stopped the blade in its tracks and held it steady as Cameron tried to force it. It was no use, David was immovable. With a frustrated grunt, Cameron faced David properly and they swung at the same time, resulting in a battle of strength as the blades clashed in between them.

Cameron put his weight behind his blade as best he could, but nothing was going to stop David. He had nothing left to lose and nothing left to gain, either. In that moment, he just was. He was his anger and grief. He was his sorrow and pain. His clarity. His fury. His patience. Everything that made David who he was and what he’d been through was flowing through his body, holding him steady against the murderer in front of him, and with it, he was able to knock Campbell’s sword out of his hand. Pointing the end of his blade at Cameron, David began walking forward, pure hatred on his face.

Campbell fell to the ground and scrambled backward against the floor as David continued walking forward, not letting the sword fall from Campbell’s face. He eventually ran out of floor space and was backed against the wall, nowhere to go.

“N-now let’s talk about this Davey. I’m sure we can figure something out and-”

“David.”

“W-what?”

“My name. Is David. And there’s nothing left to figure out- you killed someone that I loved.”

Campbell scowled, “So then, you’ve got an old man against a wall and suddenly think you’re a man huh? Is that it? Well let me tell you something, David, you’re nothing. You’ve always been nothing and you’ll always be nothing. You wanna kill me? Go ahead. It won’t change a damn thing about you.”

David chuckled darkly. “You know Cameron, there was once a time in my life where those words would have absolutely crushed me. But then I realized what you really were- a monster. You don’t care about anybody or anything except yourself and your precious money. All you do is take and destroy without the slightest bit of remorse for anything or anyone. I thought that maybe I could change that about you. And that you had the potential to still become someone good. I realize now that I was wrong.” He paused and removed the sword from Cameron’s face. “But I’m not going to kill you. That would be that path you would take. The path of a fucking coward.”

The three stood in silence for what seemed like an eternity until David bound Cameron’s hands and feet together using his bootlaces.

“Come on, Max. Let’s get _____ and get out of here.” Max was too stunned to speak. Reaching up, he took David’s hand and lead him to where you laid on the ground, pale and bloody.

As soon as he laid eyes on you, David dropped to his knees. Kneeling over you, he allowed himself to openly weep in anguish. He took you in his arms, tears falling down his face and onto yours and looked over your once vibrant features, now only warm due to the small amount of time that had passed since you’d taken your last breath.

Max came to stand by him, unable to hold in his own emotions. David pulled Max in close and the two clutched each other as they sobbed unconsolably.

“I’m so sorry David,” Max whispered. “If I had just stayed in the boat then-”
“Shhh sh sh sh,” David rocked Max back and forth soothingly. “You didn’t do anything wrong. This wasn’t you.”

“But I-”

“Max.” He clutched the boy tighter. “It wasn’t your fault.”

He kept Max close to his side as he looked over your form. You looked just like you were sleeping- a sight David had come to love to watch in the early morning light. But now you were limp, unable to wake up and kiss him like you did in the mornings. In fact, he would never feel your lips against his again. Your fingers would never again lovingly caress his hair when he was upset. Your soft hands wouldn’t return his gentle squeezes, letting him know in your little ways that you loved him. Your voice would never again speak those tender words.

“You lied to me, _____,” David whispered through his tears. “You told me I wouldn’t lose you. You promised.” He gingerly moved a strand of hair out of your face.

“Now what do we do?” Max asks.

“I...I don’t know, Max. I don’t want to do anything else.” He pressed his head down to your chest and let the tears fall down his face again.

...... thump.....

David shot up from his hunched position.

“What’s wrong?” Max asked, startled.

David didn’t respond. He simply placed two of his fingers to your neck and waited- hoped.

...... thump.........thump........

“Max she’s alive. MAX SHE’S ALIVE.”

“What?!”

“She HAS A PULSE. SHE’S ALIVE.” David ripped off his shirt and pressed to to your injury trying to stop what little bleeding there still was. “CALL AN AMBULANCE.”

“MY PHONE GOT TRASHED IN THE WATER!”

So did David’s. He screamed in frustration- you were still here. So close but so far.

Cameron. “MAX GET CAMERON’S PHONE. IF ANYTHING HE CAN BE USEFUL FOR THAT.”

Max took off into the other room, ready to confront the man who had almost taken your life. They were going to get you out of here- one way or another.

Chapter End Notes
The ambulance and the Millers got to Camp Campbell in record time. The agents allowed David time to see you be lifted safely into the stretcher and be driven down to the camp road before they hauled Cameron into the back of their vehicle for the second time. Due to the urgency of the situation pertaining to the escapee, they told David and Max that they’d be questioned at a later date. As soon as the Millers had left, the two got into David’s car and tore off down the road to Sleepy Peak General. Max checked in with the campers and scouts using Ered’s walkie talkie to let them know what had happened on Spooky Island, and that you were currently being rushed to the hospital.

The kids of Lake Lilac were absolutely distraught. Some refused to believe him and thought he was pulling a cruel prank on them.

“It’s not a joke,” David said, voice full of worry. “We’re really making our way there right now.”

“Is she going to be ok?!” Space kid asked.

David didn’t answer because truthfully he didn’t know. He glanced at Max, face pained and sorrowful.

“...We’re not sure,” Max finally responded. The speaker nearly exploded with the sound of distress coming from the kids. Some had begun to cry, others were fearful. Pikeman was angry, going so far as to try to get together a party to get revenge on Campbell.


The conversation rose and fell again as everyone discussed what to do and it was agreed that they would meet David and Max at the hospital later that night. Soon enough, the two pulled into the parking lot and rushed through the doors of the building, concern and worry radiating off of them. The receptionist was started by their sudden appearance- a young man and a child soaking wet, dirty and the older one slightly bloody.

“Please,” David said once he reached her. “I need to know where my girlfriend is.”

“I-I’m going to need more information, sir.” She seemed worried, but did her best to maintain a professional attitude.

“Her name’s _____. Probably just got in?” David was frantic.

The nurse warily typed in what information she could and found that you were currently in the ER. She pointed David and Max in the direction of the waiting room and they rushed off, leaving her confused and slightly frightened.

Max took a seat on one of the cushioned seats and quietly stared at the floor as David paced back
and forth in front of him. You’d survived and were currently getting help, but the reality of the situation was that it was unclear if you would really end up being ok. You’d lost a lot of blood and the wound looked severe. Neither of them were able to put their minds at ease, even if they knew you were being treated.

David was an absolute wreck. His pupils were the smallest Max had ever seen them as he paced back and forth across the gray carpet in the small, cream colored room. He would put his hand to his head and run his fingers through his hair, then drop his arm back to his side before repeating the process a few moments later. He couldn’t lose you. It would destroy him.

He eventually managed to stop himself from pacing and took a seat next to Max. He placed his arm around the young boy and Max didn’t try to fight it. He was an emotional wreck, too and needed someone to comfort him. Even if it was David. Max closed his eyes and allowed himself to weep away what little tears he had left for the night, and David pulled him in close, making sure Max knew it was a safe place to do so.

About a half hour later, the rest of your campers and the scouts showed up, all rushing into the waiting room where they found David and Max leaned against each other.

“WHERE IS SHE?” Nikki screamed as she ran into the room. She jumped up on David’s chest and held onto his neckerchief. “IS SHE OK? TELL ME!” She shook him back and forth. Petrol pulled her off of him and let Nikki cry into his shoulder. David, now slightly shaken, began to speak.

“I haven’t had a chance to talk to a doctor yet, but my best guess is that she’s in surgery. The receptionist told us that she’s in the ER. I don’t know what’s going to happen.” Looking over the sea of anxious faces, David did his best to stay strong for the kids as he spoke- they needed it right now. They were doing their best to comfort and console each other. Preston held Dolph and Space kid as they cried. Sasha and Ered were doing their best to console a downcast Nerris while Harrison was currently being crushed in a bear hug by an inconsolable Nurf. Erin was doing her best to stay strong as Snake took her hand and gently rubbed it with his thumb, and Tabii was silently crying into Neil as he held her. The Scoutmaster placed a firm hand on his son’s shoulder. Neither of them spoke.

“Oh,” Neil said after a few moments, “we ended up stopping by camp. Here, take these.” He handed David and Max each a set of fresh clothes to change into.

“And I found this in lost and found,” Pikeman said. Walking over to David, he handed him your original camp shirt- the one you’d lost when you’d been kidnapped. “I’d figured you’d want it.”

David swallowed his tears, “Thank you, Ed.” He managed a small smile as he placed his hand on the teen’s shoulder. David and Max soon went off to change into dry clothes.

Upon returning, David noticed that the kids had calmed down somewhat, turning to their phones as a means of distraction. David almost wished he could do the same, but at the same time he didn’t want to be distracted from any update that might come his way about your condition. As he sat, another realization came to him- Max witnessed everything. He was right there when Cameron had stabbed you.

“Max?” he asks. “Are you….ok?”

“I mean. No?? What kind of question is that, David?”

“Sorry. I’m just worried. About a lot of things. Including you.” David stared down into the floor, letting his mind wander again.
Moments later, a doctor walked into the room, surprised at the number of people in the waiting area. His eyes eventually fell on David. “Shirley? Is that you? Good to see ya!”

David stood up and made his way over to the doctor, shaking his hand. “Hey doc. How is she?”

“Stable. She’s currently resting in the ICU.”

“Can I see her?” David was hopeful.

“One at a time,” he said, looking over the room, “but yes. Follow me.”

David followed the doctor down the hallway deeper into the hospital. They paused in front of a large window. On the other side was you. You were hooked up to all kinds of different machines and tubes that were doing everything from helping you breathe to keeping you fed and hydrated. Two IV’s were connected to your arms that were slowly dripping into you, helping keep you alive.

You were incredibly pale. It was as if all the time you’d spent in the sun over the summer had been stolen from your features and sent away. Your hair was hidden beneath a light blue cap and your eyes were closed, mouth slightly parted.

David put his hands to his mouth, aghast. Was that really you in there? Where was his strong, quick-witted woman? What he saw through the window was a frail girl who would break at even the slightest touch. But even so, he knew it was you- there was no one who could match your beauty to David. Even in your fragile state, he looked upon you like you were the most beautiful thing in the world because to him, that’s exactly what you were.

“I’m not going to lie, Shirley,” the doctor spoke. “When she first got in, I wasn’t sure if she was going to make it. She was on the cusp. It’s nothing short of a miracle that’s she’s even still with us now- must have a guardian angel or something looking out for her.”

David remained silent as he took in the doctor’s words. He watched as your chest slowly rose and fell in time with your breathing and could see your weak heartbeat on the monitor next to you. “Is she...is she going to make it?”

“I can’t promise anything. All we can do is wait. If she wakes up, there’s a good chance she’ll walk out of here, but that’s only if.”

David closed his eyes and took a deep steadying breath. He can wait for you- he’d done it before and he’ll do it again for as long as he needed to.

On his way back to the waiting room, he’d decided to not let the kids visit. He didn’t want them to see you like that. They’d protested at first, claiming that they were just as worried as he was, but the longer they pushed, the worse David felt.

“NO!” He shouted as it came to a head. He put a hand to his mouth and took a step back as he looked out over their shocked faces. “I’m sorry,” he said immediately after. “That was uncalled for. But trust me on this. Let’s wait to visit until she’s a bit better.”

“But we may be gone by then!” Nerris cried. “It’s not fair!”

David hugged himself and gave the kids a silent, pleading look not to take things any farther. So they didn’t.

“Can we at least come back to see if she’s better tomorrow?” Nikki begged.
David was taken aback. “But, don’t you kids want to fight for the camp? _____ really believes in you guys! We both know you can do it!”

“Some things are more important zen camp, David,” Dolph said quietly.

He couldn’t hold back anymore. David dropped down to one knee and brought his kids into a group hug. They all cried with each other both for you and for the camp. It was the end- no more time to save camp itself, but hopefully they’d made a fair trade off by saving you instead. In the end, David realized that he was ok with letting camp go if it meant he got to stay by your side. He also made a promise to himself right then and there that he would keep in contact with the campers- he couldn’t let them go, either. They all meant too much for him to do that.

“I love you guys,” David said quietly as the campers surrounded him. He didn’t need them to say it out loud to know that they loved him back.
Aquarium

This chapter's title was inspired by 'Aquarium' by Saint Saens. Check it out here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCBDlC0N8Rc

Warning:
Mention of suicide
Implied suicide attempt

You were floating. It was a strange sensation- which direction were you moving in? Slowly, you blinked your eyes open to find yourself surrounded by large white space, and when you looked down, you discovered that you were currently wrapped in a white sheet that billowed around your form. As you moved within the space, you discovered that you weren’t floating, but falling gently downward. When you squinted your eyes, you saw...something coming up to meet you.

You weren’t afraid, it wasn’t a creature or something menacing- it looked like a big screen. When it was finally in front of you, you hesitantly reached you hand out to touch it, curious as to what it would play. Your fingers gently brushed the screen but nothing happened- it remained dark. You place your palm against it, but still it did not turn on.

“Uh, play?” Your voice echoed in the empty space and just when you were going to call it a loss, the screen turned on.

It played a video of what looked to be a hospital room. The camera was squished against something and you could hear people talking but were unable to understand the language. The scene changed and a baby could be heard crying as the camera rested inside of a crib facing up. A mobile hung above it.

A blurry figure walked into the room and picked the camera up, whispering soothing things to it. After some time, the baby’s wails stopped and the scene changed again.

“Mommy! Mommy! Look what I found!” A very young girl’s voice spoke and you could see two tiny hands carrying a bullfrog across a yard towards a small house.

“Honey put that down! You’ll get warts!” the mother spoke. She wasn’t stern but concerned for her child.

“But he sings! Listen!” The frog croaked in the girls hands, squirming to get out of her grasp. Eventually it managed to get free and the girl went to chase it before a hand was placed on her shoulder.

“Let him go- you shouldn’t try to keep wild animals as pets. Come on, let’s wash our hands.”

The scene changed again, this time looking out over a neighborhood from a high vantage point. You realized that the young girl was sitting near the top of a tree, admiring her view of the area. You furrowed your brow- that looked familiar.

The scene changed again- a birthday party. The girl, now standing in front of balloons with the
number seven on them, had received a bug catcher and a small microscope to look at the world up close. The kids surrounded her as she placed a small bit of the tablecloth under the lens. You noticed she had a cast on one of her arms. You cocked your head- did you know those kids?

Another scene, this one in what looked to be elementary school. The girl had just been handed back a science test with a massive 100% written in red ink across the top. You were proud of her, but something was still gnawing at you. Why was this so familiar?

The girl took her test home to her mother, excited to tell the good news. “Mom check it out!”

“Well well well ,” the mother said, “ looks like we have a little scientist on our hands now don’t we? Can’t say I’m surprised though .” She winked and smiled.

“Do you really think so?” The girl asked.

You remembered this conversation- it’s what really gave you the kick to want to study the world around you. That was your mother’s voice speaking which meant-

“I do, ____. You’ve always been fascinated with the outdoors. Why not keep with it?”

These were your memories- one’s you’d forgotten you’d had. Ones that were fuzzy but that had stayed in the back of your memory since the moment you were born.

“Am I dead?” you asked the screen. It didn’t answer. It just kept replaying moments from your life as it had played out. You watched yourself grow and become even more enamored with the world outside. You saw yourself bullied in middle school but overcoming it with your friends and fists. You saw your first crushes and heartbreaks over people that you now realize were probably not even worth crying over in the first place. You smile. Oh hormones.

You saw yourself studying your ass off in high school, joining whatever nature and science clubs you could get yourself into. You saw the ukulele your parents gave you for Christmas in your sixteenth year- the same one you played up until the very end. You saw yourself crying in joy when you realized you’d gotten into your top choice of college and then immediately stressing about finalizing classes, housing, meal options, loans, and everything else that made that summer stressful.

You saw yourself in orientation and your first day of classes- wide eyed and excited for the first lessons to begin. You saw the fights you had with your roommate- you didn’t get along so well, but luckily you were able to get your own studio apartment the next year. You saw study groups and parties and friends and fun and love all pass by you on the screen, each of them playing a significant role in shaping you as a person.

Finally, you saw David and you felt an immense sense of guilt. You’d told him that he wouldn’t lose you- now look where you were. Actually, you still had no idea where you were, but it certainly wasn’t back at camp.

“Stop,” you tell it. “Show me the rest in a different way. Please.” You couldn’t watch the rest, it would have been too painful to relive your memories with him only to be left alone when it was over.

The screen paused and floated up away from you. Suddenly, you felt your descent picking up speed and you saw that you were now falling to what looked like a small building. Your feet touched down on an invisible floor when you reached it, now surrounded by a few walls.

Looking around, you found that the building was set up to be an art gallery and your memories
were the exhibits. The pictures and videos were silent as they sat in their frames, and as you wandered through you found them to all be of you and David. Some were snapshots of a memory quickly running through small bits a pieces of an event. Others were actual pictures you and David had taken during the time you were together.

You paused at one of the quick snapshots- it was from spring break. You and David were sitting in his living room streaming Coachella and he had just placed a flower crown on your head, his own already resting around his forehead. You smiled at the memory.

Moving along, you saw a few pictures that you’d taken with him. There was your bad day, a beach trip where David and you were making peace signs at the camera, small hikes near campus, your first dance concert. Finally, your eyes landed on your absolute favorite picture of the two of you: pride.

You’d asked him if he’d wanted to celebrate and he was ecstatic. You and he quickly planned out what you would do and ultimately settled on marching in the parade and spending the day in the square engaging in the festivities along with all the other people. You quickly gave each other face paint and once you’d had the rainbow adorning your face and David the Pan flag on his, you set off ready for the day.

You loved pride- it was a day when everyone could really be themselves. A day of love. The day you really fell in love with David. Now as you looked at the picture of you and he with your cheeks painted and arms wrapped around each other, you wondered why you’d had any doubt that he’d loved you back.

“Howdy friend! Fancy meeting you here!” A familiar voice popped up from behind you, ripping you out of your memories and forcing you to face it. The gallery disappeared when you did, leaving you standing alone with someone you didn’t recognize. His hair was bleach blond and he was dressed head to toe in white with slight gold accents in the shoes and belt buckle. Icy blue eyes looked softly back into yours as a wide, friendly smile crossed his face. And that voice.

“Daniel?” you ask, shocked.

“Hey! You remembered my name! Good to see you again.” He took a step forward seemingly to shake your hand and you took one back out of fear. “It’s ok, you don’t have to be afraid,” he said.

“Why the hell should I trust you? Last time I saw you, you tried to kill me!”

Daniel winced slightly. “Kill is such a strong word. I was merely trying to help you ascend! It’s completely different."

You gave him your best are-you-fucking-kidding-me look and he chuckled nervously. “I understand that you’re mad at me. But give me a chance to help you? I think I’ve got at least a small grasp on this place."

“I’ll take my chances, thanks,” you spit back.

He sighed. “Just a chance? Please? It doesn’t have to be anything big and grand. How about I tell you how to change your clothes?"

You look down and realize you were still wrapped in a billowing white cloth. “Alright fine,” you say, embarrassed to find yourself in so little clothing while standing before Daniel. “How?”

“Oh it’s really easy! Just picture whatever you feel like wearing and then poof! Its on!”
You look at him skeptically, but it’s just clothes. What have you got to lose? Closing your eyes, you do your best to picture an outfit you would wear to class. Something casual and comfortable but not too difficult to see in your minds eye. Feeling the cloth having disappeared, you look down to find the outfit you’d pictured now on your body.

“See! Easy!” Daniel smiles. “Come on, let’s chat for a moment.” With a snap of his fingers, a small park bench materialized beside him. Taking his seat, he patted the area next to him for you to sit. You do so, still not trusting him.

“So,” you begin. “Are we dead?”

“I don’t think so. I think this is more an ‘in between’ area.”

“Purgatory?”

“Not quite that either,” he ponders. “Because I think you still have to be dead to get to purgatory.”

“So then where are we?”

“Like I said. I think we’re in between.”

You hum contemplatively in response and the two of you sit there in silence, staring off into the endless white nothingness.

“How did you get here anyway?” you ask him.

Daniel sighs. “It got lonely in solitary so I tried to ascend on my own. But, they found me before I could finish and I’ve been here ever since. I think Zeemuug may be punishing me for trying to ascend before my time. I hope I didn’t anger him too much.” He looked down, an expression of genuine sorrow on his face.

“Oh Daniel,” you rest a comforting hand on his shoulder. “How long have you been here?”

“I’m not sure to be honest. Time moves differently here I think.”

Unbelievably, you found yourself feeling sorry for Daniel. He called it ascension but when you strip away everything cult related about his story, he’d tried to end it. Now he was stuck here for who knows how long.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Daniel.” You meant it.

“Don’t worry about me. I’m alright,” he says with a small smile. “What about you? How did you wind up here?”

“Stabbed.”

“Oh.”

A slightly awkward silence follows.

“Oh! One of your friends passed through here not long ago!” Daniel said. “Told me to call him the Quartermaster?”

“What?! Where is he? Is he ok?”

“He’s fine. Seemed to know more about the place than I did. I think he made it back, though.”
You were relieved— you seriously owed the Quartermaster big time. He risked his life for you and the kids, and apparently almost died in the process.

“Hey Daniel? Did you happen to see if anyone else came through? Anyone who looked like a camper?”

He paused for a moment, thinking hard. “No I can’t say that I did. Sorry!”

You bit your lip and rested your elbows on your knees, lost in thought. If Jasper was already dead then maybe this really was an in between place. A long silence falls between you as you sit and ponder just what it was you were faced with here.

“Do you think this is real, Daniel?” you ask, and he jumps at the sudden noise.

“Real?”

“Yeah,” you lean back onto the bench. “Or is it just all in my head?”

“…..I don’t know.”

You sigh sadly. Either this was actually happening and you had Daniel here next to you in the infinite, or your mind was so fucked up from everything that had happened that it was conjuring people out of thin air to try and cope.

I just wish it could’ve made David.

You don’t know how long you sit there with Daniel, just thinking and reflecting on your life. In the end, you had to say it was a good run. Sure, you’d had your regrets but ultimately you’d lived a good life. You’d had friends, traveled places, seen amazing things, studied your passion, fell in love— the list was decent as far as human experiences go.

“_____, there is one thing more I’d like to say. If I may,” Daniel said.

You shrug. “Now’s as good a time as ever.”

He hesitates for a moment, hunching over and closing his eyes. “I….I’m sorry for what I did to you. It was wrong. Very wrong. I never should have tried to force you to ascend.”

That wasn’t at all what you were expecting to hear, and you weren’t sure if it agitated you or helped put your mind at ease. Another heavy sigh escapes you, but then you realized that in your moment of rage and weakness, you could have killed him, too. Hell you’ve wanted him dead since you saw what he’d done to David but, now as you sit here with a better understanding, you realize that maybe you shouldn’t be so hostile.

“Listen Daniel, I’m not going to sit here and pretend that I’m not angry with you. But it’s not about what you did to me. It’s about what you did to David and the kids. So I accept the apology on behalf of them, but I don’t think I can forgive you myself.

“But I’m also not going to act like I’m innocent, either. I-” you force the words out, “I almost killed you that day, Daniel, and if David hadn’t been there to stop me then I don’t know what would have happened. So I’m sorry, too.”

He looks at you, surprised by your words. “You what?”

“After you went unconscious I...kinda tried to strangle you. David pulled me off but I wanted you
dead.”

Daniel’s eyes went wide in fear for a moment and he scooted as far away from you as possible while still remaining on the bench. “I- that’s...I don’t think I can forgive that, either.”

“I don’t expect you to.” Part of you was relieved to have gotten it off of your chest, but the other part of you felt bad. You just hoped he understood where you were coming from a little better.

Suddenly, you felt yourself drop through the bench and onto the ground below you. “What the hell?”

“I- I think that means your on your way back,” Daniel explains. “It happened to the Quartermaster, too.”

You look to your hands- they seemed to be phasing in and out of this reality moving from solid to transparent and back again.

“But what about you?” you ask him.

“I guess I’m just not done here,” he gives you a small smile. “Who knows? Maybe one day we’ll see each other again and be able to dine with the great Zeemuug himself.”

One of your arms completely disappears. “So this is it?”

“It seems so.”

“I guess this is goodbye then, Daniel. I hope you make your way out of here soon.” It was genuine. You may not like each other much, but you wouldn’t wish eternity of loneliness like this on anybody.

“Goodbye, ____. If we ever cross paths again in the real world, please understand that I’m going to have to file a restraining order.”

“I’ll gladly comply.”

Those were the last words you spoke to Daniel before disappearing completely, leaving him to contemplate his existence alone once again.
A soft beeping noise was sounding to your left, making you stir slightly in place. You went to rub your eyes, but found that one arm was around something and the opposite hand was being held. Slowly, you lifted your lids and allowed your fuzzy vision to clear itself without the aid of your hands.

You realized you were in a hospital room. David was to your right and when you looked down, you found Max to be snuggled up into your side. Each were currently passed out, snoring slightly in their sleep despite it seemingly only being the late afternoon. A soft golden light was shining in through the large window to your left. You looked out over the forest as it stood below you, shadows growing longer as the sun continued falling. It was peaceful. Quiet.

Slowly, things started coming back to you. You don’t remember how you got here specifically, but you remembered being stabbed by Cameron Campbell on Spooky Island in the dead of night. Turning back from the window, you looked at Max- he’d gotten away and was here with you now, safe. You smile, relieved your son was ok.

Woah. Your brain jolted back to reality. Son? You vaguely remember calling him that when Cameron had him trapped against the wall. I guess that vein ran deeper than I thought. You found yourself surprised- you’d never thought yourself the motherly type, but camp had completely changed that about you.

Speaking of camp, wasn’t it the day that the kids were supposed to fight for it? Did they already? If not, why were these two here? Shouldn’t they be with the others? You looked back to David as he slept- head resting on one of his fists held aloft by his elbow resting on his knee. His mouth was slightly open as his soft snoring continued in time with his breathing.

You rubbed your thumb over his hand and gave it a weak squeeze. It wasn’t intentionally weak, but you found that your strength had been completely sapped from your body. You test your voice. “...David…” It was coarse and rough- how long had it been since you used it? You try again. “David?” Still barely a whisper, but you see him starting to stir.

“David.” You give his hand another light squeeze and watch as he opens his eyes slowly, unsure of who was calling for him. The second he saw you were awake, though, he jolted upright in his seat. You smiled at him. “Hey Davey-” You were cut off as he pressed his lips to yours and rested his hands on the sides of your face. You closed your eyes and moved the hand that was once holding his up into his soft auburn locks, slowly taking your time to run your fingers through them.

“I love you,” he said as he released you, ocean green eyes staring deeply into yours.

“I love you too, David.” You blinked, surprised by his sudden intensity.
You felt Max begin to move slightly by your side so you softly nudged him awake. He looked to your smiling face once he did, absolutely shocked.

“Holy fuck. You actually woke up!”

You begin to laugh at him, but wince as you feel a sharp pain coming from your gut. David places his arm around your back and clasps your hand again in concern. “Are you ok?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” you say, waving him away. “Where am I?”

“A hospital, smart one,” Max smirks.

“No shit Sherlock,” you fire back, “I mean how did I get here?”

“Why didn’t you just ask that then?”

You pull Max closer to you with a grin. He was still the same shithead you’d come to know and love over the summer, and you wouldn’t have it any other way. “Come on man, I got stabbed. Surely that constitutes as a small pass?”

“You fucking wish,” Max says as he gently wraps his arms around you, careful not to irritate your injury.

“Well, if you’re not going to be any help,” you say as you ruffle his hair, “maybe you can tell me Davey?”

He blushed. David wasn’t quite sure what to do with himself- he’d waited for so long to see you again. Not just your unconscious form, but you: the brilliant, show-stopping woman he’d fallen hopelessly in love with. But now as you sat before him, he had no idea what to do or what to say.

“David?” Your soft voice brought his attention back to you. “Is everything ok?”

He kissed you again. “It is now,” he laughed as tears began to fall down his face. “It is now.”

You let out your own soft chuckle and gave him a small smile as he pressed his forehead to yours. “I love you, David.”

“I love you too, _____.

“I think you’re both disgusting. Can we stop with all the affection? It’s making me sick.” Max was now incredibly unimpressed with your behavior.

“I’ll stop once someone answers my questions,” you say before pulling David down into another kiss- he certainly didn’t seem to mind as he wrapped his arms around your frame.

“Augh!” Max yells as he shields his eyes. “Fine! I’ll tell you.”

“Good,” you say as you pull away from David, leaving him with a wobbly smile and red cheeks.

The two go onto recount all that had happened the night you’d almost been killed. You couldn’t believe that David had to sword fight Cameron, let alone win it. You suspected that Nerris would be proud. You felt David clasp your hand a little tighter when he told you about when he’d found you and a pang of guilt hit your stomach. Max filled in with his own commentary about getting to the hospital and how much of a mess he and David were upon arrival.

“I’m honestly surprised they even let us in. David looked like a fucking murderous hitchhiker.”
“Hey! It wasn’t that bad! I do not look like a murderous hitchhiker!”

“You’re right,” Max shrugged. “With a babyface like yours there’s no way you could be a hitchhiker.”

David opened and closed his mouth in frustration as you giggled, but the sound of your voice put him at ease again.

Once they’d finished telling you about the campers visiting, you still had a few questions of your own.

“So where are the campers now? Are they with the scouts?”

David sighed. “I guess you could say that. They’re all back at camp right now watching the auction.”

You were confused. “But I thought the auction wasn’t for another week? Shouldn’t they be showing off their skills to keep the camp? Was the date changed?”

The realization struck Max and David at the same time. They looked at each other slightly uneasily, neither wanting to be the one to tell you.

“_____,” David said, “you’ve been out for a week.”

“What the fuck?! ” you shout, shooting up in bed. “I’ve been out for a week? We have to get to the camp! The auction can’t happen! The kids-”

“The kids chose to come see you instead of trying to save the camp. They were so worried about you, _____. You have no idea.”

You sank back into your propped pillows, dumbfounded. All their hard work- gone. Gone because they wanted to make sure that you were ok.

“But...why?” You couldn’t believe it.

David put a gentle hand on your shoulder. “Because some things are more important than some old summer camp.” A weary smile followed his words, and you latch onto him, trying your hardest to suppress your sobs while tears streamed from your face.

“It’s ok,” David said soothingly, “you can let it all out.”

You let out a small snort despite your tears. “I totally would if my stomach wasn’t actively trying to kill me.”

He held you tighter and Max joined in too. You felt loved- your two boys were here for you despite all the crazy shit that had happened during the past few months and you were so happy to be with them. The three of you stay in your group hug for some time before you release them, laughing as you do so.

“What’s got you so excited all of a sudden?” Max asks with a sly grin.

“Well, let’s see. This summer I was: kidnapped, beaten, damn near sacrificed, and started dating the guy I’ve been in love with for almost a year. Not to mention I learned ghosts actually exist, found a dead body, had a near-death experience, and was almost murdered. You know, typical camp shit.” You smile at Max.
The three of you sit and chat away about the summer for a while longer before the doctor pokes his head in the room. “I thought I heard a new voice! Welcome back to consciousness!” He stepped into the room and began to look you over a bit. “You seem pretty good for someone who was an inch away from death a week ago. I’d play the lottery if I were you.”

“Was I really that bad?”

“Worse than bad. Brink of death, more like. By all accounts the sword should have cut right through some major arteries and the like. Medically speaking, you shouldn’t even be here right now.”

“So then, how am I here?”

“I’ll tell you what I told Shirley. My only explanation is that you’ve got one seriously dedicated guardian angel looking out for you.”

You reach to the area where the sword pieced you and gasp slightly, though not out of pain. It was the exact same spot that Jasper has pushed his arm through you when you’d first met him. What the fuck. “I….I think I have to agree with you there, doc,” you say, shaken.

He runs a few more tests and upon deciding that you’re on track, he leaves you, David, and Max alone again. You were still clutching your stomach.

“Everything alright?” David asks.

You blink a few times before a warm smile takes over your face. You absolutely had someone looking out for you.

“Yeah,” you say softly. “Yeah I’m ok.”

No sooner had you answered did the nurse walk in, letting you know you had visitors. You had a pretty good feeling of who it was going to be, so you had her send them in. Sure enough, there were all your campers wide-eyed and excited to see you awake. You gave them each an individual hug as they came to see you, happy to see them all again. You still couldn’t believe that you’d been out for a whole week. Did these kids see you every day?

Of course the scouts weren’t far behind your kids and you gave each of them a hug as well. You reflected on the summer as you did and realized that if someone had told you you’d be hugging Pikeman as tightly as you were at the moment at the beginning of the summer, you’d have probably thought they were insane. But, you figured that these things have a tendency to change and you were happy at how things had turned out, even if you’d almost died in the process.

You talked with the kids about everything that had happened while on Spooky Island, though you left out the more…detailed account of being stabbed through the back. They knew how you were injured and you figured that’s as much of a mental image as they need to have.

“Do you remember anything else?” Neil asked.

You cocked your head. “What do you mean?”

“Did you see anything while you were unconscious? You know, glimpse the afterlife, have an out of body experience, stuff like that?”

You pause. Something in the back of your mind was trying its damnest to remind you of
something, but you couldn’t pull it from the recesses of your mind. You didn’t remember fully the
time you’d spend in the white space, but your brain would always try to remember it. “I can’t say
that I did, sorry Neil.”

“Well, at least we know Daniel’s whole Zeemuug thing is still trash,” he wiggles his fingers and
crossed his eyes making everyone laugh, but again, that nagging feeling returned at the mention of
Daniel’s name. For the first time since he’d appeared, you didn’t feel a rage bubbling within you.
Instead you felt a strange, almost misplaced sense of closure.

“Yeah,” you say quietly.

“So,” David began gently, “how did the auction go? Did the Camp Corp end up getting it?”
The kids all looked at each other doing their best to hide small grins.

“We’re not allowed to tell you,” Dolph said.

“Why the fuck not?” Max asked.

“Because, little dude,” Ered said, “my dads have to talk to our counselors first.”

“But David and I already answered all their questions like, three days ago. What could they
possibly have to ask them?”

“Yeah Ered,” you say, curious. “I don’t exactly know if I’ll be of much help to the investigation.
My memory is still a little fuzzy right now.”

She gives you a cool wink. “It’s not about the investigation. Come on guys, we can’t be here for
this.” Ered grabs Max effortlessly and puts him under her arm before walking out of the room.
Max, of course, is kicking and screaming the whole time but she doesn’t care.

You and David look to each other as all your campers and the scouts followed out of the room.
Some winked, others gave thumbs up- all of it leading more and more to yours and David’s
confusion. Finally, after all the kids had left, the two agents stepped into the room and closed the
door behind them.

“I really wish we didn’t have to meet under such circumstances all the time,” the first agent said,
gesturing to your bedridden figure. “Do you know why we’re here?”

“To discuss the auction?” you try. You had absolutely no idea why they were here.

“Not exactly,” the second agent said, “the auction never happened.”

“What?!” David said. “But the kids never even got to show off what they learned! How could it
have never happened?”

The agents shared a smile that let you know exactly where Ered got hers from. “You see,” the first
agent said, “during the time they were supposed to show off what they’d learned, we were free to
roam about the camp to look for them. We didn’t find any campers- just safety violations.”

“A lot of safety violations,” the second agent said as he crossed his arms.

You and David glance at each other from the corners of your eyes before looking back to the
agents.

“But that’s not the only thing we found,” the first agent continued. “You see, we ended up finding
the nest of an endangered species of hawk. I believe you call him Timothy?”

“Therefore, the land has been taken over by the US government as a new wildlife preserve for it in the hopes that it can continue to thrive in its natural habitat,” the second agent finished.

You and David looked at each other. You were ecstatic— even if the camp wasn’t there anymore, it would stay natural. It was as much as you could ask for. David shared in your excitement, each of you with a wide smile on your face.

“That’s not all,” the first agent said. “With the addition of the wildlife preserve, we’ve begun the process of turning Sleepy Peak and the surrounding area into a national forest. It would fall under the protection of the parks service— rangers would be here year round to look after the place.”

“Oh my gosh! That’s wonderful!” David was practically jumping out of his seat with excitement and you didn’t blame him. This was amazing! But you were confused.

“This is all great and everything, but why couldn’t you tell the kids this? Legal stuff?”

“We’re getting to that. There’s one more thing that we need to tell you,” the second agent said. “We’ve discussed it with the park service and they feel that it would be beneficial to have a camp in the park to help educate the youth about the surrounding area. Say, during the summer?” He smirked slightly.

“…..Are you saying what I think you are?” you ask in absolute shock.

“Maybe we are,” he bent his head and winked under his sunglasses. “Camp Campbell would have to undergo some major renovations for the activities, but if the current owner so chooses, the camp will remain open to the public as a summer camp for kids.”

David jumped to his feet. “OF COURSE I CHOOSE TO KEEP IT OPEN!” You saw the stars in his eyes again. “WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?!”

“Easy David. There’s one more thing we need to talk about,” the second agent pulled out a briefcase. “With the camp being part of the park system, it has to be run by rangers. This would include at least one on site as an acting counselor for the duration of the camp. We’d also need a researcher to keep an eye out for the hawk and track its progress as well as study the surrounding area in detail in case there are further developments in the flora and fauna.” He pulls out two papers from the briefcase and hands one to each of you and David. You both choke— they were applications for the US park service.

“We’ll put in a good word for you, if you want.” The second agent winks again.

You could not believe what was happening. Not only was Camp Campbell allowed to remain open at David’s discretion, but you had just been offered your dream job. You were having a hard time processing the whole situation as your jaw refused to close itself. David was in the same state of shock that you were— was this actually happening?

“I hope you understand that we couldn’t let the kids influence your decision,” the first agent says. “Do you need some time to think?”

“NO!” you and David yell at the same time, startling both the agents and each other.

“What do we need to do?” David asks excitedly. You grab his hand and hold it tight.

“Fill out the application and send in a resume. You both are close to graduating in your fields,
“Perfect,” the second agent says, “then you should be able to start your training now and be ready to run the camp by next summer. We’ll take care of everything.”

“Thank you again for everything you’ve done for Meredith,” the first agent says as he walks out the door. “She’ll be back next summer, if she so chooses.”

They leave you and David alone in the small hospital room and its quiet save for the soft beeping of the heart monitor. You slowly turn to each other, still in shock, and stare into each other’s faces in disbelief. Before long, you throw your arms around the other, laughing and crying at the situation that’s come about. You rocked back and forth with happiness as mild hysteria came over you both. Eventually, you pulled out of the hug long enough for David to pepper your face with kisses, making you giggle.

“Davey! That tickles.”

He stops and plants one on your lips instead, making you melt into him. You hold the kiss for what feels like eternity, you couldn’t bare to remove yourself from him and he certainly didn’t mind.

Everything had turned out just fine.

Chapter End Notes

Campe Diem everyone.

And don't worry, the fic isn't over quite yet! There's still a way to go ;)
Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by "Into the Unknown" from Over the Garden Wall. Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBWyQwsdOLw

The day after, the kids had all come to say their goodbyes until the next summer. You wished that you could have seen them off from the camp, but in the end you were just happy to have had the opportunity to say goodbye at all.

Max had stayed one extra day at the camp and would be getting a ride home with Pikeman and his dad- it turned out they lived in the same city! Part of you was selfishly happy to have one more day with Max, but saying goodbye to him was possibly the most difficult thing you’d had to do all summer. You reiterated that if he ever needed you that he was to come to you and David- no questions asked. You also made him promise to text you at least once a day if he could manage.

“What, no letters?” he snidied.

“I mean, I could make you write me every day. Would you rather it be that?” You snuck a glance at him from the corner of your eye. He relented and let you give him a hug in front of Pikeman and his dad.

You ended up having to send Gwen an email explaining why you hadn’t been talking to her lately, due to your phone getting waterlogged and all. The day after you’d sent it, she was at the hospital ranting and raving about how you could have been killed and what the fuck were you thinking. You just rolled your eyes at her with a smile- you were flattered that she’d cared so much about you, but you were alive, weren’t you?

“ Barely!” she says. “Seriously- you both are getting a fucking babysitter next year so help me God.” You and David laughed.

You were released from the hospital a week later and David drove you back to camp. Luckily, you didn’t require a ton of physical therapy to get back on your feet, and even though you were going to have to take it easy for a while, you were still able to walk independently and even run short distances. Swimming would end up being your best form of exercise though, which you weren’t about to complain about.

David was right by your side the whole time. He helped you pack everything up and put it back into the car. You were melancholy as you saw the way your room emptied- even if you hadn’t decorated much, you had forgotten just how empty the place looked when you’d first got there. But, the fact that you would be back by the beginning of summer helped put your mind at ease- you already couldn’t wait to see everybody again, and you couldn’t wait to see what everyone did over the year. You’ll have to send them Christmas cards!

Man, I think I’ve been hanging out with David too much. You chuckle to yourself slightly. Was that such a bad thing?
That night, you and David sat beneath the stars and roasted hot dogs over the campfire. With it being your last night there, he’d wanted to make it a bit special and you couldn’t have thought of a better way to do it. You clinked your apple-juice filled glasses together and toasted to a successful summer, new beginnings, and love.

“So,” he asks, “how was your first year at camp?”

You kiss his cheek. “Amazing, Davey.”

He puts his arm around you and nuzzles his face into your hair. You smile softly. This summer had been absolute hell in a lot of ways, but it had also been one of the most amazing experiences of your entire life. It was certainly the most unforgettable (traumatic) summer you’ve ever had, but you wouldn’t trade it for the world.

“I’m really glad I came with you,” you say softly as you lean into him.

“I am too, for a lot of reasons.” He kisses the top of your hair and you giggle. David was your perfect match and you couldn’t wait to spend the next phase of your life with him. What would he be like outside of camp? Sure you’ve known him as your friend, but dating was a whole new adventure you couldn’t wait to embark on with him.

Later, after you’d finished your hot dogs and had juuuuust one more marshmallow, you sat in David’s bed, writing down in your journal the final events of your summer.

It was certainly a wild ride. Ghosts, murderers, near-death experiences- this summer had it all! But even so, I can’t wait to come back. With the next summer, I’m sure we’re going to have even more kids and crazy shit happen. You pause for a moment.

But hopefully it won’t be as crazy as this summer. I’d do it all over again if I had too but, I’d rather not. You shudder at the memories.

However, even if it does get stupid, at least I know that I’ll be able to get through it. COME AT ME WORLD- YOU CAN’T KILL THIS BITCH THAT EASY! (Ok maybe I shouldn’t tempt fate, but come on!) You chuckle at your words.

As I sit here and reflect. I realize I have no idea what I’m going to do with this journal. Do I leave it out in the open? Do I continue it? Both options feel wrong- this is my camp journal. It’s special. Maybe I’ll put it in a memory box or something and bring it out on a rainy day. Yeah. You liked that idea, subtle but special still.

“I just did one last sweep of the bathroom, do you want to double check?” David walks in holding the last of the soap and shampoo.

“I’ll check in the morning,” you say as you look up from your journal. David looks over you fondly.

“I didn’t know you journaled! I have one too!” He puled out a small diary from his nightstand and showed you. You smile.

“Yeah! I did one for the summer to make sure I wouldn’t forget anything. Not that I think I ever could.” You look straight ahead for a moment, but shake away the feeling. You scoot over so that he could join you in the bed.

“Would it be alright if I read it?” he asks as he sat next to you. It was an innocent question, one that you don’t think meant to bother you, but as apprehension slowly crept its way into your
stomach and through your body, you knew that there were some things that you couldn’t share.

“N-no, David. I...there’s things in here that I just....” you trail off, unable to gather the correct thoughts.

“I understand,” he says with a gentle smile. You return it, grateful.

“Thank you, David.”

He kisses you right between the eyes causing your face to scrunch up in a grin. You loved this man.

David is here, you pen, by my side like he has been all summer. He asked to read this but I said no. Not yet, at least. Maybe in the future when I’ve been able to really understand and comprehend everything that happened I’ll let him read it over. I’m sure he’d find my ramblings about him endearing, but the more….personal stuff I can’t indulge him in. You bite your lip slightly in contemplation, trying to gather your thoughts when you catch David looking at you.

“What?” you ask, amused.

“You’re cute when you write,” he says. “Your face moves- I can see you thinking.”

You smile sheepishly and blush before turning your attention back to the journal.

He’s such a dork and I love him so much. What am I going to do with you, David? You with your cute face and perfect hair and loving, caring, wonderfully optimistic personality. Where is this road going to take us? You already knew the answer- home. He would take you home, no matter where your travels took you.

I love you, David. And I love camp. And the kids. And dancing. And everything else that I’ve come into contact with because of you. You’re wonderful. Please, never change.

You smile thoughtfully at the last words on the page and find yourself wiping away small tears from the corners of your eyes.

“You ok?” David asks.

“Yeah. They’re happy tears. I promise.” You set the journal on the bedside table and cover yourself with the blankets. David wraps his arm around you and pulls you in tight- holding you close as crickets chirp outside your window.

“It went by so fast,” you say. “I can’t believe it’s already our last night here.”

“It always goes too fast,” he says softly. “And if you think about it, it’s not quite our last night. Only until next year.”

“I guess so.” You sigh and rest your head against his chest, his heartbeat comforting you. He still smelled nice- like camp. Like home. “Hey David?”

“Hmm?”

“Do you know if swans are native to the area?”

He pauses, thinking for a moment. “I’m not sure. I’ve never seen one around here, but I guess it’s possible. Why?”
“I want to talk to one about something. Ask for some advice, trade stories, see what it knows, you know?”

“Now you sounds like Nikki.” Even if you couldn’t see it from where you were, you could hear the smile in his voice. “Tell you what. If I ever see one around here, I’ll point it in your direction, alright?”

“Sounds good to me.” You let yourself completely relax against him and you hear him hum happily.

“I love you, ______. Sleep well.”

“I love you too, David. Sweet dreams.”

Chapter End Notes

And just like that, the summer is over. But wanna know what isn't? This fic. Stay tuned for Thursday everyone we still have a ways to go!

Campe Diem!
Banana Pancakes

Chapter Notes

This chapter was inspired by Banana Pancakes by Jack Johnson. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igc2EmI6rSM

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Months pass and you’d found yourself the most happy you’d been possibly ever. You and David were an absolute power couple- individually you were able to climb your way to the top of your classes and work hard at your training to become part of the park system. Together, though, you were able to overcome just about anything. You would help each other study and work through tough issues you faced together, being there for the other when they needed it.

You hadn’t told your friends at first. You and he wanted to see how long it took them to figure it out, but you soon learned you weren’t exactly as subtle as you once thought. They of course were happy for the two of you, even if some had lost the bet that you would end up together by the time you got back. You and David laughed as your friends argued who owed who dinner for the next week.

Some days were harder than others. David wouldn’t usually outright say when he’d had a rough day, but you quickly learned in the way his smile was smaller and how his shoulders would hunch and how he would hold onto you just a little longer than normal when his bad days were. On those days, you’d sit him down and rub out his back and shoulders, wrapping your arms around him when you were finished to give him a kiss. You’d feel him smile when you did, and he’d relax just a bit more as the stress of the day melted away from his muscles.

The first time you’d come home aggravated, David noticed immediately and was quick to help you feel better. It had become a ritual on bad days for you that he’d wrap you up in a blanket burrito and run you a warm bubble bath complete with candles and rose petals in the water. You damn near cried the first time he’d done it. David would sit by the side of the tub as you soaked and talk with you about whatever you wanted. You mostly would ask him to talk to you about his classes and what he was currently learning about, and he was more than happy to oblige. His excited ramblings would help put you at ease and even get you to smile after a time- you found it impossible to be in a bad mood for long when you’d listen to him.

It wasn’t always perfect. You’d have your fights and disagreements just like any couple would. None were as bad as you’d had at camp, but once you did go to bed mad at each other. The room you shared became his room and you moved into the guest room for the night. You’d cried angry tears into the pillow that had gone unused for months, unable to sleep. Eventually, you gave in and went back into his room to raid his closet.

“_____, what are you doing?” he had asked, exhausted.

“Looking for one of your shirts. I’m still pissed the fuck off but I love you and your scent comforts me.”

You grabbed one of his larger pajama shirts and stormed back into the guest room. You’d put your prize over the pillow like a case and cuddled it through the night, managing to fall into a restless
sleep. The morning after was filled with long conversations and apologies from both sides—David was always unafraid to admit when he was wrong and you were slowly learning how to do the same. You loved each other, but sometimes love took just a little work.

On days David would come home late, you’d have a small dinner ready and the bed made for him to fall into. Becoming a ranger was no easy feat as you’d both come to learn, but you knew that it would all be worth it in the end. So when he would lay in bed, you’d run your fingers through his hair to help him fall asleep more easily. You’d often find yourself wrapped in his arms the next morning, both of you unconsciously finding and clinging to the other in your sleep. You liked those mornings—those were the days you’d get to kiss him awake.

Usually though, you fell into a routine where he would get up long before you did and head to his classes. It worked well with him being a morning person—he was the only person that was one hundred percent willing to take an 8 am. If anything, you think he actually preferred them. As for you, you managed to get a schedule that didn’t start until around 11 am most of the week, allowing you to sleep in until the last minute. Then, you and he would meet for lunch on campus before finishing out your day. He would be there waiting when you got home from class and you’d give him a hug and a quick kiss.

Sometimes though, you’d have to stay late in a lab for either class or for the park service asking you questions and helping you prepare for the summer. One night when you’d come home, you found David dressed up and sitting at your small table with your favorite food on it. It was lit by candle light—a small romantic touch.

“What’s all this?”

“Just a little surprise. Will you join me?” He gave you a small smile before pulling your chair out for you. As you talked and ate, you felt him reach over the table to lightly grab your hand, rubbing his thumb over it while you spoke.

You smiled. “Let’s do this again sometime?”

Since then, you’d taken the time to dedicate Friday nights as date nights where you’d dress up and cook together, making whatever you thought sounded good and spending the evening in.

You also kept dancing with each other. In what little time you could find, the two of you would sneak off into an empty studio and play. It was always great fun as you either made up new dances or redid your old ones. Both of you always ended up smiling by the end of your sessions.

Weekends were some of your favorite times, not only because it gave you a break from your hectic schedules, but because it was the time you got to respond to the kids and catch up on what they were doing that week. With it now being November, you’d gotten into a good habit of texting them at least once a week and sending a letter to those who wanted one as often as you could. This was where you found yourself now, leaning against David on the couch as you read your texts and letters.

“What’s yours from?” you ask him.

“It’s from Space kid! He says that he’s already signed up for next year and that he can’t wait to meet all the new campers we’re going to get! Oh I’m just so happy for him.” David grins with happiness. He begins to write a letter back and you turn back to your texts. One was from Nikki.
Beneath her message was a picture of her hanging off the bicep of Petrol as he was dressed in a football uniform. She had stars in her eyes as her mouth was open in a huge smile. Petrol seemed to be chuckling at her as she hung there.

Hey Nikki. That’s really awesome! Who knew you guys were from the same place? Tell him I said hello if you have the chance.

I know right! He calls me his little G, whatever that means. And I will!

You smile. Theirs was a pairing you hadn't seen coming originally, but Petrol totally took over the roll of an older brother. You hope that they continue to get along.

Ered’s text had your attention next. She’d sent you a picture of a brand new scuba license with her name and face on it.

So like, this happened B)

You laughed out loud happily surprised and showed the picture to David. You were both overjoyed for her.

Ered that’s awesome! We’re both super proud of you!

Nerris had written a letter to both you and David, asking if you’d found a party to play with and what characters you were using. You wrote her back telling her that due to your schedules, you couldn’t find time to play, but that just means she’ll have to get you back into the swing of things over the summer.

You know I’d be lost without my trusty DM! You finish before signing your name at the bottom.

You mainly kept tabs on Preston through Snapchat- his story was always full of drama both in the theatrical sense and personal. From what you could gather, he was currently rehearsing with his school’s theater crew for a production of Willy Wonka. Your suspicions were confirmed when you saw him dressed up in a fur jacket and pink skirt- looks like he was Veruca! You were of course proud of him, but also a bit jealous at the fact that he could rock a skirt better than you could ever hope to. You noticed he’d sent you a snap.

OHMYGODTHANKYOUILOVEITAAHHHHHHHHHHH
You chuckled. You’d found an illustrated version of the complete works of Shakespeare at a thrift store with David one day and sent it to Preston for his birthday. Looks like it just got there.

Nudging David, you line up a return shot of the two of you smiling into the camera, revealing David’s yellow beanie and green flannel along with your oversized gray sweater to the camera.

- Happy birthday Preston! And congratulations on your part in the play!

You send it only to be handed a paper by a very amused David a moment later. He doesn’t say anything, he just winks. Giving him a confused look, you gingerly take the paper out of his hand.

To whom it may concern,

Due to numerous recent events, we at Camp Corp must unfortunately remove you from our list of official summer camps. We thank you for your past patronage and hope you find luck elsewhere.

Sincerely,

Ron Dundeer

“We each got one,” David said as he held up an envelope with your name on it.

“Man, it’s like they think we actually gave up on the place.”

The two of you chuckle with each other- you’d already had your own personal boycott going against the company. You’d even managed to get your friends in on it!

“I’m gonna frame mine,” you tell him. “That shit is a badge of honor.”

“_____,” he said in his counselor voice. “Language. You know that’s a quarter for the swear jar!”

“What swear jar?!”

“The one I’m starting today.” He leaned down and planted a kiss on your forehead. You roll your eyes but can’t hide your small smile.

“Fine,” you huff. “But only around here. The lab doesn’t count- especially when shit’s on fire.”

“Deal. Also, now you’re up to fifty cents.”

“I’ll give you my fifty cents.” You wrestle him for a moment until you manage to pin him underneath you on the couch.

“Oh darn,” he says sarcastically, “you got me. Now I have to hold my favorite person. Such a life.” He drops the act and wraps his arms around you, flashing you a wide grin. You bend down and kiss him.

“You’re a big nerd, you know?” you say as you rest your head on his chest.

“Am I at least your nerd?”

“Yeah. You’re my nerd.”

“Then I’m a happy nerd.”

He holds you tighter, sighing contentedly. As he begins to move his fingers through your hair, you
feel your eyelids getting heavy. You weren’t tired— the contact was just so soothing for you. And David was always so warm and comfortable to lay on. You allowed your eyes to close as he gently plays with your hair, happy to be sharing this closeness with him.

A buzzing noise brings your attention back to your forgotten phone.

- Daily text #92.

You smile— that was Max. He’d done well in keeping his promise to text you at least once a day since he’d returned home, and you’d made sure to respond to every one as quickly as possible. He’d still give you and David shit when he could, but you and he had maintained the close relationship you’d formed over the summer.

- Message received, Max. Still waiting on those letters though.

- I’m not writing you dipshits a letter. I thought I’d made that clear.

- Whatever you say.

You desperately wanted to ask him about what he was doing at home, but you didn’t want to bring up any issues he may be facing. You knew, or at the very least hoped, that he would talk to you if things got really bad, but so far he’d just told you bits and pieces of how school was and such. He and Pikeman seemingly hung out a lot which you were grateful for. You knew Max had at least one close friend.

“Is that Max?” David asks.

“Yeah. Want to say hello?”

“Tell him I say that I’m looking forward to another great summer full of fun, sunshine, and music!” He gives you his grin and you smile.

- David says hello and that he’s looking forward to seeing you again this summer. He’s excited for music camp.

- Tell him I said to suck a dick.

“Max sends his love,” you tell David, and you meant it. Max may have an interesting way of showing his affection, but you knew that he really did like David— even if he would never dare say it out loud.

Life was good.

Chapter End Notes
Hello everyone! Due to the fact that this fic is super freaking long and I'm lazy, consider this to be the beginning of book 2. I'm not gonna separate it because again, I'm lazy, but yeah! Book 2: start!
This chapter's title was inspired by 'Unsteady" by X-Ambassadors. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFjryf8zH_M

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Midterms: taken.
Backpack: on the floor.
Pants: off.

Oh yeah, it's break time.

The past few weeks had been incredibly stressful due to midterms, and you and David had done your best to help each other prepare. Long nights full of flashcards and practice tests had become the normal for the two of you as you studied your asses off. It had all paid off in the end, as you walked out of your tests more confident than you had for a long time. Well, except for math.

Freakin' calculus. You didn’t think you’d failed but your grade remains to be seen. As you crawled under the covers, you decided you weren’t going to worry about it and let told yourself to relax for the next week. With Thanksgiving right around the corner, you couldn’t wait to celebrate with everyone and gain about ten pounds in the process. More importantly to you, though, was that it was going to be the first major holiday you were going to spend with David as a couple.

Halloween had been a blast for the two of you, as you’d dressed up like Meg and Hercules to hand out candy before heading to a party your friends were hosting, but Thanksgiving was different. You couldn’t wait to spend the day with him. Scratch that, you couldn’t wait to spend the week with him, as it will be the most time you’d had with each other during the day since camp.

“_____! You home?” David’s voice rang through the small house as he made his way through the front door.

“Bedroom!”

You reached out your arms when he found his way in prompting him to come in for a hug. What you didn’t expect was him to completely lay on top of you before going limp.

“Davey!” you laughed, “What are you doing?”

“Getting comfortable.” He rests the side of his head against your face with a silly smile, doing his best to cover as much of it as possible.

“David I swear to God,” you joke as you shake your head back and forth slightly.

“Hey don’t move so much! You’re being a bad pillow!”

“BOY.”
He laughs at your reaction before rolling off and into the bed next to you. You scoot closer.  
“How’d it go today?”

“Fantastic! But I know I couldn’t have done it without your help!” He suddenly pulls you into a tight hug, pressing your cheeks close together. You giggle.

“Glad to hear it.” You give him a small kiss on the cheek before laying your head on his chest. He, in turn, wraps one arm around your form and places the other behind his head.

As you lay, you begin to hear the soft pitter-patter of rain begin to fall lazily onto the roof. It was comforting- the steady rhythm of the falling water put you fully into a relaxed state of mind. David rolls over and opens the blinds, revealing the rain in its entirety as it splashes against the window, slowly picking up in intensity.

“Looks like a storm,” you say as you turn him into the little spoon and he hums in agreement. You liked stormy days- they always lead to hot cocoa and cuddles.

The buzzing of your phone turned your attention away from the window and back towards the nightstand. You make a move to grab it, but David holds your hand.

“Let’s put them on silent for a while?”

“But what if it’s Max?”

David squeezes your hand in understanding and you reach for the phone. You’d been a bit troubled in the past week as Max hadn’t sent you a single message. It wouldn’t have bothered you so much if he hadn’t been so adamant at texting you everyday. The first day you’d been a bit hurt, but David assured you that he was probably just really busy and couldn’t find the time. The second day, you hoped that you hadn’t done anything to make him angry, but reading back through your messages, you didn’t see anything that could have done it, at least from your perspective.

Day five had you in a panic. You did your best to focus on your studies, but only because you had to, and you obsessively checked your phone all day long. Now, eight days had passed, and you knew something was wrong. Why hadn’t he texted you? Was he hurt? In danger? Did he need help?

Grabbing the small device, you found that the text wasn’t from Max, but from a number you didn’t recognize. Opening it, you found the following message:

- **Hello _____, this is Edward Pikeman. My apologies for texting you out of the blue, but I was wondering if you’d heard from Max lately. It seemed like the two of you were close and since I haven’t seen him in awhile, I thought you might have?**

Your stomach hit the fucking floor.

“David. DAVID.”

He jumped to your side. “What happened?”

You couldn’t speak- your mind wouldn’t let you as it was currently doing its best to fight off whatever horrible thoughts that were trying to make their way into your head. Slowly, you calm down your breathing enough to speak.
“Max is missing. Pikeman just texted me asking where he was.”

David’s eyes went wide with worry. “Missing?”

“David we have to find him.” It was the only thing on your mind. You frantically got out of the bed to throw your pants back on and were halfway out the door before David managed to catch you.

“______, I know you’re worried, but maybe this is just some sort of misunderstanding? Maybe Max is just...really sick! Yeah! And he hasn’t been able to be outside much?”

“Then why hasn’t he sent me any messages?”

“His...phone died?” David attempted, but it didn’t convince either of you. “Even if Max is...missing,” his pupils shrank at the word, “where would we even begin to look?”

“Don’t we have his address from his application? We start there. I’m going. Are you coming with me?”

“But his parents never put down their address! I don’t know where he lives!”

You take a deep breath and look at your phone. “But Pikeman does. David, send out a message to everyone who might have the slightest idea as to where Max might be. I’ll text Pikeman to see what he knows.”

David nods, just as worried as you are before running to grab his phone. You shakily sit down on the couch and begin to type away.

- Hey Ed. No, Max hasn’t talked to me in a while. When was the last time you saw him?

- I saw him about three days ago. He seemed upset about something, but didn’t want to get into it.

Three days? He’s been missing for three fucking days?!

- Do you know where he lives?

- I’m afraid not. Max never wanted me to go over to his house.

Son of a bitch.

- I’ll let you know what I find out, Pikeman. In the meantime, will you ask around to see if anyone knows anything?

- Consider it done. Edward Pikeman, reporting out.
You stared at the messages with your hand over your mouth. Three days. Max has been missing for three. Fucking. Days. You felt sick to your stomach and retched slightly at the thought of him-

-No. No, he’s not dead. He can’t be- he’s way too resourceful. You did your best to reassure yourself, but it didn’t help your stomach.

“Alright, I sent a message to Nikki and Neil, but-” David stopped talking at the sight of your trembling form on the couch. Concerned, he sat beside you and gently wrapped his arms around you. “Hey, it’s going to be ok. I’m sure Max is alright. L-like I said, it’s probably just-”

“It’s been three days since anyone’s heard from him, David,” you say softly and he holds you tighter.

“Let’s just….think about this for a minute. It’s going to get dark soon, and we shouldn’t drive all night, especially in the rain. It’s dangerous!”

“But we can’t just sit and do nothing! What if he’s in danger, David?”

He bites his lip nervously before closing his eyes and sighing. “Ok. If we haven’t heard from either him or someone who knows where he is by tomorrow morning, we’ll go.”

You wanted to argue, you really did. But you knew that he’s right. You wouldn’t be able to do anything if you ended up getting hurt on the way there. You breath in deeply and squeeze his hand. “Ok. If we haven’t heard, we’ll go tomorrow.”

The two of you sat on the couch for the rest of the evening trying to distract yourselves from your worry. Dinner was nonexistent as neither of you had any kind of appetite, and even though it was stormy, you didn’t want cocoa. It just felt wrong to drink it if Max was really out there somewhere. You hoped it wasn’t raining where he was.

David eventually made his way back into the bedroom to drag out the comforter and wrapped it around the two of you when he returned. You lean your head on his shoulder and take his hand. You feel him squeeze it gently, trying to comfort you in his small ways and you loved him for it. He put on a movie but you didn’t pay attention to which one it was. You assumed something that would try to lighten the mood, but you wouldn’t be able to focus on it. Not tonight. Eventually, you find it too difficult to keep your eyes open and let yourself pass out on David.

Chapter End Notes

I got this out at like, 11:20 pm where I live it's still technically Sunday.

OOF.
A few hours later, you’re woken up by David moving around in his sleep next to you. His face was strained and his breathing was quick and shallow. Small twitching movements in his hands and feet all gave way to the fact he was having a nightmare. They’d become somewhat of a common occurrence since you’d gotten home from camp, but he didn’t seem to remember what they were about. And if he did, he didn’t tell you. You had your guesses, though.

Reaching up, you gently run your fingers through his hair- it always seemed to calm him down and tonight was no exception. After a few minutes, his breathing slowed back down and his face relaxed. You wished he’d tell you outright what troubled him in his sleep, but you didn’t want to rile him up during the day. Maybe you’d ask him soonish.

A small knock on the door broke you from your thoughts and raised your curiosity. Double checking that David was ok, you gingerly remove yourself from him and make your way to the door.

“Hello?” you ask groggily as you crack open the door.

“Hey.” A familiar voice rips you right out of your sleepy state. Max was on your doorstep, soaking wet and carrying a small yellow backpack. “You said no questions, right?” he asks as he wipes his eyes with his shoulder.

You don’t say anything. You merely pick him up and bring him inside, closing the door behind you.

David is soon awoken by the sound of the shower turning on. He checked the time- 1:00 am. He immediately realizes that you’re not by his side and assumes it’s you, but then he sees your form silently move from the bathroom into the bedroom.

_Maybe she forgot pajamas?

He rubs his eyes and makes his way into the bedroom where he finds you digging through your dresser.

“_____? You ok?” His voice was quiet as he watched you sift through clothes. You didn’t seem to hear him. “_____?”

You jump at the sound of David’s voice and turn to find him standing in the doorway, more confused than anything.

“Hey David. Didn’t mean to wake you. I’ll just be a moment.” You continue digging through the drawers until you find a small pair of basketball shorts and an old t-shirt from when you were in high school. “These should fit,” you mumble to yourself.
“What was that?” he asks, still not fully awake.

“Oh, nothing. Just...talking to myself I guess.” You move to the door and give him a small kiss. “Head to bed, I’ll be there soon.”

David nods and goes to grab the blanket from the couch. You make sure he’s comfortable before heading back to the bathroom. You give the door a small knock. “Max? I have some fresh clothes for you. May I come in?”

“Yeah just...set them somewhere. I don’t care.”

You enter to the sound of the water still running and set the dry clothes on the counter.

“I’ll be in the kitchen when you’re done. There’s towels on the rack for when you get out.”

He doesn’t say anything more, so you leave the bathroom giving Max his privacy. As you walk to the kitchen, your mind swims with all kinds of questions. A small, selfish part of you regrets telling him that there would be no questions asked if he came to you, but your relief at the fact that he was ok helps put that feeling at bay. You couldn’t ask him anything tonight, it was too late and you didn’t want to make him feel any more upset than he already was.

But still, you couldn’t stop your mind from bringing forth all kinds of questions. How did he get here? Why did he leave? Was he hurt? Are there others looking for him? You wanted to ask him everything and let him know that he was going to be ok if he did. But you were fearful that if you did, he’d leave. You weren’t sure you’d be able to handle that.

The water stops running and a few minutes later, Max walks into the kitchen dressed in your old clothes. One look at him made you wish you’d had something better for him to wear.

“Sorry I didn’t have anything more comfortable, Max.”

He shrugged. “Can’t blame you. Not like you were expecting a runaway in the dead of night.”

“Runawa-”

“You said no questions.”

You sigh. “You’re right, Max. I did. But you have to understand that we are going to have to talk about this eventually.”

He nods and takes a seat at the table, neither of you knowing what to say.

“You...hungry? I might be able to make something quick if you want.”

He tries to protest but you hear his stomach growl, betraying any kind of argument he was going to make. You feel your heart break just a bit.

“...what do you have?”

You end up making some minute ramen in the microwave for each of you. Sure, it wasn’t super nutritious, but that was the absolute last thing on your mind. All you were focused on was getting this kid something to eat.

The two of you sit quietly as you eat. You tried not to watch him, but you found yourself sneaking concerned glances when he wasn’t looking. Max would occasionally stare at the noodles before eating them, sizing them up before he put them in his mouth. You wondered why, but didn’t ask-
you’d made a promise.

When you’d finished, you walk him to the guest room and show him where everything is in case he needs something in the night.

“David and I will be right next door if you need us, ok? Please don’t hesitate.” You wanted to add next time to the end of your phrase, but stopped yourself before it could snake its way out. “You going to be alright?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. Night.”

“Goodnight, Max.” You gently close the door and make your way back to the bedroom, exhausted. Luckily, David seemed to still be asleep and it relaxed you just a little bit. You had no idea how you were going to explain to him that Max was currently staying in the room right next to yours, but you didn’t want to have to try and explain it tonight. Crawling into bed beside him, you get as close as possible without touching him. You didn’t want to wake him.

He was listing his trees- a good sign. It meant he was sleeping peacefully. Rolling onto your opposite side, you feel him reach out in his sleep and pull you closer to him. You release a melancholy sigh as he unconsciously rests his face in your hair and close your own eyes, drifting off into a dead sleep for the second time that night.

You’re up early the next morning, earlier than David. You don’t feel as tired as you did the night before, but you still weren’t thrilled to be up so early.

David will be up soon you tell yourself, and it was a small comfort. Even with him right next to you, you couldn’t help but feel a bit lonely in the dim light of the morning. You could tell it was still overcast outside, as the light wasn’t a soft yellow, but a cold grayish-white that seeped its way in from between the cracks in the blinds.

Closing your eyes again, you bide your time until David wakes up. You hear him groan slightly as he stretches before running his hand softly through your hair. He bends down and gives you a gentle kiss on your temple before moving to seemingly get out of bed. You turn to face his back as he sits up.

“David?”

He jumps slightly and turns towards you, blushing. “S-sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you up. You usually sleep through that.”

“Wait, do you do that every morning?”

“......maybe.”

You give him a soft smile- you really did love this romantic dork. You prop yourself up onto one elbow and take his hand, gently trying to pull him back into the bed. He complies and wraps you in his arms, giving the top of your head a quick kiss.

You sigh- you didn’t want this moment to end, but you knew you had to tell him about Max. You just hoped he wasn’t upset with you for not telling him earlier.

“There’s something we need to talk about.”

He sighs. “I know. We’ll leave to find him as soon as you-”
“No, David. We’re…we’re not going anywhere. Max is in the guest room as we speak.”

“He’s WHAT!?”

“SHHHH! He’s probably still sleeping. Listen, he showed up last night on our doorstep and said something about being a runaway? So I got him those clothes and sent him to bed.”

David looked at you. Had it been anyone else, he would’ve thought this to be some horrible joke, but after learning his lesson from over the summer, he believed you completely.

“….Can I see him?”

You nod and the two of you quietly sneak out of the bedroom. You put a finger to your lips as you slowly open the door revealing Max sleeping away. You always found it a bit peculiar to see Max asleep. He was always so grumpy, but when he slept, the angry lines in his face disappeared and he was peaceful.

“What are we going to do?” David asks as you close the door as quietly as possible. You didn’t seem to hear his question though, as your hand remained firmly on the doorknob and your intense gaze stared straight ahead at the door in front of you.

“___-”

“I don’t know, David.” You cut him off. “But we can’t send him back.”

“But his parents-”

“I doubt they even care.” Your grip tightened on the handle as your temper began to flare. David put a gentle hand on your shoulder, trying to calm you down. Releasing the handle, you let him pull you into a comforting hug while he stroked the back of your head.

“We’ll figure this out,” he says. “It’s going to be ok.”

You and David do your best to go through your morning routine that day, though it was much quieter than usual. He was a master at silent maneuvering, and you assumed it was because he’d been tiptoeing around you all semester. Still, you did your best to get ready for the day as quietly as possible. You realized that you had no idea what today was actually going to be about- before Max showed up you were planning on just going on full on sweatpants and staying on the couch all day. But maybe you could still do that- you doubted Max would care what you wore.

David, on the other hand, put on actual clothes which made you feel a bit sloppy, but then he looked you up and down, gave you a wink and finger guns and you felt better about yourself again.

Max’s backpack was still in the kitchen where he’d left it the night before, soaking wet and sad. As David set to making breakfast, you took it to the laundry room to dry it all out. It didn’t seem to be packed very well, more like a bunch of whatever he could grab was hastily thrown inside. At the bottom, you found an old matted teddy bear. Some of its stuffing was coming out of ripped seams and one eye was missing. You’d ask David if he could fix it up.

As you started the dryer, you knew that this was going to be an interesting day, to say the least, but you were glad Max was here with you and not out on the street somewhere cold and alone. Your worry had not entirely been replaced yet, but it was subsiding, and right now that was the best you could do.
Max you're breaking my heart again.

Also! Quick announcement. There will most likely not be a Sunday update this weekend because I'll be traveling home from Canada! It's one hell of a drive so, I'll most likely be shooting for Monday instead!
Max woke up the next morning wrapped in clean sheets and to the scent of something sweet cooking just beyond his door. He wasn’t sure whether or not to leave the room yet, so he took to staring at the door instead, worried.

Had coming here been a bad idea? You didn’t seem to hate the fact that he’d showed up- quite the opposite, and Max knew David was going to be his stupid happy self no matter what, but he still felt like shit about the entire situation and knew he was going to have to tell you what happened sooner or later.

Sighing, he slid out of the bed and made his way into the kitchen where he saw you and David making breakfast. David was at the stove cooking what seemed to be pancakes and with a flick of the pan Max’s suspicions were confirmed. You were at David’s back as you chopped up various fruit at the counter behind him. Max sat and watched as the two of you worked with each other in a comfortable silence. It was a sight he didn’t see at home.

David moved to place the completed pancake on the plate next to him when he noticed Max standing by the table.

“Good morning Max! Go ahead and take a seat, food’s almost ready.”

Before long, you and David joined him at the table with a stack of pancakes and a bowl of fruit salad. It was a bit awkward at first, as no one really knew how to start a conversation. The elephant in the room was absolutely suffocating and no one wanted to put it out of its misery.

“So,” Max started, “how have things been?”

“Oh it’s been wonderful Max!” David said. “We’ve done all kinds of things in just a few short months. For example just last month…” David continued on about some of the things you and he had been up to, and you were grateful he’d been given the gift of gab. You were still troubled though, as Max didn’t seem comfortable. He certainly wasn’t himself today, though you assumed it was because of….whatever it is that had happened to him.

“… wasn’t that fun,_____?” David gave you huge smile and you felt guilty at the fact that you hadn’t been paying attention to his story at all.

“Y-yeah! It sure was.” You hastily put a piece of pancake in your mouth before he asks to elaborate. You feel him grab your hand and give it a gentle squeeze and you do your best to give him a smile with your mouth full of food.

“Ahem.” Both of you turn your attention to an unamused Max. “While I’m glad you’re both still the idiots I was forced to get to know over the summer, could you maybe tone it down a bit? I am
You and David blush a bit and give him embarrassed smiles. “Sorry Max,” you say. “We’ll stop.”

He rolls his eyes before picking at his breakfast. Strangely, his little outburst made you feel a bit better- it was certainly more like the Max you knew and you hoped he would continue to feel a bit more comfortable. But, with David’s story over, another crushing silence invaded the space between the three of you. It was so bad that all three of you jumped at the sound of David’s phone ringing. David chuckled nervously as he checked it.

“Oh darn,” he says. “Looks like they’re calling me in today. Will you two be alright?”

“No,” you say jokingly. “We’re going to get into all kinds of trouble. Isn’t that right Max?”

“Yeah but don’t worry David. We’ll use our one phone call to let you know how much bail is.”

You snicker and Max gives David a smirk. David rolls his eyes.

“I’ll be home as soon as I can.” David gives you a quick kiss and heads out the door, but not without telling you and Max not to have too much fun without him. You stare at the closed door leaning your head on one of your palms and sigh, lovestruck.

“He left, you know. You can stop eye-fucking the door.”

You chuckle and roll your eyes at Max’s attitude. “Max, I think you nailed it months ago when you said ‘all I do is fawn over David all day’ because that’s kinda how I feel.”

“Riiight.” It wasn’t a sarcastic response, but a hesitant one.

“Come on Max, let’s clean up.”

The two of you get to work on cleaning the dishes. You deal with the soap and water and hand them to Max for drying. You were both quiet, though Max’s silence was uneasy while yours was content.

“So,” Max started, trying to break the silence, “I never took you as the housewife kind. What gives?”

“I’m not. David and I share the responsibilities around here. Neither is above the other.”

“But you’re stuck here all day while he’s at work! Now you’ll have to cook and clean everything by yourself until he gets home. How is that not a housewife roll?”

“Usually things are a bit...different. But then again, so is today.” You give Max a small wink.

“Sure, sometimes I have to take over a little more than usual, but other times David does. It tends to balance out pretty well. It’s a partnership, you know?”

“Whatever you say Mrs. David.”

“Mrs. David? I thought we eloped, Max. Are we getting a divorce?”

He snickers as the two of you finish with the dishes. You were happy he was starting to relax a bit more as the day went on, and you were doing your best to not bring up any burning questions you had. You’d have figure out a way to keep your promise to Max as well ask have your questions answered, but you’d wait until tomorrow.
You ended up texting everyone to let them know Max was ok, and asked the Millers for legal advice on what to do with a missing child. They said you had to report it, but by letting them know you already had. They said they’d give you and David a few days to figure things out before they passed it on, but the situation would be looked into and dealt with accordingly.

Max and you spent the day on the couch playing video games and giving each other shit about it. It was a nice way to spend the day, and Max slowly was able to get more comfortable in your little home.

David returned home a few hours later and smiled at the sight of you and Max on the couch. It reminded him of the night at camp that he’d found you and Max in front of the television. “I’m home!” he called out, diverting yours and Max’s attention to the door. As he made his way over to the couch, you stand and do the same, meeting in the middle for a tight embrace and a small kiss.

“Welcome home,” you say softly, still holding him a little closer than arms length.

Max watches your interactions cautiously. Did people really act like that? He assumed that if anybody did it would be you and David, seeing as you’re both hopeless, but he was still not quite sure how to handle such blatant displays of affection. It’s not like he saw much of it himself.

He quickly looked away as soon as it seemed you and David were going to release each other and join him on the couch. It was certainly… different than what Max was used to, to put it simply. Usually the house was louder once his dad returned home, but with you and David, it was comfortable- homely.

The two of you sit on either side of Max doing your best not to alienate him. You give him a small smirk.

“What?” he asks.

“You didn’t say anything this time. You getting used to us or something?” You give him a playful wink.

“Actually, I was just trying to swallow my own vomit. Can’t exactly talk with a mouth full of old breakfast.”

You laugh at him- this fucking kid.

“So,” David says, “what did my favorite people get up to today?”

“Just video games.” Max’s response was quick and to the point. Uncharacteristically so. Your eyes flash to David’s and he understands the message.

*Keep going.*

“Video games are always fun! What did you guys play? Did you win? _____ always beats me in Mario Kart.”

“Mario Kart and sometimes.” Max was looking straight ahead. Was he afraid of something?

“W-well I noticed the dishes were all cleaned up! Thank you for doing that! Did you help out, too Max?”
“Yes.”

You couldn’t take it anymore. “Max? You know you can talk to us, right? It’s... it’s ok.”

“I’m fine. I’m going to lie down.” He was out of the room in a flash leaving you and David sitting there wondering what just happened. You looked at each other, confused and concerned for Max—you hadn’t meant to upset him. You felt awful and David could see it on your face. He scooted closer and put an arm around your shoulder.

“Hey it’s not your fault. You didn’t know.”

“I know but I’m just worried about him. He was seemingly fine all day and then he just did… whatever that was.”

David paused for a moment. “Do you- do you think it’s me?” He seemed ready to face the worst.

“What?! God no David! I know it’s not you!”

“But you said it yourself. He was fine until I got home! And during breakfast he was uncomfortable and-“

“David.” You grasp his hand and give it a firm squeeze. “I know for a fact it isn’t you.”

David wanted to ask how you knew, but the tone of your voice and intensity in your gaze let him know that he didn’t need to ask. You knew. And he wasn’t going to challenge it. “I believe you.”

You give him a reassuring kiss before leaning your back against the couch. David follows suit and you rest your head on his shoulder.

“What are we going to do?” he asks. “As much as I’d love to keep him here, we can’t legally harbor a child!”

“I talked to the Millers. They said they can give us three days before an investigation is launched.”

“That’s so little time.”

“I know.”

You were at a loss. Max had obviously come to you in a time of need, but you had no idea how to help him. It was killing you. Whatever it was he had faced was a tipping point- Max was a tough kid, not one you would have taken as one who would run. Yet there he was in your guest room.

“David? Do you think you could try talking to him tomorrow? I promised him I wouldn’t ask him any questions but-“

“Of course I will. You don’t even need to ask.”

You smile and kiss him lovingly on the cheek. You had no idea what was going to happen, but you knew David would be there with you the whole time. “I love you.”

He puts an arm around your shoulder and kisses the top of your head. “I love you, too.”
I'M BACK EVERYONE CANADA WAS LIT. I was there for a football game. I'm in the marching band and we drove 16 hours (both ways, 32 total) to go support them and it was one of the best road trips I've ever taken. Thank you all for being patient for this update!
Max could hear you and David talking quietly in the living room. About him, undoubtedly. Maybe coming here had been a bad idea. All he was doing was putting stress on you and David, and who the hell was he to do that? He knew the two of you had your own lives to lead, but he couldn’t go back to his house.

A small knock on the door drew Max’s attention to it. “Max?” It was David. “I have your clothes. May I come in?”

Max opened the door to find David there with a nice small stack of laundry, clean and warm. He could smell something savory coming from the kitchen- looks like you’d started dinner.

“Oh, thanks,” Max said as he took the small pile from David.

“It’s no trouble. Would you like to help with dinner? We’re making stir fry!” He gave Max that cheesy grin he’s known for, waiting for a response.

“Let me change first. And only if you two keep your hands off each other.” He closed the door swiftly.

“No promises!” David called through the door, and Max rolled his eyes as he slipped into his hoodie and a pair of pants. You and David were hopeless- that was undeniable, but at least you weren’t pressing him for information. Max knew he would have to talk about it soon if not for his sake then yours, but for now, he would just try his best to stay out of yours and David’s way.

Exiting the room, he found David’s arms wrapped around you from behind and his chin on your shoulder watching as you cut a carrot into small slices. Neither of you seemed to notice the pan behind you starting to smoke.

“Uh guys? The pan?” Max pointed to the stove and you and David turned, immediately jumping into damage control mode once you saw the smoke. David moved the pan off the burner while you grabbed the fire extinguisher just in case. The moves almost looked practiced.

“Nice catch Max!” David says. “Don’t know where we’d be without you!”

“Probably wondering why the fire alarm was going off. Seriously, how often has that happened?”

You and David glanced at each other before looking back to Max. He slaps his face to his hand. “Idiots.”
You roll your eyes with a smile. “Since you’re out, still want to help? I think David needs some help handling the stove.” You shoot Max a small wink. He shrugs.

You smile as you listen to David teach Max how to handle the pan when the oil was hot and how to safely put the ingredients in. It was sweet— you liked it when they got along, rare as it may be (from Max’s side at least).

The three of you made a successful stir fry and dinner was filled with light conversation. You noticed Max easing up a little again and he’d crack jokes at you and David about every little thing he could. You were having a good time, but as dinner continued, you noticed David growing a bit more uncomfortable. You hoped it wasn’t the jokes— you kind of didn’t want them to stop. Max was a little shit but damn he was funny. But by the time it was time to do the dishes, he was tense.

“David? You ok?” you ask him, concerned.

He sighs somewhat sadly. “As much as I’d love to say yes, I can’t. Max,” he looks at the boy across the table, “I once told you that you shouldn’t have to pretend like everything is ok when it’s not, and I feel like I need to set an example for you now. I understand if what happened is something that’s...difficult to get into, but we will have to eventually and we’ll need you to tell us as much as you can. We want to help you, Max. But we need to figure out how, and fast.”

You give David a sympathetic look and take his hand, stroking the top with your thumb. You let out a small sigh as well and look to Max. “We only have about two more days to figure things out, Max. After that, we don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Max looked at the two of you and guilt slowly crept its way into his mind. This wasn’t what he’d intended to happen, but he had a feeling it’s what was going to. “I’ll...fill you in tomorrow. I’m going to bed.” With that, he hopped of his chair and disappeared into the guest room, leaving you and David alone at the table.

You bring a fist to your mouth and close your eyes, shaking your head side to side slowly. This kid was breaking your heart little by little and you could barely stand it. All you wanted to do was throw him in your arms and never let him go again. You’d let go once— now look where he was.

“_____?” David asks. “I’m not sure if you knew about this, but I think I have at least one answer to our questions.” He pulls out a muddy and thoroughly worn envelope. You could vaguely make out yours and David’s address on it. You sigh and set it back on the table.

David frowned. He knew Max’s home life wasn’t great, but had no idea what could’ve possibly happened to make him come here. Despite what you told him, David wasn’t convinced Max liked him much, not nearly as much as he seemed to like you, anyway. He would call his relationship with Max complicated. David, of course, loved Max just as much as you did, but he was hesitant to show it in anything larger than small increments. He didn’t want to make Max uncomfortable, so he would restrain himself as much as he could, even if it was difficult.

“Should we just go to bed?” you ask. “To be honest I don’t think I’m up for much more tonight.”

“Sure,” he says softly. “Don’t worry about the dishes, I’ll take care of them and meet you there.”

Part of you wanted to protest, but you didn’t. You stand and kiss his cheek before making your way into the bedroom, stopping only to pause at Max’s door. You look at it briefly before disappearing behind your own.
You flop yourself down onto the bed. For not having done much during the day, you were exhausted. You didn’t really know how to feel about the whole situation and it troubled you, but it’s not like you’d ever gone through this before. You close your eyes, ready for the day to be over.

The next morning was lazy. You woke up to find David’s arm wrapped around your waist and his soft snoring coming from behind you. This wouldn’t have been so unusual if it wasn’t already 11:15. David never sleeps this late, and you hoped he hadn’t had a rough night. Rolling over, you run a gentle hand through his hair and watch as whatever tension he’d had during the night slowly began to fade.

Yeah, you think. Rough night. Your lips find his and you eventually feel his grip on your waist tighten just the slightest bit, letting you know he was awake. Pulling away slowly, you watch as his eyes flutter open and focus on your face. He smiles warmly and normally you’d return it, but he looked so tired behind the smile that today you just couldn’t. You cup his face with your hand and lovingly stroke his cheek with your thumb, concerned.

“Morning, Davey.”

David doesn’t miss the worried lines etched onto your face nor the careful tone of your voice. “Good morning. Is everything ok?” He was worried about Max. Had something happened?

You sigh. “David…I’ve noticed that you have nightmares a lot. Do you, you know, need to talk about it?”

David looks down, saddened. “I didn’t think you knew. How long has it been happening?”

“I first noticed them a few weeks after camp. I’m worried about you, David. Please,” you grasp his hand in both of yours, “let me know what’s wrong? I want to help you.”

He pauses and sits up, steadying himself. “It’s mainly about you, _____. I keep seeing your body back at camp and I just…” He curls in on himself and you reach to embrace him, doing your best to comfort him. “It’s the most common, but I still see Daniel and Cameron, too. I keep hoping it’ll stop but it just hasn’t.”

You’d expected Cameron and Daniel, but the thought that you might be a source of his nightmares never even occurred to you. You felt selfish.

“I’m so sorry, David. Is there anything I can do?”

He manages a weak smile. “Sometimes in the night, I can feel you stroke my hair. It...helps a bit. I guess I never put two and two together until now, though.” His face suddenly drops again. “Wait, how often do I wake you up?”

“Maybe once every two weeks or so?”

“I’m...I’m sorry, I-”

“David.” You grab his chin and make him look you in the eye. “Do not ever apologize for having nightmares. You went through some traumatic shit and you’re still processing. It’s not your fault.”

He gives you another small smile before planting a chaste kiss on your lips. “Thank you. Also, that’s a quarter for the swear jar.”

You decided to leave it there for now as David had told you what was on his mind. You’d talk more about it with him at a later date, but you were glad he got at least a little bit of it out in the
open. You wrap your arm around David’s chest and pull him close, letting him rest his head on your shoulders. You love this man.

A small knock on the door brings your attention away from David. Untangling from each other, you call Max in and watch as he hesitantly pokes his head in the door.

“Hey Max!” David calls. “Come on in!”

He walks into the room and stands next to the bed. He seemed upset and you furrowed your brow.

“Max?”

“I’m ready to talk and I’m only going to say it once so listen up.” He crossed his arms and looked away from you. You don’t hesitate to pull him up on the bed and set him between you and David, surprising him, but he doesn’t say anything.

“Whenever you’re ready Max,” David says.

Max sighs. “Things went downhill fast as soon as I got home from camp. More so than usual anyway. Sure, parents were still fighting and didn’t give a shit about me- that was normal, but then they started asking me things. What did you do? How was it? Make any friends? It was almost like they cared. But when I’d answer, they’d just ignore me again, so I stopped responding.

“Pikeman ended up being pretty cool. Gave me a place to go when shit got to be too much. I didn’t have to sit through as many screaming matches about how much money I was wasting my parents which was nice so I started spending more time over there. For whatever reason, my parents didn’t like that, so they tried to forbid me from going over. Like, what the fuck? Did they just want total control over my life? They already hovered over every little thing I ate or wore and never hesitated to tell me how much I cost.

“So I started sneaking out more and more. My dad caught me one night and practically screamed my head off for being “ungrateful” for all he’s done for me. I told him that they only thing he ever did for me was be a shitty sperm donor and that I’d be better off in the streets than there with he and my mom. Then, the next day…” Max stopped and took a breath. “The next day I came home and all my stuff was on the lawn. It was like they’d taken my shitty room and chucked it out the fucking window. When I asked my dad about it, wanna know what he said?” Max stopped again, blinking back his angry tears.

“He said ‘who are you kid, I have no son.’ My own fucking parents disowned me right there and then. And of course my mom did nothing to stop it, she always just let dad do whatever he wanted. I thought motherly bonds were supposed to be strong, but I guess the fuck not, obviously. How fucking strong can they be if she’s willing to let me go just like that?

“I grabbed what I could from my drawers and what little cash I had and bailed. Found a small hollow to hold up in for a few days while I tried to figure things out and came here when I could considering I really don’t have anywhere else to go.” Max stopped as angry tears began to roll down his face. They were silent like beads of water dripping off an icicle in the afternoon sun. You gently wrapped your arms around him and pull him close to you. You feel him do the same as you begin to run your hand through his curly hair, doing your best to comfort the young boy you’d come to love like your own. You didn’t cry- you couldn’t. Max needed you to be strong for him and you knew it, so you did your best to keep your face dry as he let his become wet.

You soon find David’s arms wrapping around the two of you as he does his best to fight back his own tears. No child deserved to go through what Max had, and David was not only disheartened, but angry. What kind of parents could do something like that to a child? How can they live with
“Max,” you say softly, “I’m not sure what we’re going to be able to do. I can’t predict the future, but my guess is that you’ll be placed into a foster home. You know that, right?”

He nods against your chest.

“It’s going to be ok. I promise you that. But what I can’t promise is that you’re going to be able to stay here for much longer than a few days. Once the Millers report you, you’ll probably be taken away from us. Do you understand that?” Your words were gentle, not harsh. Max nods again and you sigh, holding him tighter. The three of you stay like that for some time as you and David hold onto the child that had come to you in his hour of need. You remembered back to when you first met Max all those months ago and how cautious you thought you’d have to be around him. That was all before he’d slowly wormed his way into your heart, and now you weren’t sure if you’d ever see him again after tomorrow.

“Let’s go to the beach,” you find yourself saying, and David and Max look at you, confused.

“The beach?” David asks. “Right now?”

“Yeah.” Your mind was still reeling. “Why not? It’ll get us out of the house at the very least.”

David and Max looked at each other before looking back to you. At first glance, one may have thought your face was a blank slate, but upon closer inspection your eyes deceived the fact that you were thinking about something.

“Do you...think there’s something there?” Max asks.

“No,” you admit. “I don’t. Just the beach.” You look down at Max softly. “Have you ever been, Max?”

“No?” He wasn’t sure where you were going with this.

“_____, I hate to put a damper on things but, it’s the end of November? Won’t it be cold?” David asks, and you didn’t blame him. You knew just as well as he did that the beach wasn’t always the best place to be- especially in winter. But as you looked through the window and watched as the haze of the morning slowly giving way to the sun above, you knew that even if it was going to be cold, the day would at least be nice.

“Probably,” you say. “But I still want to go. We don’t have to get in the water or anything. Beach combing can be fun. Maybe we can bring a kite...” you keep staring out the window and a small smile finds its way onto your face. “A kite is always fun.”

Max waves his hand in front of your face. “You ok? You’re acting a bit spacey.”

You take a deep breath and look at him again, still smiling. “I’m ok, Max. Do you want to go to the beach?”

Max looked to David who just shrugged- he was as confused as Max was. “I mean, sure?”

“Cool,” you say as you release him. “I think you’re going to like it. Go get dressed, David and I are right behind you.”

Max gives you one more curious look before doing as you say, leaving you and David alone again.
“Um, _____? Do you….have a plan?” David asks hesitantly.

You sigh. “David, I think our hands are tied here. I don’t know if there’s anything we’re going to be able to do for Max in the time we left. At the very least, we should spend the time with him making happy memories instead of sad ones. That’s what I think at least.” You bring your knees to your chest and rest your chin upon them.

“I...understand,” he says softly as he rests his hand on your back. He straightens out his back and looks at you, eyes now shining with determination. “If that’s the case then gosh darn it, we’re going to make Max’s time here the best he’s ever had. It’ll be even better than camp! We’ll do everything we can to make him happy.” He frowns and narrows his eyes in what you can only describe as a competitive gesture. “Now let’s get dressed for the beach.”

You throw your arms around his neck, grateful that he understands where you’re coming from. “Have I ever mentioned that I love you?” you ask.

He smiles and returns your embrace. “Maybe once or twice.”

Chapter End Notes

Sometimes, all you can do is make the best of a shitty situation. Hang in there, Max.
Soon, the three of you were heading to the beach. You and David had decided on a little-known local spot. You doubted anyone would be there considering there’s a small hike to get to the actual beach, and like David had mentioned earlier, it was November. You parked near the entrance to the trail and David helped you grab what little you’d brought out of the back of the car: a few pails, a kite, a picnic, and some flip flops just in case.

As Max exited the car, he looked around the area searching for hint of sand, but all he saw was a well worn path and walls of berry bushes taller than any of you. It wound its way into the undergrowth of a small forest and Max wasn’t able to follow it anymore once it disappeared.

“I’m no expert,” Max says, “but isn’t a beach supposed to have sand and you know… the ocean?”

You giggled. “Don’t worry Max. It’s just beyond the treeline. Want to lead the way?” He shrugged and began to walk.

The path was narrow so you had to go single file in order to avoid stepping into the bushes. The small patch of trees greeted you with gnarled roots and criss-crossing branches that noticeably darkened the area. David had to duck a bit near the entrance as a fallen tree had leaned itself against its brothers- the casualty of a storm.

The sky was still slightly overcast but you assumed it would burn off soon enough. And even if it didn’t, you wouldn’t mind. All that meant was that there would be less of a chance of other people being there.

Near the end of the path was an old stump with small steps that had been made from years of people climbing over it. You showed Max where to step and how to get over it in the best way possible. When you reached the other side, your feet hit the soft sand and the beach spread out to either side of you for miles. The water wasn’t a royal blue like many would have believed, but rather a greyish green color. Max was confused.

“Is the water like, polluted or something? It looks...not right.”

“Nothing’s wrong with the water, Max. It’s just a cloudy day. Not as much light gets through so less is reflected off the water. But, if the clouds burn off, you’ll get to watch the water turn blue. It’s quite a sight.”

He shrugs again. “You’re the expert I guess.”

The three of you decide to walk the length of the beach for a while seeing what you can find in the sand. David was keeping his eyes peeled for seashells and sand dollars while you were on the hunt
for agates. Max was looking for dead things to poke, or so he says anyway. He ended up getting lucky when he spotted a dead seal on the shore. At first, David had raced after him, trying to get him to *not* poke it with a stick, but you thought it would be a cool teaching moment. The three of you advanced on the creature and discovered a large chunk of it missing. David leaned in for a closer look.

“Looks like a shark bite. Tis the season, after all.”

“No way,” Max says. “It probably got hit by a boat or something.”

“I’m with David on this one,” you say. “A propeller wouldn’t have cut like that and look, you can kind of make out little indentations where the teeth first entered.” You and David spend a bit more time discussing the animal and doing your best to teach Max about it as well, even though he didn’t seem as interested.

“Leave it to you guys to make dead things boring.”

You and David chuckled. “Have you been talking to Nikki lately by any chance?” you tease.

You eventually ended up taking off your sock and shoes in order to walk a little closer to the waterline. The hard sand made it a little easier to walk in and the water gently lapped at the tops of your feet. It was cold and the wet sand between your toes was a bit uncomfortable once the water left, but you didn’t mind. You were able to get used to the water pretty quickly. You spotted a sand dollar and grabbed it for David’s sake.

As the day continued on, you watched as the sun eventually managed to overcome the haze that had tried to overcome the beach. Max’s eyes widened as he saw the water slowly begin to turn from grey to blue and you smiled at his reaction. It really was beautiful- the now blue water was slowly undulating in small swells as it made its way towards the shore. The way the sun reflected off the small waves was nearly blinding as it sparkled. The crash of the waves breaking on the shore was calming, and the way it came up the sand before returning to the ocean was hypnotizing. You could smell the sea salt and hear gulls screeching overhead.

After the walk, you sit in the sand and watch as David and Max tried to get the kite up in the air. David held the kite up above his head and Max took off running down the beach. Between his running and little help from the wind, the kite began to get higher and higher in the air, shrinking in size as it rose. David happily ran over to Max and showed him how to handle the string and keep the kite in the sky. You smiled.

*David would be a great dad.* The thought was in your mind before you realized what you were thinking. You blink and shake your head, coming back to yourself. You thought yourself *way* too unprepared to be a mom- you haven’t even finished college for crying out loud! But, as you watched David place a hand on Max’s shoulder while the kite flew high above them, you wouldn’t deny that David would be a good father figure. Did he even want kids? It wasn’t a conversation you’d had yet. You’d been so focused on your lives in the now that not much thought had been given to your future as a couple.

You ended up staying the whole day at the beach alternating between finding things, flying the kite, drawing pictures in the sand, racing each other, and sand castles. At one point, Max had tried to, and succeeded in wrestling David to the ground before attempting to bury him in the sand. You stepped in before he got much farther than David’s shins, though. Lunch had consisted of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and chips. You’d made Max’s special with grape jelly and gave him a knowing wink once he bit into it. He gave you a quick, jolting hug before tearing into the sandwich...
making your heart swell and leaving David a bit confused. You shrugged at him, a knowing smile on your face.

As the day came to an end, the three of you sat in the sand to watch the sunset. While you loved the ones you’d seen at camp, there was no comparing it to an ocean sunset. The sky on the horizon turned completely orange as the sun sank into the sea, casting its light onto the water in a beam of golden light shining on the surface of the ocean for miles. If you were able to tear your eyes away from the sea, you’d see the first stars of the night beginning to pop out overhead as the night sky crept its way out of hiding from the sunlight.

Once the last of the sun’s rays waved goodbye to this side of the planet, the three of you began to make your way back home. As David drove, you turned around to find Max asleep in the back of the car- seems like the day took more out of him than you realized. He didn’t stir when David took him out of the back seat and carried him into the house, nor did he even seem to notice you taking off his shoes before tucking him into bed. You silently crept your way out of his room and closed the door as quietly as possible, though you had a feeling Max would be sleeping for a while.

As soon as the door closed, David’s lips were on yours and it felt like you were kissing him for the first time all over again. His arms were around your waist while yours hung from his neck. Hell, you even felt one of your feet come off the floor. You weren’t sure where this sudden burst of passion came from but, you weren’t about to question it.

The next day you woke up to a message from the Millers stating that someone would be by tomorrow to get Max. Yours and David’s hearts broke but you knew you would have to tell Max sooner than later. So, as David made breakfast, you sat Max across from you to try and break the news as gently as possible.

“Max, this is...your last day here,” you try, and you cringe a bit at your words. There was probably a better way to phrase that.

“In what sense? Am I dying or are you kicking me out?”

“What?! Neither! Here just-” you cut yourself off and hand him your phone, watching his reaction carefully as he studies the message. His face moves from curious to apathetic and you feel like trash. “We had a feeling this would happen, remember?”

He nods and turns away from your direction seemingly not trusting himself to speak. David glances over from the counter and winces slightly at the scene before him.

“Hey kiddo,” he says, making his way over to Max. “I know this is going to be tough, but ____’s and my hands are tied here. Of course we don’t want you to go but-”

“I get it,” Max says. “My parents didn’t want me and now you want me out of your hair too.”

“Max, your parents are assholes who obviously don’t know anything about how awesome a kid you are. Now listen, this isn’t a fun or easy situation to be in, but we want to make it as relatively painless as possible for you. Is there anything we can do to make you feel better?”

You and Max stare at David in surprise before glancing at each other. Neither of you really knew what to say, as it was always such a shock to hear even something remotely close to a swear word come out of David’s mouth, and the last time David’s cursing was directed at Max was when he was upset at him. Now, he was upset for him. Max wasn’t quite sure how to take that.

“I...guess I need more clothes?” Max says.
“It’s a good start,” David says cheerfully as if the last few sentences never even happened. “Finish your breakfast everyone. We have some shopping to do!” With that, he left you and Max alone at the table.

“Is he like, secretly super vulgar when he’s not around campers or…?”

“No,” you reply. “The David you see at camp is just a slightly more excited version of the one at home. Hell he makes me pay into a fucking swear jar.”

“Yeah? How’s that going?”

Before you could answer, David returns with the jar in question, now overflowing with quarters.

“See _____? I told you this would pay off in the end!”

You groan, slightly embarrassed at your bad habit, but Max just laughs.

The rest of the day was taken over by the three of you hitting up various shops to find new clothes for Max. You couldn’t afford anything band name or flashy, but Max didn’t seem to care. He was just grateful to have clothes again as he admittedly didn’t bring nearly as much as he originally thought in that small bag of his. You ended up with a few new pants and shirts, pajamas, and other various things like new shoes and even a nice winter jacket for him. You ended up giving him one of your old suitcases to pack it all in, putting a little piece of your soul with every fold. You decided to watch a movie that night, much like how you had at camp- popcorn bowl in Max’s hair and all. He even fell asleep on your lap again.

As you tucked him into bed for what would be the last time, you found David in the bedroom crying silently.

“David?”

He jumps and looks at you, eyes wet, but tries his best to wipe at them as if he wasn’t just shedding tears.

“O-oh! _____! I didn’t expect to see you here?”

“I... live here? David are you alright?” You place a hand on his shoulder and he covers it with his own.

“I just wish we could do more for him. He deserves so much better.”

As you sit with him, you let your mind wander back to camp. You really did love Max- you couldn’t believe that this may be the last time you see him for a long time. You had no idea where the foster home he was being set to was. Would he even be able to make it to camp? Looking to David, he seemed broken. You knew he loved Max just as much as you did. He loved all his campers, there was no denying that, but you could tell Max was special to him.

There was one thought still swirling in the back of your mind, but it was crazy and somewhat selfish. David would have to be on board with it too, and you were worried he would reject it. If he did, what would you even do? Could you even stay with him? After another few minutes of silence and you wrestling with the idea in your very soul, you decide to pitch it.

“Well, there’s always one more thing we could do.”
gEE I WONDER WHAT THAT COULD POSSIBLY BE
I Could Never Be Ready

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by "I could never be ready" from the Steven Universe soundtrack. Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHDia2IvwFQ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

David whips his head around to look at you. “You’re serious?”

“Deathly.”

“But what if-“

You put your hand up to stop him. “I’ve thought about it a lot, David. Even since before we left camp. We may not know what we’re doing but neither does anyone else. Max trusts us, and that’s more than some can say.”

You and David look at each other for a tense moment, and you prayed he would agree. He seemed to be wrestling with the idea himself. He put his head in his hands and ran his fingers through his hair. “It’s not going to be easy,” he says finally, “but if you’re as serious as you seem to be, then… then I think we can do it.”

He gives you a small smile and you do the same before moving in for a kiss. He holds you close when you do, unwilling to let go- not that you wanted him to, anyway.

You fall asleep in his arms, both of your happy and just a little bit nervous for the massive change you were about to undergo.

The next morning, you wake up to the sound of your alarm playing the familiar melody you’d come to despise considering its association with being forced to wake up. You reach to turn it off and roll over, only to find David wide awake and staring at you. You jump, startled.

“Good morning!” he says enthusiastically. You’d almost forgotten just how much of a morning person David was.

You grunt. Good morning.

“What?”

Good morning.

“Uh, translation, please?” His voice was slightly nervous.

You groan before finding your actual voice. “Good morning.”

“How did you sleep?”

“Pretty good. You?”

“Oh I didn’t! I’ve been up all night thinking. I was too excited to sleep!”
“David!”

“I couldn't help it! Should we tell him?”

Even in your groggy mindset, you manage to process his words. “Not yet just in case something goes wrong. I’d hate to disappoint him.”

David’s eyes suddenly soften. “Nothing is going to go wrong. Everything is going to work out just fine.”

“I’d like to counter that first part with about three months worth of arguments.”

“I’d like to advocate for the second also with three months worth of arguments.” He kisses your forehead. “Come on. We have to get him up and ready.”

You groaned again. It had been a while since you actually had to wake up early, and you’d almost forgotten just how much it sucked. But, you knew David was right. So you dragged yourself out of the bed to get ready for the morning. It helped wake you up little by little the more you moved about the room and you soon found yourself tittering away in the kitchen set to make breakfast. David was currently making his way into Max’s room in order to wake him up.

There was a serious knot in your stomach as you waited for the stove to heat up, but it wasn’t with fear or worry, it was excitement. You were excited (and slightly terrified, but mostly excited) for what was going to come. Soon, David found his way into the kitchen and wrapped himself around you, nuzzling his face in your hair.

“I know the answer is yes, but I have to make sure. Are you sure about this?”

You smile and crack a few eggs into the pan. “Yes. I’m sure. Are you?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” You turn and give him a kiss just in time for Max to walk into the kitchen.

“Seriously? God if you wanted me to leave faster you could’ve just said something. Enough with this psychological warfare.”

“Sorry Max!” you say. “Didn’t think you’d be out so soon.” You grab him a plate and set the scrambled eggs in front of him taking your seat soon after. “By the way,” you ask, “what happened to your phone?”

“Oh it’s right here,” he says, pulling it out, “I just don’t have any service anymore. I guess my parents cut it off when they kicked me out. Wifi still works though so if you want me to keep sending you messages, I’ll find an app to use or something.”

“I’d like that, Max.”

He gives you a small smile before returning to his breakfast. It was quiet for the most part after that. You all knew what was coming, but none of you wanted it to happen. Max seemed to realize something.

“Wait. Where’s Mr. HoneyNuts?”

You and David looked at each other.

“Mr. HoneyNuts?” David asks.
“My...bear.” He grumbles out the last word, embarrassed to be speaking it.

“Oh, I’ll get him! I hope you don’t mind that I washed him.” You race to the laundry room and return a moment later with the old bear in your hands. Max opens his arms out wide as his eyes get all shiney. It reminded you a lot of David. You give him the bear and watch as he cuddles it close to his chest, pure joy radiating off his face. But, he then realizes that you and David are watching him and he coughs awkwardly, setting the bear to his side. “Uh, thanks. For washing him.”

“No problem, Max,” you say.

There’s a knock at the door and you know that it’s time. Max frowns- he didn’t want to go, but he knew he had to. He stood behind you and David as the door opened, revealing a nice-looking older woman.

“Hello!” Her voice was pleasant and friendly. She reminded you of your dance teacher, in a way. “I’m looking for Max?”

He poked his head out from behind yours and David’s legs. “Uh, hi?” He looked her up and down, cautiously.

“Hello Max! My name is Martha. I’ll be in charge of you for a little while. Are you ready to go?”

“I mean, not really, but I don’t have much of a choice seeing as you’re here and my parents fucking abandoned me.”

“Max!” David scolded. “Language!”

Max rolled his eyes. Martha looked like she’d seen Max’s type before. “Alright young man. For every bad word, you’ll have to do another chore around the house. Understand?”

Oh good fucking luck with that, lady, you think. You hoped your weren’t smirking.

“Whatever.” He turned his back on Martha and looked up to you and David. “Uh, I guess this is goodbye then. Thanks for, you know, harboring me for a while.”

“I wouldn’t call this a goodbye, Max,” David says. “It’s more of a see you later.”

“Why?”

“Well, we’ll see you at camp, right?” You and David share a look, confusing Max.

“I...can’t promise anything. Plus, camp sucks anyway. What losers would want to spend their summer there?” He gives you a smirk and you bring him into a hug. Max wraps his small arms around you and closes his eyes. He really didn’t want to go, but like he stated earlier, he didn’t have much of a choice. When you’d released him, he looked to David who was giving him the same sympathetic smile he’d shown outside the pizza place almost a year and a half ago. Max couldn’t resist and gave David a hug, too. Not just a quick one like he had in the past, but an actual, genuine hug.

“Max?” Martha asks when he pulls away. “Are you ready?”

“I mean no but what can I do about it?”

“Then I supposed we should be heading out. I’ll help you with your bags and then we’ll—”

“Actually Martha,” you interject. “We were hoping to be able to speak with you about a few
things?”

“Oh! Of course! What can I help you with?”

Max walked towards the car as you talked. He wasn’t sure he could look at you and David anymore without breaking down, and fuck if he was doing that in front of mother goose over there. Still, Martha seemed happy when she returned back to the car, bustling to get something out of the front seat and handing it to you before actually returning to the car. As Max got in the backseat, and the car began to roll away, he saw you and David waving from the doorway. He watched you until he couldn’t possibly see you anymore.

“So,” David asks, “where should we start?”

“Well, I know a few people we can put down as references.”

He grins and you disappear inside, ready to call anyone and everyone you could to get this off the ground.

You didn’t even realize until your friend texted you and David asking where you were that you realized it was Thanksgiving. You’d been so caught up in everything else that the day had completely slipped your mind. You sent them a picture of the mountain of paperwork you had and told them you and David were working on something important.

“Hey David?”

“Hmm?” He looked up from his own papers.

“What’s something your thankful for?”

“Well, lots of things! I’m thankful for the outdoors and the rain and the sun and clouds and trees and camp and music and animals and love and….and you.” His jovial rambling turned shy at the end, and you found him to be blushing. You found it endearing.

“I’m thankful for you too, David.” You leaned across the table and kissed him. You each fell into a comfortable silence as you continued in your endeavor to complete the paper trail you had in front of you.

It continued on like that for weeks. Everyday after work or school, the two of you would sit down and work out every little detail of the papers. When one stack was finished, another would be sent in order to be filled out and returned. It was the middle of December by the time you’d managed to get it all done and another two weeks after that to find out you’d been approved. You couldn’t believe it. David picked you up and spun you around the room as you each laughed and cried with each other.

“I told you it would work out,” David said as he set you down.

“I know. I know. But I think we should really thank the Millers for helping expedite the process.”

“We should send them a Christmas card! We haven’t done one yet!”

You laugh and he kisses you. “When do we-”

“Tomorrow,” he says. His eyes suddenly go wide. “I have to work on my jokes!”

“I think they just come with the experience, David.”
“Well that’s not fair! I’m almost twelve years behind!”

“Relax, Davey. You’re jokes are going to be awful and it’ll be great.” You kiss his forehead for reassurance.

Neither of you were able to sleep that night- you were too giddy. Instead, the two of you lay in the bed talking about everything you were going to do and how amazing it’ll be. You weren’t sure how camp was going to work, but you’d cross that bridge when you came to it. Right now all that mattered was the immediate tomorrow, and for you and David, it couldn’t come fast enough. The butterflies were in full force for each of you was the night dragged on. You felt like you were checking the time every five minutes, hoping that it had been an hour, but eventually, you found a message.

- *This is early but daily text #24. Are you up?*

- *Hey Max! Yeah, I’m awake. What’s up?*

Max was relieved. At least he had someone to talk to. But he knew you were going to be upset.

- *I don’t really know how to say this so I’ll just be blunt. I don’t know if I’ll be able to talk to you anymore. I just found out two days ago that I’m leaving to move into a new home soon and I don’t know if they’ll want me to have contact with a random adult. No one is telling me anything and it’s frustrating.*

- *I see. I’m sorry to hear that, Max. And I hope you can keep talking to me, but I’d understand if not. It’s a complicated situation for sure. But, we can at least talk now, right?*

- *I guess so. It wouldn’t be as bad if they’d just fucking tell me where I was going.*

- *Hey, look at it this way. Wherever you’re going, you’re obviously loved very much. You were hand-picked Max!*

That actually made Max feel a little better. He had a small bit of hope that whoever he was going to were already more caring than his parents. He doubted that he’d ever be able to call them mom and dad- the titles were too personal, but at the very least he had someone who actually seemed to care about him.

- *That...helps actually. Thank you.*
No problem, Max. Keep being a cool kid, alright? If I don’t hear from you within a week, I’ll know that I can’t talk anymore, but if that happens and we can’t communicate, know that I’m happy for you and that I’ll miss you a lot.

Max stared at the message. He decided that he’d miss you, too.

You managed to get some sleep that night after your conversation with Max and spent the morning with David eagerly waiting. You went from the bedroom, to the kitchen, to the front lawn, to the curb as your excitement built and built. You had no idea what the car was going to look like, but you knew he was in one of them and finally when a large white sedan pulled up next to you, you knew your son had come home.

Max cautiously got out of the white car and barely had one foot on the ground before you snatched him into your arms, crying tears of joy.

“It’s nice to see you too but I’m not sure how long I can stay. I have to move today.” Max says and you let out a laughing-sob. You couldn’t talk, so David did for you.

“You are moving in, Max. With us.” He gave Max a warm smile and it clicked.

“Wait. Wait wait wait wait wait wait. David. _____ Did you-”

“Welcome home, son,” David said as he placed a hand on Max’s shoulder. Without warning, David latched himself around you and Max and managed to pick you both up off the ground at the same time. “I have a son! I get to be a dad!”

“You mean I have to live with you assholes?” Max said, in shock.

“You! you say. “You’re stuck with us!” None of you could be happier.

That night after you’d officially gotten Max moved in and you were getting ready for bed, David suddenly turned very serious.

“So, listen kiddo, we’re very happy that you’re here, but there’s something your mother and I have decided to be crystal clear with you about.”

You both look at him, curious as to where this was heading.

“Max,” he says, “you were adopted.”

“Are you fucking serious right now?!” Max yells.

“David shut the fuck up,” you chuckle. “That was bad.”

“Oh come on guys!” David says. “It wasn’t that bad. Just wait until tomorrow!”

“How many years till I can move out?”

Chapter End Notes

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.

(This chapter had been planned since day 1 y’all I’m LOOSING IT)
Winter came as suddenly as it always did, ending Autumn with the first real snowfall of the year. You and David were currently snuggled close on the couch late at night, watching as the yard was transformed into a powdery white wonderland. You always tended to forget just how quiet everything was when the snow fell- its blanket a natural silencer for the world around it. You sipped on your mug of hot chocolate, enjoying being warm and comfortable with the man you loved by your side. You nuzzled your face into his neck and smile as he tightened his embrace around you. You feel him lean down and gentle kiss the crown of your head, the only sound for miles now the quiet shifting of the blanket that was across your laps.

Setting your drink down, you take his hand in yours, thumbing over where years of calluses have made them rough and word. You liked that his hands weren’t exactly smooth, as the texture you’d come to love could never be replicated. They were his hands. Ones you loved holding tight and playing with when you could.

“Do you think Max has ever seen the snow?” you whisper, voice barely audible in the dark.

“He has,” David says, squeezing your hand just the tightest bit more. “It snowed once at camp. We had a mini holiday party for it.”

“It snowed in the middle of summer?”

“Yeah. It was a weird day.”

You decided you weren’t going to try and dwell on just how fucked up the weather system had to have been for that to happen but, you were excited to be able to play in the snow with your boys.

“Should we wake him up?”

David releases a soft chuckle. “Something tells me he wouldn’t like that too much.”

You giggle with him, faces scrunched up and dimly lit by moonlight as it shone through the clouds and into the window.

“I still can’t believe he’s ours,” you say as your chest fills with a sense of pride and love.

“Me either. I just hope we can make him happy. He deserves it. All our kids do.” David paused, realizing what he just said. “Uh...heh. Gosh, I guess I find myself thinking like they’re all part of the family.”

You smile. “Of course they are, David. You’re everyone’s dad. I know how much you love those kids and well, I think of them as ours, too.”

David gives you the most heartwarming smile you’d ever seen as his soft eyes look into yours. He
gently stroke your hair and rests his hand on the side of your face before leaning in and kissing you softly. You couldn’t believe how lucky your were. Out of all the people on the planet that this wonderful, loving man could have chosen to be with, he chose you. He chose you to be his one and only, his lover, his best friend, his partner, and the mother to his son. You were so unbelievably in love with him and you hoped that you would always feel that way. Safe, warm, happy.

“I love you,” he said as he pulled away, leaving your lips but never your heart.

“I love you too.”

The next morning, you woke up to find David fiddling with your hair, playing with the ends and tickling your nose in an effort to wake you up. You groan slightly.

“Remind you of anyone?” He asks playfully and you move to swat him, but before you could get your hand in range he catches your wrist and pins you gently, kissing your groggy lips. You close your eyes and sigh into the kiss, allowing yourself to get lost in a sea of pillows and blankets with him. When he does finally release you, you find him to be looking at you with the utmost admiration. It made you blush.

“Davey, stop it!”

“Stop what?”

“Looking at me like that.”

“How else am I supposed to look at you?”

“HOLY SHIT!” Max’s voice rang through the house alarming you and David and sending you from barely awake into bright eyed and bushy tailed as you rushed to his room. Opening the door, you found him still in his pajamas pressed up against the window. “It’s snowing!”

Relieved that he was ok, you and David each let out the breath you didn’t know you were holding.

“Sure is kiddo,” David says as he makes his way over to Max. “Did you know that despite the claim ‘no two snowflakes are alike’, there’s actually a set number of 35 different shapes they fall into? There’s the hexagonal plane and the stellar plane and-”

“David don’t make the snow lame,” Max said. You chuckled.

“Max, let your father teach you about the snow.”

“Oh it’s alright,” David says, “I guess I’ll just have to keep my snowball techniques a secret.”

Max peered at him. “What’s your game, camp man.”

“You’re just going to have to find out!” David said as he beamed at Max. “Now, who wants to go play in the snow?”

The three of you dawn your snow gear and head out into the backyard, sinking slightly as the fluffy white powder had not completely hardened. Finding a good spot out of the way, you flop on your back and rub your arms and legs in and out of your body, making a nice little snow angel. Standing up, you jittered a little as some of the powder made its way into your clothes and against your skin.

“What’s wrong _____, can’t handle a little snow?” Max asked with feint innocence. You smirked.
“Oh I’ll show you snow you little shit. Come here!” You grab a handful of the stuff and begin to chase after him, each of you laughing at the other’s attempts to run through it. Just as you were about to catch him, you feel something hit you softly in the back before you were coated with snow.

“Bulls eye!” David yelled from across the yard.

“Hey no fair I thought you were on my side,” you yell to him.

“All’s fair in love and war!”

_Is that so?_ “Hey Max!” you hold out your hand for a handshake “Truce?”

He takes it. “Anyone willing to go against David is a friend of mine.”

It was an all out war. As Max set to making and throwing snowballs in David’s direction, you began piling up snow to make a wall for cover. David’s aim was impeccable though, and every time you came out of hiding, you found yourself covered head to toe in the white fluff. Max laughed at you.

“Man you suck at this. The goal is to not get-” He was cut off as a snowball was lobbed over the wall and landed right on top of his head, holding down his curls into his face. He looked like one of those mop dogs and you did your best to suppress a laugh. “Not a word,” he said as he fluffed the snow out of his hair.

With it back in its normal position, you and he toss your own retaliation towards David but can’t seem to get much of a shot. Your attempts were valiant but futile as many either fell apart mid air or missed him by inches. Whatever hits you could get on David were matched ten fold.

“I’m not going down like this!” you yell as you grab a massive hunk of snow from your wall. “Max. Cover me.”

He nods and you charge forward towards the other side of the yard. David smirks and reaches for ammo but finds he had run out. With a look of fear in his eyes, he tries to flee but is unable to due to the snows depth. With a battle cry, you leap into the air, legs folding beneath you as you bring your snow cannon ball down upon him, hitting him square in the chest and covering his entire torso. He waves a small white handkerchief in surrender. You and Max cheer in your victory.

The rest of the day is spent with David showing you his snowball technique (the trick was not packing it super dense) and making homemade soup for dinner. The three of you laughed and talked and enjoyed the time you sent together, as a family.
“Ma-ax!” David called from the kitchen, “lunch is ready!”

Max made the short trek from his room to the kitchen, closing the door behind him with a small thud. The sign that said “Max’s Room: KEEP OUT” swung on its hook slightly when the door shut. You and David had given it to him for his birthday a few weeks prior and he seemed to enjoy the way it looked. In fact, Max has managed to carve out a comfortable little room in his new home, decorating it with posters and pictures along with a new bedspread he’d chosen himself. It was a relatively simple design with large stripes of different shades of blue covering the blanket and the pillow cases matched. His closet was full of all different clothes that you and David had bought him and had glow-in-the-dark stickers on the door. A small desk sat underneath the window and had Max’s schoolbooks and backpack on it. Next to it sat a bookshelf that was covered in books and various random items Max had either found or had been given by you and David. Little things like a cool rock David had found or the eagle feather he’d discovered on his bed one day after school (which he assumed was you, but you never gave him a straight answer) were on the shelves, and it made Max smile just the slightest bit when he would look at them. And, beside the bed sat his very own guitar.

“Grilled cheese!” David said cheerfully once Max took his seat. “Then tonight I was hoping you could help me make Tandoori chicken?”

Max smirked slightly. “Still can’t make it on your own?”

“Weeeell…” David rubbed the back of his neck with a cheesy, embarrassed smile, “let’s just say you’re the expert on these things.”

“No problem,” Max said before taking a bite out his sandwich. “Can’t have a repeat of last time I guess.”

David remembered the night clearly. You and he had tried to surprise Max with an Indian-style dinner but fucked it up royally and nearly burnt down the house in the process. You were still trying to air the place out when Max had returned home from school.

“ What the FUCK? ” he said when he walked into a smokey house.

“Hi Max! ” David said like there wasn’t something threatening to take out the stove. Luckily, you’d managed to grab the pot.

“ MOVE ,” you commanded and both boys got out of your way long enough for you to chuck the pot into the front yard where it continued to bubble in the grass. David followed close behind and flooded the thing with the fire extinguisher. As Max looked on in utter confusion, you did your best to fill him in.
“We uh, wanted to surprise you with Tikka Masala but kinda...messed it up?”

He blinked before slapping his hand to his face. “God damn it.” He retreated into his room which, luckily for him, hadn’t been open allowing for minimal smoke. You and David were defeated and cleaned up as best you could- opting to deal with the actual food left in the yard for later. But, then Max came out of his room holding a piece of paper.

“Listen. If you’re going to make it, do it right. Use this recipe instead of whatever bullshit a foodie site claimed to be the best.” He handed it to you and David and started to walk away before you called out to him.

“Will you help us?”

Max and turned and looked at you. “Why?”

“Well...” you gestured to the kitchen, “we don’t know what we’re doing here. And yeah we can follow the recipe but there might be little things we won’t do that you know how to.”

Max sighed. “Fine, but only if you two listen to me. Can you do that?” You and David nodded. “Alright, here’s where we’ll start...”

With Max directing you and David, you were able to successfully recreate the dish and Max had to admit, it tasted delicious.

“So,” Max asked between bites, “when’s _____ coming home?”

“She should be back tomorrow afternoon. I think today they’re trying to see if Timothy has a mate!”

It was true. You’d been called to camp after a possibility that a second hawk had been spotted in the area. You had to take a few day off of school, but luckily your professors understood. Plus, you didn’t have any tests that week, so it was an easy trip.

With today being a Saturday, neither Max nor David had school, so instead David took Max on a hike near the campus. Max wasn’t especially fond of them, but it was something to do outside of the house and he figured he could tolerate them every once in a while. What did bother Max, though, was the fact that David insisted on wearing his camp uniform on every. Single. Hike. Max found it to be embarrassing, but David would always brush off Max’s comments with his own endless positivity.

“Are we. There yet?” Max panted as the uphill climb continued to take everything out of him.

“Almost! Come on Max, you can make it! I Believe in you!” Max had no idea how David was able to get through this shit with seemingly no effort. At least when you were there you could suffer through the uphill portions together, but with David, Max had to tough it out. But, David was right and within a few minutes they’d reached the top of the hill overlooking the small town that they called home. David sat on the ground and pulled out his guitar, playing random chords that could be a song but hadn’t been given lyrics yet. Max eventually laid on the ground beside him, resting his head against David’s side and placed his ankle against his own bent knee. Max wouldn’t admit it out loud, but David was a rather good musician and Max actually had come to enjoy learning from him both from summer and from times at home.

“You wanna show me what you’ve been working on?” David asks. “I hear you strumming in your room sometimes- you sound great!”
Max shrugged. “It’s alright. Nothing special.”

“Aww come on, Max. I really wanna hear!”

“Ugh, fine. But if you record it you’re dead to me.” Max grabbed the guitar from David and played through a few songs he’d learned on his own. He’d taken a liking to the punk scene, listening to bands like Green Day and Paramore so he’d taught himself a few songs each. David wasn’t a huge fan of the genera, but he was happy Max was able to find something in it. And David would admit, he liked some of the less angry songs, even going as far to learn ‘Good Riddance’ for Max’s sake.

Once they were back home, Max flopped onto the couch dead in the legs. David chuckled as he groaned.

“It wasn’t that bad, was it?” David asked.

“No actually, it was worse,” Max said and David chuckled again taking a seat next to him.

“We still have some time before dinner, do you want to do anything?”

“I want to lay here and do nothing until I can feel my legs again.”

David smiled and rolled his eyes, grabbing a book of crosswords from the coffee table in front of him. He was just glad that Max had decided to go at all, so the kid earned a break. They sat quietly on the couch for some time, David working on the puzzles while Max typed away on his phone. He’d kept in good contact with Neil and Nikki during the year, updating them in his new life situation. They couldn’t believe it when they’d first heard from him.

- Wait. They ADOPTED YOU?! Neil.
- NO. WAY. (OvO) Nikki
- I know. Weird right? Like don’t get me wrong I appreciate it but now David’s my dad? And _____’s my mom? Should I even call them that? It feels weird.
- I don’t think you have to, Max. I’m sure they’ll understand if you’re not comfortable with it. Neil.
- Yeah, I wouldn’t worry about it too much. (OvO) Nikki

Max also did his best to keep Pikeman updated, too. He really did end up being a good friend in the end, and Max felt kind of guilty about abandoning him. Luckily, Pikeman understood.

- But don’t you dare think I’ll be going easy on you during this year’s Camporee.

Max smirked at the text.
Oh please, you’re going down easy. Nikki tells me Petrol has been teaching her how to bench properly. Camp Campbell’s going to be unstoppable with her on our side.

Petrol! That traitor!

That was a few months ago. Now that it was spring, Max had gotten more comfortable around the house but still couldn’t bring himself to call you mom and dad. It didn’t bother you and David-Neil was right. You just hoped that he was happy with the two of you, because if that was the case then you were doing something right.

Truth be told, you and David had no idea what you were doing. Sure, Max was an independent kid, but sometimes you wanted to make sure he knew he didn’t always have to be. You did your best to ensure he had his privacy and independence to a degree. You’d always knock before entering his room and let him hang out with his friends at school within reason, but he still had a bedtime and curfew for when to be home. David had also taken it upon himself to start a swear jar for Max as well, but you and he said it wasn’t fair for you and he to have one without David doing one as well. So now three jars of quarters sat on David’s dresser. Yours and Max’s were about even, and would probably have more if you made him pay into it when David wasn’t home, but David’s held a few quarters as well. Max wasn’t sure where they’d come from, and assumed they were from when you and David were home without him. He was still trying to convince Nikki and Neil David swore at all, but they always thought he was just trying to mess with them.

“Hey Max? What’s an eight letter word for union?”

“No idea. I’ll look it up.”

“No! That takes all the fun out of it!”

Max rolled his eyes. Why David refused to do the thing that made sense, he would never know.

“Whatever. Let me know when you want to actually know the answer.”

David pondered for a few moments longer before he figured it out. He happily penciled in the word before staring at it for a while, a dopey smile on his face. Max raised an eyebrow.

“Uh...you figured it out?”

“Hey, Max? Will you...help me with something tomorrow?”

“Sure, what is it?”

David continued to stare at the puzzle, further prompting Max’s curiosity.

“I’ll let you know soon,” David said, not taking his eyes off the paper. “But I think we’ll need aunt Gwen’s help, too!”

Max smiled slightly and rolled his eyes. Gwen had flipped her shit when she’d heard that you’d adopted Max.

“What the FUCK do you mean you’re have a kid? _____ how long have you known!?” The camera shook the picture around in her surprise.

You’d laughed at her response. “Gwen, I’m not pregnant. The situation is a little different than that.”

“We’re adopting,” David said, “and we were hoping you’d be the Godmother?”
Gwen was stunned and had no idea how to respond. “Guys I’m flattered but a kid is a huge responsibility. I know you look after them at camp and all, but your own? Are you sure about this?”

“Yeah,” you said. “We’re more than sure. You actually already know the kid.”

Gwen cocked an eyebrow. “I do?”

David gave her a gentle smile. “It’s Max, Gwen. It’s a rather long story.” David went on to explain the situation and how it had come down to you and he deciding to take Max in. You both agreed that it wasn’t going to be easy, but you think that at the very least, you could give Max a stable home life.

“This is insane,” Gwen said, and you watched as she leaned her back against her couch, her face in utter disbelief. “If this is a joke, you’re both much better at them and much more devious than I once thought.”

“It’s not a joke, Gwen. Look.” You showed her the absolute mass of paperwork in front of you, proving that your words were true.

“So, what do you say, Gwen?” David asked eagerly.

“Alright,” Gwen said after some time. “Ok, I’ll do it. But you’d better not fucking die on me. Either of you.”

You and he laughed, but she continued. “I’m serious! No more near death experiences or I’ll have to come back and watch you watch the camp!”

“Well,” David said, taking your hand, “we certainly wouldn’t mind having you back at camp!”

Gwen rolled her eyes. “Nice try, David.”

“Can you blame me?”

You chuckled at their interaction.

Now, in the present as Max and David were finishing up dinner, the house was warm with the scent of chicken and spices. Max had taught David a few small tips to really make the dish pop and David was more than happy to learn. It was a pleasant evening and each of them were smiling by the time they’d finished eating, and they spent the rest of the evening working on Max’s homework. While Max usually waited until the last minute- a habit you and he shared- David was doing his best to break the bad habit for each of you, knowingly pestering until the project was at least started. Once they’d finished, it was nearly time for Max to head to bed.

“Oh come on David, you know it’s a weekend!”

“Sorry Max, but you know that a good sleep cycle is one of the best ways to stay healthy!”

“One day isn’t going to kill me, you know.”

David shrugged. “All I’m saying is that you should head to bed, but I supposed I won’t be able to tell if you’re asleep or not.” He gave Max a wink as he helped gather up his homework. Max let out a single chuckle as he took his backpack from David.

“Yeah, I guess not.” He hesitated for a second before giving David a quick hug, but David had
returned it before he could get away. Max smiled and rolled his eyes. “G’night, David.”

“Night, kiddo.” David released him to ruffle his hair, and Max made his way into his room. Another day, complete.

Chapter End Notes

Y’all want some fuckin uhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

DADVID?
You walked in the front door to find the kitchen and living room empty. It still smelled like hash browns, despite it being the afternoon, and you hoped your boys had left you some. It had been a bit of a long drive and you were happy to be back home with your family.

“I’m home!” you call out, but when it doesn’t elicit a response, you wonder if they were home. It was entirely possible that they’d gone out for a bit- you know David likes to take Max on hikes every once in a while. However, once you heard a bit of faint murmuring coming from Max’s room, you knew that they were here. You were about to open the door, when Gwen’s voice came through.

“I don’t know about that one,” she said, “not sure it’s really her, you know?”

“I kinda have to agree with Gwen on that one David,” Max said.

“Well, alright. But what about this?” David asked.

“I think it’s too basic still,” Gwen said. “Try and find something unique.”

“But it is unique! Look! It has-”

“David,” Max said, “that’s not what she means. Think outside the box.”

You realize that you were eavesdropping and feel a bit guilty for it. Doing your best to seem casual, you open the door to find Max holding David’s phone as his laptop was on David’s lap. Two very surprised faces were staring back at you.

“I’m home!” you say as you lean against the door frame. “What are you all up to-”

“BIRTHDAY.” David yells.

“CHRISTMAS.” Max’s voice overlaps.

“NOTHING.” You hear Gwen’s voice coming through the speaker on David’s phone. The three of them pause before trying another’s answer- their voices becoming a cacophony of excuses again.

“Woah alright I’ll leave you guys to it!” you say, slowly making your way back out of the room.

“Do you think she saw?” David asks once the door closed.

“David the computer is facing you. How the fuck would she have been able to?” Max says.

“That’s another quarter young man!”
“God damn it fine.” Max hops off the bed and makes his way into yours and David’s room to pay his fine.

“That’s two!”

“You have a swear jar?” Gwen asks once Max leaves the room.

“At this rate,” David chuckles, “it’s going to be a college fund.”

As Max makes his way into the bedroom, he doesn’t seem to notice you on the bed, giving you the perfect opportunity to strike. Slowly, like a tiger about to pounce, you crawl your way to the edge of the mattress with a wicked smirk on your face. As soon as the quiet plink of metal against glass is heard, you strike—grabbing Max and pulling him onto the bed as you tickle him.

“Alright Mister. What do you and David have planned?”

Max squirms as forced laughter erupts from his mouth. “I’ll never tell. I was sworn to secrecy hahahah HAHHAHA.”

“Oh, so now you have a pact with David? You’ll break sooner or later.”

“DAVID!”

David comes running to find you still interrogating Max with your laugh torture. He stifles a laugh.

“SHE’S TRYING TO FIND OUT. HELP.”

Immediately, David pulls you off Max and starts to give you a taste of your own medicine.

“How’s it feel you monster!” Max jokes before rushing out of the room. David is relentless.

“David!” you laugh as tears start to form in your eyes.

“No one messes with my son and gets away with it!”

“Ok ok I yield!”

David stops and holds you close instead, giving you a chance to catch your breath.

“I love you,” you say, and you feel him tighten his hug.

“I love you too. So much.” He kisses you and you feel one arm pull you closer still as it rest on your back, while the other makes its way into your hair. You smile as your palms rest themselves on his chest. Neither of you wanted to pull away, so you stay in that position for some time, not quite making out, but for certainly longer than the length of a normal kiss. David was always so tender with you and his soft lips were never ones to disappoint.

When you finally manage to pull away from each other, David just looks at you, completely enraptured. He couldn’t believe how lucky he was to be able to call you his, and he never wanted to let you go.

“Daaaaavid,” you say, trying to bring him out of his staring. “Daaaaaavid!”

“Huh? Oh, sorry. You’re just…” He was staring again. You blushed. You would’ve thought that the honeymoon period would’ve been over by now, but the way he was looking at you well, you weren’t sure. You certainly didn’t mind though- you’d be content to watching him forever, too.
“Come on, let’s make dinner.” You give him one more quick peck before taking his hand and pulling him into the kitchen.

“W-wait!” he says, stopping you. You turn back to him, somewhat confused. You furrow your brow.

“Is everything ok?”

“Y-yeah everything’s fine. It’s just, hypothetically speaking,” he seemed nervous about something, “if we were going to go on a trip, where would you want to go?” He blushed a little and moved his eyes away from yours.

“You mean like as a family? Because I think Max would really enjoy-”

“N-no,” he says, surprising you further. “I mean, I’d love to do a family vacation somewhere, believe me! But if it was just you and me, where would you want to go?”

Your mind blanked. Ever since you’d adopted Max, you and David had put a bit of your personal life aside to take care of him. You were, of course, happy to do so- you loved Max just as much as you loved David, but you did miss the time you spent with him alone. Sure, you’d have your time when Max was out of the house where you’d slow dance in the living room and go out on the occasional date, but it was time few and far between what you’d grown used to back in the fall.

“I’m really not sure, David. There’s a million places I want to go with you, but I can’t think of a single one right now. Sorry.”

He smiled softly. “Don’t worry about it. Sorry for springing it on you so suddenly. But if you think of anything, let me know, ok?”

“Will do. Now, let’s make something, I’m starving!”

You ended up deciding on spaghetti that night and taught Max how to tell if your pasta is done- throw it at a wall and see if it sticks. After a small amount of noodle flinging and a somewhat exasperated David, dinner was ready and the three of you sat down to eat. It was filled with pleasant conversation as they asked you how camp was and if the rumors had been true. You told them how in just a short time, the place had changed so much. The counselors cabin was now a rangers station and there were a few separate, smaller cabins for extra help. The grounds had been expanded upon and it looked like the renovations on the activity field were going great. But, despite all the changes, it was still the same camp you’d come to know and love. David was ecstatic to hear about how the camp was improving and Max was happy to hear that the plumbing was no longer absolute trash.

“This is going to be the best year at camp ever!” David said once you’d finished your story. “Just think! I’m going to be able to spend it with my family this year!” He clasped his hands and put them up by his head.

“David,” Max said, “we were both there last year. Don’t tell me you forgot about last summer.”

“Of course not Max! And while yes you were both there, it was different. This year we’ll really get to be together not just because of camp, but because we wanted to be.”

“Speaking of wanting to be,” you say, looking to David, “while I’m really excited for the prospect of us all going together, I think we should give Max the choice of whether he wants to go.”

David’s eyes went wide. He’d been so excited by the thought of everyone going together, he’d
neglected to even see if Max wanted to go back.

“Gosh, sorry Max,” David said. “I guess I just got excited about camp. But _____’s right. It’s your choice of whether you want to come with us. We won’t force you to go if you don’t want to go.”

Max looked between the two of you, your faces hopeful but understanding. “And what if I don’t? You both have jobs over there. It’s not like you can just ignore them.”

“I’ll stay,” you and David say at the same time. “No, I’ll stay,” you each say again.

“David you have to be there. You’re going to be acting ranger! I can take the time to stay here.”

“But you have to monitor Timothy! I can’t ask you to give up on your research!”

“But what if I want to stay with him?”

“Well so do I!”

“Alright,” Max says, “that’s enough.” The two of you turn to look at him. “Listen, I appreciate the fact you’d want to stay, but you don’t need to worry. I’ll go.”

David’s face lit up. “Do ya mean it?”

“Yeah,” Max said. “I’ll go. Plus, what would you idiots do without me? You may work there but we all know I run that fucking camp.”

David was bouncing in his chair, eyes shining and a huge smile spread across his face. He practically flew out of his seat as he rushed to embrace Max in a near-crushing hug.

“I….can’t...breathe,” Max said as he squirmed slightly against David’s arms. David released him with a nervous laugh as Max gasped for air.

“Sorry Max! I’m just so gosh darned excited! We really are going to camp as a family!”

You smile as David’s infectious optimism washed over the room. You would admit- you were also excited to be able to go as a family. It would be the first big adventure the three of you took together.

Looks like the three of you were heading to camp.

Later that night, as you sat scrolling through an article on your phone, you pondered the question David had asked you earlier. Where would you want to go if it was just the two of you?

“Hey David?”

“Hmm?” He looks up from his puzzle book at the sound of his name.

“About that trip, are you...planning something? Because if this is really like a birthday gift then-”

“What? No! I’m not planning anything! What...what made you think that?” He chuckled nervously as he averted your gaze. You sighed.

“David, I love you but you’re a terrible liar. But can you tell me one thing?”

“Of course.”
“Is this serious or hypothetical? I need to know for cost reasons.” You wanted to travel the world with him at your side, seeing new things, meeting new people, and trying foods you couldn’t even pronounce. You wanted all of it. With him.

“It’s seriously hypothetical,” he mused. You smile and roll your eyes lovingly.

“I think I’d like to go camping, then,” you say confidently. “Take a few weeks and hit up some of the national parks, you know?”

“That sounds wonderful,” David says. He puts an arm around your shoulder and kisses the top of your head before pulling you down into the bed with him. You each turn off your respective lights before snuggling close in the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 69.

Nice.
Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by "Best day of my life" by American Authors. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y66j_BUCBMY

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With spring quickly reaching its end along with the semester, it would be an understatement to say things were a bit stressful around the house. You and David were buzzing about taking care of Max, your classes, studying, graduation bullshit, and prepping for summer. David was less than two weeks away from becoming a full fledged ranger, and the day after he was going to be accepted, the three of you would be at camp to get acquainted with the place and learn about your new duties. David no longer had to worry about hiring extra help himself, as that had been taken care up by the parks service, but you and he did have to oversee the new and old campers again. All your kids were going to return, and you couldn’t be more excited to see them all, along with a few new faces that you were sure you would come to love as well. You and he did your best to get all the paperwork in order and ensure every camper was where they wanted to be. Max had decided to go back to music camp which you and David were delighted about.

Still, as the days came and went, you and David were unable to find much time with each other. Even at night, the two of you would trade off putting Max to bed, only to find the other already asleep from the trials of the day. You couldn’t say you minded but, you did miss him. And he, you. Luckily that all came to a stop once finals had ended. You knew you’d passed the last classes you’d probably ever take in your life with flying colors, and you knew David had as well. Max had been offered to stay the night at a friends house, leaving you and David alone for a little well-deserved time. You didn’t do too much aside from hold each other on the couch and make some mac and cheese for dinner, but it was enough. You were exhausted from the last few weeks, so being able to have him hold you was absolute heaven.

“Hey,” you say into his chest.

“Hey.” He holds you tighter and presses his nose into your hair, breathing you in.

“I can’t believe we’re graduating tomorrow. It doesn’t feel real.”

David chuckles. “Where did the time even go? It feels like I just met you yesterday, and now we’re about to start the rest of our lives together.”

You smile. The rest of your life with David didn’t sound like a bad gig to you, that’s for sure. Between your work and David and Max, you had to admit you were living a pretty damn good life.

“It’s surreal for sure,” you tell him, “though I have to say I’m a little bit nervous.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I’m not sure why but I guess I’m just anxious about it being over? I’ve really loved the time I spent in college, not to mention it was the reason I met you and…” you found yourself
crying. You knew you’d be able to face the next challenge that life presented you, but you weren’t ready for your college years to be done. As much stress as it has caused you, as many sleepless nights and early mornings and tears and rage-inducing group projects, you weren’t ready to let it all go.

David stroked the back of your head as you let the tears fall down your face. He understood where you were coming from, and he wasn’t quite ready himself for it to all be over. But as long as he was with you, he knew he would be happy.

“It’s going to be ok,” he told you, “and I know you know that but I need to hear it aloud too.”

You let out a chuckle and sit up, doing your best to wipe away your tears. “It’s our last night as students, is there anything you want to do to celebrate?”

“Honestly? I can’t think of anything else I’d rather be doing than this.” He pulls you back down and gives you a tender kiss, holding you close as you melt into him.

“I love you, David.”

“I love you too, _____.

The next morning was filled with excitement and tears as you drove to the campus, ready to graduate but not quite ready to become alumni. Each of you had a dark green camp and gown complete with a yellow tassel representing your school colors. Hundreds of your fellow students sat amongst you in a sea of green and gold, some friends for life and others complete strangers. The ceremony was long (longer than you’d have expected) but full of heartfelt speeches and inspiration to continue on in whatever it is you found to be your passion. You smiled knowing you’d found that, and felt a sense of pride knowing you had your passion waiting for you just beyond the forest.

You watched as David was called across the stage, his red hair poking out from beneath the cap reminiscent of a forest fire. His flames had reached your heart long ago and it had been the same smile he wore now as he was handed his diploma that you saw the first day you met him that sparked it. Before you knew it, you were being handed your own credentials, signaling the end of your academic career. For now at least. Maybe one day you’d return for a masters like David had, though now you would focus on your work.

The last speech was given and the crowd threw their caps into the air, cheering as they did so. A bit of a mess followed, as people rushed to find friends and family to hold and cherish for a few more moments before parting ways. For some, they would be seeing each other tomorrow. For others, their paths would never cross again.

You somehow manage to find David and he embraces you, kissing you passionately. Usually you would’ve been embarrassed but with the organized chaos that surrounded you, you didn’t mind spending a moment away from it.

“I’m so proud of you,” he whispers.

“I am of you, too.”

He grins and picks you up, spinning you around the field as the sun shines down onto it. He looks into your laughing face and feels at peace with everything. You were his world and when you were happy, he knew things were just as they should be.
You and he managed to find your friends and have pictures taken, laughing and smiling and crying just the slightest bit when you had to say goodbye. Finally, you found Max in the crowd.

“Christ,” he says once you and David each gave him a hug, “could that have taken any fucking longer?”

You ruffle his hair. “Oh come on, it only took what? Three years to get through?”

“More like six. I’m going to graduate high school in twenty minutes chop chop people.”

You and David chuckled at him. The three of you have your picture taken together, and Max offers to take yours and David’s. He ends up taking about 5 selfies first, but is good on his word. The rest of the day is spent out with friends and family as you celebrate your accomplishments.

You had a single day of rest which the three of you used to pack for camp before David was sworn in as an official park ranger. He was given his uniform and the official responsibility over Camp Campbell and its surrounding area for the summer. You didn’t think you could’ve been more proud as he showed off his outfit later that night- he looked adorable.

With everything out of the way, the three of you were up early (well, David was at least. You and Max were only technically considered awake) and started the long drive back to camp. David couldn’t wait to return, listing off all the activities he had planned for the summer. With the camp now having proper funding, most of the activities were able to be expanded upon! Second aid was now first aid, science camp had a working lab, theater camp had a whole new costume shop, music camp had extra working instruments, as well as numerous other changes that made Camp Campbell what it should have always been.

The mixers were going to continue throughout the summer just like they had the year prior, and the first one was scheduled that very weekend. You and David wanted to surprise the kids with a theme, deciding upon a sock hop. Everyone would make or bring 50’s style clothing and dance around to the music of the time period. You and David would teach your campers how to dance like it was, too.

One other thing David wanted to add was a formal night, not unlike that of the summer social. It would be separate from the mixers, happening at the end of the summer before everyone left for home, and give the kids a chance to get all dressed up. You thought it was a fantastic idea and were quick to jump on board with it, adding “formal wear” to the list of needs a camper would have when attending.

Once you arrived, you gave the boys a quick tour of the grounds as they’d been completed. The activity field was larger now, giving extra space for the different contending camps, as was the tent area. You were extra grateful for this, as you hadn’t seen that done when you’d visited. There would be plenty of room for all the campers now. The mess hall has been left untouched on the outside, but the kitchen had been redone to accommodate larger meals being prepared. And of course, the counselors cabin had been transformed into a ranger station with two extra, smaller cabins behind it for new counselors.

You and David would be in the ranger’s station. It only had one bedroom now, as the other had been turned into an office space for tracking and recording all different types of occurrences. Everything from animals to geological events would be written and recorded where, and it was where you were going to be doing the bookkeeping for Timothy.
You and David unloaded your belongings into the room before setting up the camp like you had last year. You couldn’t believe it— it had already been a year. It was only about five weeks away from yours and David’s first anniversary, too. You smile as you watch David teach Max how to set up a tent. Max was begrudgingly watching and following along as David beamed at him. And, for just the slightest second, you saw Max smile as he worked.

Later that night after camp had been set up, Max comfortable in his tent, and you and David were settled down for bed, you noticed something felt...off. You realized you had yet to bring out your journal for the summer! You had bought a new one, as the first one seemed too sacred to try and continue, but it too sat in your suitcase full of the secrets only you knew about.

“New journal?” David asks as he climbs into bed beside you.

“Yep! I think I’ll do one every summer we’re here. It’ll be fun to look back on them, you know?”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea! Maybe I’ll pick one up in Sleepy Peak and do one too! We can go through and compare notes at the end of the summer!”

You giggle at his excitement. “Sure Davey, that sounds fun.”

He smiles and calms down a bit, taking your hand in his. “You ready to go around again?”

“I am. I’ve missed all the kids so much and I’m sure the new ones will be cool, too. But, I think what I’ve missed most of all has been spending time with you together. It’ll be nice to be able to be able to really work with each other again.”

“I hear ya on that one,” he says as he leans in and kisses your cheek, earning him a soft giggle.

As you continue penciling in your first entry, you wonder what will happen this time, but you at least knew one thing: You couldn’t wait to find out.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, here we go again everyone!

Campe Diem!

(I've missed writing that.)
The last few days of prep passed quickly and soon enough, the campers were back in the mess hall saying hello to the friends they hadn’t seen and talking with some of the new kids. Everyone seemed to be having a pleasant afternoon and once David and you stepped into the room, all your old campers were quick to say hello.

“Hello everyone!” David replied cheerfully, just as excited to be back at camp as he had been the year previous, if not more. “It sure is wonderful to see you all again, and to our newest campers, welcome to Camp Campbell! I’m sure you’ll love this place just as much as we do by the end of the summer!”

“What’s with the new costume?” Nikki asked, pointing at David’s ranger uniform.

“Well Nikki,” you explain, “Camp Campbell and Sleepy Peak have been partially taken over by the park service so, David’s now a ranger!”

Nerris gasped. “He’s dual classing!”

You and David chuckle at their excitement before sending all the campers to their assigned tents. For the most part, everyone had been in the same tents, but you had to give Nikki a bit of a lecture about not sleeping in the trees anymore. She begrudgingly agreed before smothering her cot in dirt and leaves. It was the best compromise you’d get out of her.

You and David gave a quick tour of the grounds, showing everyone the changes that had been made and giving the kids a sense of what camp was going to be like. Space kid was buzzing with excitement over his new station, it having been transformed from a curtain with stars to a replica space station control center. You were sure he’d have the thing memorized in a month, tops.

Neil couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw that there was actual scientific equipment at his camp.

“Sweet, sweet glassware,” he said as he rubbed a beaker against his cheek.

Ered was itching to try out the new half pipe, along with the new grind rail and tube that had been added, and Nerris was in awe of her castle- it’s cardboard having been turned into actual stonework with a turret now adorning the top.

Nurf was more than excited to see that the old science camp station had been transformed into a blacksmithing station. It had all the tools and molds he could ever want to continue with the passion he’d found last year. And, speaking of passions, Dolph was overjoyed at the new supplies he encountered at his station: New paints, chalk, pastels, colored pencils and more were all neatly tucked into shelves that lined the area near the easels.

Preston couldn’t contain his excitement at the new stage as it had actual working lights and a
costume shop full of clothes that were production ready. He threw himself into the trunks, pulling out and naming all the productions he’d be able to perform with them. You gently pulled him out and walked with him as he listed all the plays he was thinking of doing that year.

“And then at the end of the summer, we can do Rent!”

“Uh Preston?” you ask, “have you ever seen rent?”

“Nope! But the soundtrack is fanTASTIC.”

You would have to find a way to break it to him that he probably shouldn’t do Rent at a later date.

Harrison found his stage more of less the same but with a few added props. He seemed incredibly happy as he showed off a few tricks for the camp, making things disappear and reappear with ease. Neil was rolling his eyes but, he didn’t say anything.

Dinner was served after the tour and you saw the returners with a look of fondness you hadn’t seen last year, nostalgia swimming in their eyes as they ate and talked about the new version of the camp they’d come to know and enjoy. You and David were at your usual spot by the window, watching the family you’d come to love as your own continue to grow before your very eyes.

Camp began on a Friday this year, so after dinner you rounded up all the kids and made your way to the bonfire pit. You caught a few of the new campers giving you and David some curious looks, and you couldn’t help but remember seeing them on your campers last year, too. You wouldn’t tell them, they would have to either figure it out on their own or ask the others to give them the story. As David got the fire going, you watched as the campers grew giddy with excitement.

“Auuuugh, I can’t take it anymore!” Nikki yelled. “David! Where’s the s’mores?”

David chuckled, “Don’t worry Nikki, they’re right here!” He pointed to the log next to him, empty. “Oh. Looks like I forgot to grab them. _____ do you mind?”

“On it!” You head back to the mess hall- what good was a campfire without s'mores?

David watched you walk away for a moment, waiting until you were far enough out of earshot to turn back.

“Did you get them?” he asked Max.

Max pulled a bag of marshmallows out from behind his back. “She’ll be looking for the other stuff for a while. Don’t worry.”

“Wait,” Harrison said, “if you have them, why did you send her to look for them?”

David and Max shared a knowing look.

“Kids,” David said happily, “I’m going to need your help with something.”

You searched high and low for the freaking marshmallows but couldn’t find them for the life of you. And, on top of that, it seemed like everything else had been misplaced, too. The graham cracker had been in the freezer and the chocolate in the attic. The attic! How it even got there, you had absolutely no idea, as for as far as you were aware, all the kids had been accounted for all day long. Even Max!

Slightly frustrated, you huff as you continue going through the pantry trying your best to find the
sweet fluffy treats. You couldn’t disappoint the kids on the first night back! The bonfire was special to not only them, but yourself as well. It was a chance for everyone to let loose for a while and chill out. Listen to music, play games, tell jokes, stories - the possibilities weren’t exactly endless, but what they lacked in diversity, they more than made up for in entertainment and, to you at least, sentimentality.

Looking around the room one last time, you saw the ends of the sticks poking out from underneath sacks of flower.

Who in the hell put them there? You didn’t have much patience left for searching, resigning to letting yourself give up and move onto a plan b. The kids were going to roast banana chunks and they would have to live with it.

“I’ve got good news and bad news,” you say as your skin begins to glow in the light of the fire. “Good news is I found most of the stuff for s’mores. Bad news is we have no marshmallows.”

You hear some of the kids start snickering as they looked at you with excited eyes. “What?”

Max tosses you the bag of marshmallows with a slight smirk on his face. You blink, surprised as all hell as you catch them. “Max how did you even-”

“For as much as this place has changed, it’s still the same old camp I’ve been coming to for years. I’ve got a year on you to have learned the ins and outs of this place like no one’s business. Don’t forget that.”

You smile and roll your eyes, “Whatever shortstop.”

“Hey!”

You and the campers all chuckle slightly as Max pouts. Taking your seat next to David, the group spends the evening roasting the night away.

On Saturday, the kids were free to do as they pleased, and many went straight to their camps, excited to try out all their new equipment. David assured you that he would be able to watch the camp as you went to monitor Timothy. You decided to take Nikki with you, as she had been the one to discover him in the first place. She was all for it.

“Do you think he’s a dad?” she asked as you made your way to the nest site.

“He might be! I’ll actually need you to climb up and let me know. Think you can do that for me?”

Her eyes widened as she gave you the camp salute. Upon reaching the tree, you handed her a camera and watched as she scaled it without any resistance. You couldn’t help but wonder how she seemingly defied gravity as she climbed, perhaps Neil could help you figure that one out. You heard the shutter go off a few times, and watched as the bird perched itself on her shoulder. They squaked at each other for a moment before she came back down. Nikki was excited.

“HE’S GONNA BE A DAD! LOOK!” Handing you the camera, she showed you pictures of speckled eggs as they sat in the nest.

“Nikki this is wonderful! Couldn’t have done it without you!” You tousle her hair and make your way back to camp. You record your findings and upload the photographs once you do, making sure to give Nikki credit for the photography.
Finally, Sunday rolled around and you and David started up the dance camp for the first time that summer. With the sock hop later that night, you wanted to help the kids refresh themselves on a few swing dances and you would admit, being able to dance with David again had its perks. The kids seemed to be having a wonderful time as they were paired together again and retraced their steps from last summer. You and David helped the newest members of the group find their steps, though it seemed that a few already knew them! By the time it was time for everyone to get ready, the kids all knew at least a basic two step that they could dance to.

The kids were excited to get all dressed up for the dance. Ered had managed to snag a leather jacket from her dad’s closet before she left as well as another pair of aviators. She was dressed like a greaser and it suited her perfectly. Nerris walked in with her looking like a carhop- skates and all. Nurf had on what looked to be a vintage lettermans jacket and Neil was with him dressed in a sweater vest and tie. Space kid had modified his space suit to look like an old-fashioned diving bell while Dolph went with a red and white striped suit and tie, a gondolier’s hat atop his head. Harrison was dressed completely with his top hat and bowtie, coat tails trailing the tux behind him as he strut about the room. Nikki and Max were both looking like mobsters with their suspenders and fedoras, and David had taken inspiration from them, also dressing in suspenders and hat, though he looked too sweet to play the part. Preston had asked to make a ‘grand entrance’ with you and, deciding it sounded like fun, had agreed. So, you made your way into the mess hall dramatically, both of you absolutely rocking a pink poodle skirt.

The scouts made their way in shortly, boats parked at the dock, and you had to admit you’d missed them all. Greeting the Woodscouts as they entered the hall, you did your best to stifle a laugh at the cheesy baby blue tuxedos they were all wearing. The Flowerscouts followed soon after, each of them wearing their hair up and a polkadot dress to match their respective colors. You’d never noticed it before but it seemed like Erin had heterochromia! She looked good with her hair up and you hoped she would keep it that way.

As the mixer began and the kids talked all about their year away from each other, David found you near the door.

“Care to dance?” he asked in an overly cheesy tone and with his hand extended.

You gave him a small smirk. “Show me what you got.”

Grabbing your hand and leading you to the floor, he began to play “you’re the one that I want,” as you never did have the chance to perform it last year. And, what more of a perfect place to do so than a sock hop?

David watched you intently as you swung your way through the quickstep and wondered if you would understand the true intent behind his song choice. If you didn’t tonight, he knew you would very, very soon.

I think you all can figure out what’s about to go down.

But then trauma or fluff? Let’s find out. Mwahahahaha.

Also, because my school has finals this week, and because my schedule allows for it, I’m going to return to Wednesday updates!
Campe Diem!
The Swan (La Cygne)

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by "The Swan" by Saint-Saens. Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b44-5M4e9nI

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As the week passed, you and David ran the camp as normally as possible. Things were going rather smoothly for once around there, and you might have even been bored had it not been for the kids. You once again took over science, magic and theater camp but also tacked on adventure camp. It not only allowed you time to spend with Nikki, but gave you an opportunity to monitor Timothy during the week. Nikki certainly didn’t mind checking the place out every once in a while, though she would often get distracted by the various animal prints and markings that were in the woods.

While you studied Timothy, you tasked her with taking pictures of them so that you could report your findings. She really liked that idea and so, camera in hand, the two of you would set off into the forest before lunch to discover what you could about the woods around camp. It was nice having an assistant with you, and Nikki had a blast.

You and Nerris started a new campaign together, and this summer you would be Tantalla the tiefling eldritch knight. You played through the first week of sessions with the biggest smile on your face- Nerris had obviously been preparing this for some time. Every turn you made you were faced with a new option for story and plot development. The monsters were challenging but never drifted into the realm of impossible. And, her voice acting had improved greatly. You were unbelievably proud of her and couldn’t wait to see what adventure she took you on this time.

Meanwhile at art camp, Dolph was beginning to experiment with pastels by smudging and mixing the colors together with his hands. He always ended up looking like an aesthetic version of himself as the light colors coated his hands and face. He took inspiration mainly from the sky on these works, capturing the sunsets from camp and transferring them to his canvas with every streak of color.

Nurf had greatly taken pride in his crafts, using and experimenting with the new molds he had on hand. He asked for a mold of a sword but, given his history with knives, you and David had to let him down as gently as possible. David was terrified of the backlash but, Nurf actually took it very well, even going so far as to admit he had had issues in the past with sharp objects and that he understood where you and David were coming from. You and David were both super proud of his personal growth, as it seems he had been working more and more on his issues. He still would be the bully but, it wasn’t as physical as it had been in years past. Something that both you, David, and the kids were grateful for.

You and Preston spent most of the first week going through the costumes and sizing them up. You had everything from renaissance style clothing for Shakespearean productions, to more modern style outfits more suited for the likes of Dear Evan Hansen. It looked like most of them were pretty easily adjustable too, meaning that anyone could play virtually any part Preston cast them in. To say Preston was thrilled would be an understatement, and you could see the cogs turning in his mind as he raced to figure out where he wanted to go production-wise this summer.
On Friday night, you and the campers once again gathered around the fire to trade scary stories, play music and discuss the week at camp. Everyone seemed to be having a good time so far and you couldn’t be more happy to see them all interacting again.

You and David put the kids to bed that night and found yourselves on the couch of the ranger’s station, cuddled up against each other after the first full week of camp.

“So,” you ask him, “what’s it like being a ranger.”

David shrugged, “Can’t complain really. Amazing job, beautiful area, a wonderful girl to share it all with.” He nuzzled his face into your neck at the last part, causing you to giggle slightly.

“Alright alright, now what’s it really like, Davey.”

“It’s absolutely incredible,” he gushed. “It’s everything I’ve ever wanted and more. I get to stay at camp during the summer and stick around the forest during the off season.” He was beaming and you couldn’t help but join him. You loved to see him smile.

“I will admit,” he said, lowering his voice just a bit, “I do kinda miss my counselor outfit. The uniform is great and all but, I feel somewhat out of place looking so...official.”

You sigh slightly and give him a small smile as you take his cheek in your hand. “David, I guarantee you don’t look out of place here. In fact, I’d argue that you look the most like you belong here out of all of us. It’s what you were born to do but, if you really do miss it that much, go check the front zipper on my suitcase.”

He gasped in excitement. “You didn’t.”

“Oh yes I did. Go put it on and get back out here.”

He plants a happy kiss on your lips before rushing out of the room to change. You watch him go, the kiss leaving you just the slightest bit dizzy. He returns looking just as he had last year, camp uniform bringing out his eyes and the yellow neckerchief once again around his neck where it should be. You unconsciously move your hand to the blue one you still wore around your own neck, smiling as you watch him.

David wraps you into a tight hug once he returns to the couch, whispering a heartfelt thank you as he did so.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to you, the kids were setting a plan into motion. They were currently gathering as many candles as possible and arranging them on the shore of Lake Lilac in a very particular pattern.

“Come on guys,” Max said as he monitored the craftsmanship, “this has to be perfect. No screw ups.”

“Relax Max,” Dolph said, “it’s going to vurk perfectly. All the lines are nice and neat and the message would be unmistakable either vey.”

“It’s such a romantic gesture,” Preston swooned, “it’s just like one of my plays!”

“If this was one of your plays Preston,” Harrison joked, “something would go horribly wrong for ‘dramatic suspense.’”

The kids all laughed but Max was adamant. “No. Don’t even joke about that shit. This has to go
“Yeah I’m with Max on this one,” Neil agreed, “David’s really counting on us for this. And I think we at least owe him that after everything we went through last year.”

“ Fucking thank you,” Max said. “At least one of you assholes get it.”

Max felt a hand on his shoulder and found it to be Ered’s.

“Dude, chill out. Everything is going to go just fine. All we have to worry about is making sure these candles get lit.”

Max sighed, “Yeah I guess you’re right. Everyone have their lighters?”

It hadn’t been easy sneaking all the extra lighters into the car past your gaze, but through a mix of early morning scheming between Max and David, they’d each managed to carry enough for each of the campers. They each help up their small tool in their hands.

“Perfect. Everyone in position. They’ll be here any minute now.”

You return David’s hug with your own and get a good look at him. If you were being completely honest with yourself, you thought it suited him better than the ranger uniform, because even if he looked good in it- handsome, even- it seemed almost too mature for David. He would grow into it, much like a child would grow into a large jacket or pair of new shoes, but it would take time. And for right now, you wanted the camp counselor you’d fallen for.

“Hey can I show you something?” he asked suddenly.

You cock an eyebrow. “This late? I mean it’s nearly midnight.”

“I know, I know but, I think you’re really going to like it. Please?” He clasped his hands in front of his face in a pleading gesture and put on his best puppy dog eyes. How could you say no to that face?

“Alright,” you say, giving in, “lead the way.”

David takes your hand and gently leads you out of the station into the cold air of night. You walk side by side with fingers interlocked under the light of a crescent moon, its pale beams casting the barest hint of shadows across the grounds. The stars were twinkling gently, giving you their blessings in silent flickers. You found yourself on the docks, watching as the sky was reflected in the mirror smooth surface of the lake, completely undisturbed by man nor nature.

“Yeah you were right,” you admit, “this is pretty beautiful.” You rest your head on his shoulder and feel him place his arm around your waist. You look at him only to find him looking back at you, complete adoration reflected in his eyes like the moon off the surface of the lake. You don’t even realize you’d leaned in to kiss him until your lips met and your arms found their way around his neck.

David blushed as he pulled away. “G-gosh,” he muttered.

“I love you,” you say gently, almost a whisper to make up for the absence of wind.

“I love you too, _____.

“You know,” you say with a bit of a teasing tone, “that may have been the first kiss we’ve had
outside that wasn’t watched by campers.”

“Uh, hehe ye-yeah! I guess you’re right.”

You smirk. “Think they’re spying on us again, Davey?”

“Uh, maybe?” He let out a nervous laugh and was starting to sweat a bit. “W-want to take a little boat ride?” He gestured to the little rowboat that sat still in the water.

“Sure, David. I’d love to.”

He tossed you a lifejacket and put on his own before helping you into the boat. You sit and he takes the oars, rowing just long enough to have you face the island and he the camp. You watch as the ripples spread out across the lake, shifting the reflection of the moon and stars as they pass before ultimately stopping on the shore. Every little movement of the boat made a new ripple, expanding and forever changing the shape of the lake in its own small way. You could see fireflies peeking out from the bushes on the island, saying their luminescent little hellos before going dark again and making you wonder if you’d even seen them at all. The air was still from the lack of wind and was relatively silent save for the quiet chirping of crickets and a few scattered frogs.

“Hey ____? Can you do something for me?” David asked quietly.

“Anything,” you say, leaning in just a bit closer. More ripples in the water.

“Promise you’ll keep your eyes on me for a while?”

“Oh I get it,” you joke, “you want me to check you out. I think I can manage that.” You shoot him a wink and he chuckles, rubbing the back of his head.

“N-not exactly but I mean you can if you want to.” After taking just a second to compose himself, he pulls out his guitar and begins to play. You knew exactly what song it was a few chords in and your heart soared.

“Wise men say only fools rush in,

But I can't help falling in love with you.

Shall I stay?

Would it be a sin?

If I can't help falling in love with you?

Like a river flows, surely to the sea.

Darling so it goes

Some things are meant to be

Take my hand, take my whole life too

For I can't help falling in love with you.”

As he sings, you notice the area behind you growing ever brighter. You almost turn to look, but remember your promise to David. You keep your eyes on him, nearly in tears at the sweet gesture. He kneels in front of you in the boat as he continues serenading you.
"Like a river flows surely to the sea
Darling so it goes
Some things are meant to be
Take my hand, take my whole life too
For I can't help falling in love with you
For I can't help falling in love with you."

As he finishes his last word, he nods towards the shore, prompting you to turn toward it. Your eyes widen as you see there, written in candle light on the shore of Lake Lilac was the fateful question.

"Will you marry me?"

“Well?” David asks sheepishly, his voice drawing you back around to look at him, “What do you say?” He held out a small velvet box with the ring inside. You almost couldn’t see it due to the dark coloration, but it was there. It was much different from the standard engagement ring, as it was made out of wood and titanium. You couldn’t see it due to the low light, but a small pine tree had been carved on the wood in place of a gem and the inside metal had been engraved with the day you’d met. The area where your wedding date would be was still blank.

“David… yes. YES!” You were shaking as tears of joy streaked down your face. “Of course I’ll marry you.”

“Y-you mean it?”

“Yes!” You were sobbing as he stood in the little boat, holding you close.

“Here, let me see your hand.” Taking your left hand in his, he slipped the ring onto your finger. It was a perfect fit.

“How did you even-“

“Max told me to tie a string around your finger while you slept. And well, you’re a pretty heavy sleeper so-“ You cut him off with a kiss, launching yourself into his arms and accidentally knocking both of you overboard. You look at each other for a moment before devolving into a fit of giddy laughter. You feel him reach for you in the dark water, and run a hand through your now soaked hair as he brought his lips back to yours. He was crying, you were crying, and the kids on the shore were still waiting for a definitive answer.

David managed to pull away from you for just a moment, long enough to call out, “She said yes!” towards the shore.

It was at that moment you realized why he’d seemed so nervous on the docks as your campers let out an up roaring chorus of cheers. You’d been watched. Again. And you wouldn’t have had it any other way.
SCREAM WITH ME YALL

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

CAMPE DIEM
Finding that getting into the boat from the water was a bigger challenge than you would’ve anticipated, especially considering you were still reeling from getting engaged, you and David swim back to the shore, towing the boat along behind you.

“How did you even plan all this?” you ask David as the two of you continue swimming towards the docks.

“Well I’ve had the idea for a while now but, it was Max who really put it all into motion. He and Gwen helped me pick out the ring and was the one who really got all the campers to help out.”

You probably could’ve guess that, the little shit. Max had been ringleader for nearly all the other attempts to see you and David together, and now he could claim the fact he’d managed to get the two of you engaged as well.

“How long have you been waiting to ask me?”

“Since last summer,” he admits. “When I watched you interact with all the kids and have that fire in your eyes when you fought for the camp, I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you. And when I saw you in the hospital but couldn’t stay I just…” he trailed off, unsure whether he should continue. The reason made him feel somewhat selfish, but he found his voice, small though it may be. “I felt like a failure, ______. Like I wasn’t there to protect you. And I want to be able to protect you, even if I know you can handle yourself when you need to.”

His words left you touched, and you knew he was being sincere. David always was. You didn’t even know what to say to that, so you pulled him close to you again and kissed him, letting yourself float gently in the silent water with him. He wrapped his arms around you tightly, more so than usual, and refused to let go when you started to pull away. He needed to make sure he was awake and that this was happening. That you’d said yes and that he was really kissing you in the lake in the middle of the night at the place he loved.

When he did manage to pull away, he found himself to be laughing and crying uncontrollably at the same time. The weeks of stress and planning and preparations and him talking to himself in the mirror were over, and he was over the moon. You held him close as he laugh-sobbed into you, relieved that you’d said yes.

You finally manage to find yourselves back on shore, soaking wet and wildly emotional, only to find yourselves surrounded by your campers each offering their congratulations in an amalgam of voices. They all looked on eagerly at the ring, Nerris especially impressed by its immediate charisma bonus.
“I really don’t know how to thank you all,” David says.

“We do!” Harrison says, and the kids all look at each other.

“Alright fine,” you say, “double desert for the week.”

“We’ll take it but it’s not what we meant,” Max explains. “As the reason that you two are together in the first place, we want in.”

“In?” David asks.

“In the wedding!” Neil clarifies.

David was surprised. “Well, gosh campers! We’d love to but I’m not sure exactly how that would work. We all live so far away from each other that it would be hard to—”

“Not if we have the ceremony here!” Space kid says, further surprising you and David.

“Have the ceremony...here?” David looks to you, picturing you in white as you walk towards him standing in the woods. No! In front of the mess hall. Maybe the docks? “I...I actually think it’s a great idea. What about you, ______?”

You smile. “I can’t think of a more perfect place.”

“Then I guess it’s settled,” David says happily. “We’ll have the ceremony here at camp.”

The kids let out another rousing cheer as they walk off, back to their tents. You catch Max before he can get too far and bring him into a close hug.

“Hey. HEY. I thought we promised limited contact at camp!”

“Oh that was before I learned you helped David with this.”

Max stops squirming and lets out a sigh. Rolling his eyes and smiling, he returns your hug. “Just don’t say I never did anything for you idiots.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it kiddo,” David says as he joins in on a group hug.

“Thank you, Max. For everything.”

“Don’t mention it.”

You and David let him go and watched as he walked away.

“So David,” you say, still somewhat in a daze. “Did-did we just get engaged?”

He chuckles and wraps his arm around you. “Yeah I think we did.”

“I guess we have a wedding to plan, then.”

“I guess we do.” He’s suddenly behind you, arms around your waist as he kisses your cheek rapidly. “Is it too early to say ‘I do’?”

“Davey!” you giggle.

Sweeping you off your feet, he carries you into the rangers station. You wrap around each other in the sheets, holding each other all through the night.
The summer was spent planning and preparing for the big day alongside all of the activities you and David ran with the kids. It was a lot to think about, you would admit, but thankfully, the kids of Lake Lilac were more than willing to help out. Even the scouts got in on the action, as the Woodscouts offered to act as both bouncers and ushers, while the Flowerscouts jumped on the opportunity to make a custom fit dress just for you. Sasha had wondered where the diamond was on your ring when you’d showed them, but you laughed it off. To you, the ring was perfect.

After a summer’s worth of alterations and fittings, the dress was complete. You did your best to carry the opaque white garment bag across the grounds, but you were swarmed by kids asking to see it. You manage to maneuver your way past them and into your room, only to find David there with his own bag in hand.

“YOU CAN’T SEE IT YET!” you yell as you cover as much of the bag as possible with your body before putting it away in the closet.

David looked at you for a moment, completely confused until he realized what you were getting at. Eyes widening, he felt his cheeks get a little warmer at the thought of you in a wedding dress. As his bride. As his wife. He gave you a huge smile as he grabbed you and pulled you into a tight hug.

“Is it long? Short? Ball gown? I’ll bet it’s super puffy right? No! It’s flowy! Or maybe-”

“David!” you laugh as you try and wiggle your way out of his grasp. “I just told you you’re not allowed to see it!”

“I can’t help it! I’m just so excited! It’s almost here!” He pulled himself away from you, holding you by the shoulders. “_____ we’re about to be married.”

“I know,” you say softly, “and I can’t wait.”

You were about to kiss him when someone burst into the room. “I TOLD YOU I CALLED DIBS ON A BRIDESMAID.”

“Gwen!” you exclaim as you rush to greet her. You run into her open arms and hug her as tight as you could.

“Congratulations,” she says as she returns your gesture. “And I told you so.”

You laugh as you pull away, happy that she’d made it. “What would I do without my Maid of Honor?”

She shrugged.

“Probably get kidnapped by the Woodscouts again.” She winked, dropping her voice, “They’re in, by the way.”

You winked back, glad to know that the plan was in motion.

David found his way over, also giving Gwen a huge hug. You smile, happy that they were such close friends. The three of you sit and talk for a while, discussing the schedule, seating charts, and just taking the time to catch up with life. You’d obviously been in contact with Gwen since you’d met her, but there was always something different, something special about meeting with someone in person. You could hear her laughter and excitement as well as share your own as you spoke, engulfing each other in treasured memories and anticipation of what was still to come.

You helped Gwen get settled in one of the currently unused counselors cabins before the day’s
end, crawling into bed with David as the night began. You were excited and nervous to get married, and at some points you’d found yourself wondering if it was still too soon. But then, you’d see David encouraging a camper or help a baby bird back to its nest- just acting as himself, and you’d be reminded why you’d said yes in the first place. The wedding date was still blank on the inside of the ring, though it wouldn’t be for very long. The ceremony was going to be on the last full day of camp and everyone was going to be there. Nurf would, before the ceremony take the bands and carve the dates into them using the calligraphy stencil Dolph had made. It was to be his gift to you.

David reached for you in the dark of the room, smiling softly when his arm found itself around your waist. He scooted just a little closer and buried himself in your hair, inhaling your scent. He didn’t have a single nightmare all summer. Instead his dreams were filled with the adventures he wanted to take with you, as well as the occasional one about meeting a giant talking platypus. He wasn’t sure what it meant but, he figured it was just something his mind had come up with. He wondered what tonight would bring him, as he drifted off.

He didn’t have to wonder long, as the commotion outside roused him awake. It was still late- the night not yet old but no longer young, and you were no longer beside him. In a slight panic, he rushed out into the night to find the campers running and laughing about, half-heartedly being chased by some of the Woodscouts.

“David!” Pikeman yelled from the center of camp. “This is a raid! If you want your bride to be back you’re going to have to come catch her!”

David looked to see the three boys hustling towards the docks, and found you were being carried by Petrol. You were laughing to yourself as you were gently placed in the boat beside them.

“Is this really ok?” Pikeman asked you sincerely.

“Yeah it’s fine. Mainly because I know you’re not actually trying to kidnap me.”

He smirked. “Very well then.” He turned back towards the camp. “Camp Campbellians, the race is on!” He started the motor and you were soon tearing away from the docks.

David took off towards the docks, a determined smile on his face. Launching himself into the nearest boat, he quickly started the motor and chased after your boat in the darkness. They weren’t getting you that easily, but you were not to be won back so easily, either.

“Head around the island,” Snake said, “the moon casts shadows on the water making it harder to spot us.”

“Excellent suggestion, Snake. Petrol, take us twenty degrees Starport and cut the motor.”

Petrol saluted and did as he was told, letting the four of you slip into a small cove of fallen trees and ferns, obscuring you from the rest of the lake. You were suppressing laughter as you were hidden away.

“Lost sight of you, everything going ok?” Gwen’s voice came through the speaker on the necklace you had on. It matched the earrings she’d worn the year prior.

“We’re good on our end. Just giving him a bit of a challenge. Where is he?”

“In the water not far behind, I just saw him pass around the island.”
“Roger that.” You click off the small device and wait.

“So that’s how you were able to escape our impenetrable forces,” Pikeman said. “We tried to figure it out for weeks!”

“Well, that and the fact that you drool over Gwen more than an old cat over tuna,” you say.

Pikeman sputtered for a bit as you, Petrol, and Snake chuckled slightly.

“Well just because I know a fine woman when I see one doesn’t mean you all have to be jealous about it.”

“You know,” Snake said, “this one’s not too bad either. She’s got a serious double half hitch.”

Petrol placed his hand on your shoulder and grunted a bit, but you understood his message: *Your bravery in the face of such adversity was also admirable.*

“Aww, thanks you guys.”

The four of you hear the motor of David’s boat at the same time. Pikeman puts a finger to his lips and you all go silent as you watch him drift by. As soon as he was out of view, Petrol started the motor again and took off in the opposite direction, full speed ahead.

“Oh David!” you call out in a dramatic tone that would have made Preston proud, “I need you to come save me!” You snicker with the Woodscouts as you continue your get away.

David whips his boat around at the sound of your voice. You didn’t seem to actually be in any danger which made him feel better, but he still wasn’t going to give up easily. He pushed on, slowly giving the boat more speed until he was almost flying across the water’s surface. Soon, he was right on your tail.

“I’ve got you now!” He called out.

The Woodscouts rip around the end of the island, splashing the water into the air as they did so. David followed suit, now slightly wet. The campers and scouts watched from the lakeside, cheering David on in the chase as it continued. Grabbing a bit of rope from the storage compartment, David formed a lasso and swung it over his head. He let it fly and it caught around the motor of the other boat, quickly tying the other end to the seat of his own. Bracing himself, he cut the motor on his own boat and held on as the rope went taut.

The four of you lurched forward in your boat as you felt your drag suddenly increase. Finding the rope around your motor, Petrol did his best to try and shake David off, but it was no use. Slowly, David pulled himself forward until he was right behind your boat, victorious.

“Well done, David,” Pikeman said with a smile, “It seems you’ve bested us. The girl is yours.”

David takes your hand and helps you step into the boat, cutting the rope that connected he and the scouts. You give him a quick kiss on the cheek. “My hero.”

He dips you without warning and kisses you, resulting in a large cheer that came from the shore as you and David stood reunited.

Chapter End Notes
So I have to let you guys know

There are only 3 chapters of SOWK left.

There's potential for another one in SYS but as for this fic, we're almost at the end.

I can't believe it either. I'll be keeping in touch with everyone as much as possible in these last few chapters because I too am going to be sad when it ends.

Campe Diem everyone.

I love you all.
You hear your name being spoken gently as you’re shaken slightly in an effort to wake you. You blink your eyes halfway open and find David over you with a huge grin on his face. Smiling, you roll over and discover that he’s blindfolded himself.

“David? What are you-”

“The groom can’t see his bride on the wedding day before the ceremony!” he says cheerfully, “Gwen says so.”

You smile and roll your eyes at him. Of course she did.

“Well, I guess this is where I leave you until then. Make sure you don’t hurt yourself with that thing on.” You give him a quick kiss (which gave him a bit of a surprise as he couldn’t see it coming) before making your way to the smaller cabin you’d had converted into your dressing room. You found Gwen there, already dolled up in a lilac colored dress, waiting for you.

“You ready to do this thing?” she asked.

You take a deep breath and look at her. “I’m ready.”

Meanwhile, David had found his way (without the blindfold) into the other cabin and started to get ready himself. He looked himself over in the mirror as he straightened out his tie. It was green, matching the color of his eyes, and he was doing his best to make sure it looked perfect. The rest of the tux was standard black as it ran its way down his arms and legs, the white button up beneath the coat poking out just enough.

Once he was satisfied with his tie, he looked at himself. Really looked at himself. David knew he’d been through hell and back a few times over, and somehow, despite everything, he’d managed to stay the warm, positive man he thought himself to be. David always did his best to make sure people were happy, and to find the good in others, even if that happiness sometimes came at his expense. But now, as he found himself fiddling with his cuff links, he knew that no matter what happened after today, David would be happy. How could he not? He was about to spend the rest of his life with his best friend by his side.

A knock at the door drew him away from his thoughts. “Come in!”

Max walked in dressed in his traditional cultural attire and a clipboard in his hand. “Alright, the alter has been set up and guests are starting to arrive. If the rehearsal was anything to go by, the ceremony will be about 25 minutes. Then, we move to the activity field for the reception. I’ve got Nurf and Ered working on setting up the tables right now. Last chance was yesterday but do you
still want to go with the buffet? If not I can pull a few strings.”

David chuckled. “We’re sure, Max.”

“Good, because the caterers would NOT have been happy. I’ve got to go check on Neil for the fireworks. See you-”

“Max wait. Come here for a sec.” David sat down on the bed and patted the spot next to him. Max took a seat.

“Max. I- I just wanted to thank you. For everything. I know that you’ve been behind all the plans to get _____and I together and to be honest, had you not bugged me about it at the campfire last year, I may have never found the courage to even ask her out. You’ve been there through it all with us, even going as far to risk your life! I don’t think I can say that about anyone else.

“I guess what I’m trying to say is that I’m so, so proud of you, Max. Your leadership and problem solving abilities are going to take you far in life, and I can’t wait to be there with you when they do. And I know we’re still pretty new at parenting but, I hope that you think _____and I doing an ok job. We both love you, so much.”

Max smiled. “Listen, and don’t you fucking dare tell anyone I said this, but I love you guys too...dad.” The word almost felt foreign on his tongue after not having used it in so long. But, it finally felt right. David was his dad, and you were his mom. He didn’t have much time to dwell on the thought though, as he was immediately picked up and shoved against David’s face as he was brought into a crushing hug.

“That’s the first time you’ve called me dad! Max do you know that?! Oh my gosh I’m just so happy I could-”

“D-av-id,” Max choked out.

“Right. Sorry!” He put the boy down, allowing him to catch his breath.

“Don’t blow a gasket, Dad. You’ve still gotta get married. See you at the altar.”

A few hours later and it was time. Your friends and family sat in rows of white chairs lining the shore of Lake Lilac, an even split down the middle as your aisle. At the back was a curtain that obscured the view between the lake and the rest of camp, acting as cover for when you’d make your appearance. Preston and Harrison stood, each holing part of the curtain to pull away when the time was right. The Woodscouts had made good on their promise of being ushers, and had ensured everyone was in the correct seat at the right time. Dolph held the rings on a small pillow which Nurf had engraved earlier, while Space kid stood next to him with a basket of flower petals in his hand. They’d been hand-picked by Nerris who had been brushing up on her flower language in order to give secret messages in her campaign. Neil and Nikki sat together in the back row next to Ered, hiding bags of rice underneath their seats. Timothy rested on Nikki’s shoulder. Everyone was dressed up in their formal attire, excited for what was to come.

David stood at the end of the small pier next to Max- his best man, anxiously awaiting the start. Gwen gave him a reassuring thumbs up as she stood on the opposite side, and the Millers were ready at the pulpit waiting to begin.

Preston peaked around the curtain and gave the thumbs up to Nurf who started the music. Everyone stood as the curtains were drawn back turned towards you as you stood with your bouquet of wildflowers in one hand and arm locked with Quartermaster’s. Space kid happily took his place in
front of the two of you, spreading the flower petals as he walk.

As soon as the curtains were lifted, David saw no one but you. He wasn’t sure if his mouth was open or closed as he watched you walk towards him, but he did know he was crying. You looked absolutely beautiful.

The high-low skirt rippled slightly while you walked as it fell from the empire waistline. The green satin ribbon that connected the upper and lower halves of the dress was tied into a delicate bow in the back. Lace covered the dress from top to bottom, giving it a texture in the snow white fabric. A scoop neckline was held in place by thin straps that showed off your neck and shoulders. It was contoured to you perfectly, showing off your figure in ways that flattered your body and made you glow. Your veil was mid length and held in place by a comb decorated in small green beads that resembled ivy.

As you reached the end of the dock, Quartermaster handed you off to David and the two of you took the others hands, smiling as you looked into each others eyes.

The first Agent began. “Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here today in the presence of these witnesses, to join David and ______ in matrimony commended to be honorable among all; and therefore is not to be entered into lightly but reverently, passionately, lovingly and solemnly. Into this - these two persons present now come to be joined. If any person can show just cause why they may not be joined together - let them speak now or forever hold their peace.”

The grounds were silent, not even a birds song nor a crickets chirp filled the air.

The second agent continued. “As a declaration of their love, the couple has written their own vows for each other as a promise of everlasting unity in their lives. We’ll start with the bride.”

You take a deep breath before you speak, your vows having been memorized for weeks. “David, from the moment I met you I knew you were someone special. A kindred spirit. A friend to all, and someone I’d trust my very life with. For the longest time I didn’t want to admit I was in love with you because I was afraid I’d scare you off and that I wouldn’t be able to be with you, even if just as friends. But now, as we stand here on a summer’s day at the place we love so dearly, I can’t imagine why I ever thought you would’ve gone.

“My life changed drastically from the day I met you- I found myself excited to try new things and have new experiences. But mainly, I was just excited to see you. I still am. Everyday when I see your face, I think of just how lucky I am to be yours. And I never want that feeling to go away.

“I know that no matter what we face in the future, we’re going to be able to overcome it together- just look what we’ve braved so far! Nothing is going to be able to keep us apart, come hell or high water, because we’ll always fight to get back to where we belong: together. I may have been hesitant to say it in the past, but I’m not anymore. I love you, David, from the bottom of my heart, and I can’t wait to be by your side forever.” You felt your voice quiver just the slightest bit near the end as you fought to keep the tears back. David looked at you with pure love in his eyes as you spoke, wiping away small tears as they came.

“And now the groom shall recite his own vows.”

David reached into his pocket and fumbled with a small piece of paper for a moment before clearing his throat to speak. He was slightly embarrassed to have not had his vows memorized, but the words were a safety net for him, because he knew that if he were to look at you as he spoke, he wouldn’t be able to get through his vows. He would break down at his own wedding as his declarations of love spilled forth unintelligibly from his mouth. He clears his throat as he began to
“______, I don’t think I know the right words to describe just how much I love you. Since the beginning I’d known that I had liked you, and you quickly became the center of my daydreams. I can’t tell you how long or how many times I’ve dreamt of this day, being able to take your hand and call you my wife. I’d lay awake at night thinking of you and what our lives could be like if we were together. Every single vision I had of you pales in comparison to what I’ve been lucky enough to see with my own eyes. Your laughter is music to me, and you smile makes my heart go crazy every time I see it.

“Standing here now, I can’t think of a single person I’ve ever felt this way about. If soulmates exist, I think I can say for certain that I’ve found mine. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me, and I know that even if I was to lose everything, as long as you stay by my side, I’ll be happy. I love you, _____, more than I’ve ever loved anyone or anything else. You make me want to be a better person, and I can’t imagine my life without you. Know that no matter what happens, I’ll always be there for you, and that I’ll always love you.”

You do your best to wipe away your tears as they came, and the rest of the crowd did the same. David regarded you fondly, proud that his words had moved you, as he had meant every single one of them. There was no one he’d rather spend his life with than you.

“The rings, please,” the first agent said, and Dolph brought them over, each of them having been tied neatly onto a small purple cushion. David took his off of the pillow and gently took your hand, ready to place it on your finger.

“Repeat after me,” the second agent said, “I, David.”

“I, David,” he said.

“Give you, _____.”

“This ring as an eternal symbol of my love and commitment to you.”

“This ring as an eternal symbol of my love and commitment to you,” he delicately slipped the ring on your finger as he recited the last line. You repeated the same lines as you mimicked him, sliding the wooden band on his left hand in a symbol of undying unity. The second agent spoke again once it was on.

“Do you David take _____ as your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do you part?”

“I do,” he says, and squeezes you hand a little tighter.”

“And do you _____,” the first agent said, “take David as your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do you part?”

“I do.”

“Then by the power vested in us by the CIA, we now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”
Slowly, David lifted your veil and looked deep into your eyes before cupping your face and planting a kiss your lips. Your wrap your arms around him and lean into it, everything else around you disappearing. Neither of you saw the crowd on its feet nor heard their thunderous applause or tears of joy. In that moment, all either of you felt was each other.

“I love you,” you whisper to him as you manage to come away from each other.

“I love you too.”

You suddenly feel as if you’re being hit with little pellets of some kind, and when you look up, you find Nikki being carried by Timothy as she chucks handfuls of ride at you and David from the sky. You and David look at each other and laugh before rushing off together, down the aisle of enthusiastic attendees and through the curtains on the other side.

You have your pictures taken, and Dolph paints a family portrait of you, David, and Max as a gift before the reception. Harrison had taken to entertaining the audience with his skills while they waited, earning him a round of applause, and a bit of street cred as a magician. Soon enough, you and David arrived and the reception began as everyone laughed, ate, danced and partied with each other.

Throughout the reception, various people got up to make speeches, including all of your kids who roasted you and David to hell and back lovingly. Gwen spoke about how she had absolutely no idea how you managed to put up with David, but that she was happy for the two of you.

“And for the record,” she added at the end, “I just wanna say that I called this shit from the beginning.”

The crowd laughs as you and David grin at her. Finally, Max clinks his knife against his glass, drawing the attention to himself.

“I’d just like to say that I stand by my statement that love is stupid and that you don’t find people as stupid as the two of you anywhere else but here.” There are a few chuckles from the crowd as you and David roll your eyes, smiles on your faces.

“But seriously,” he says, “the two of you deserve each other and all the adventures that come with. As much as I hate to admit it, you guys are pretty cool, and….and I’m proud to be able to call you my parents. So here’s to the newlyweds and the best parents a kid could ask for.” He raised his glass in a toast causing the rest of the people to follow him. You couldn’t resist rushing him and pulling him into a tight hug.

“I love you Max.”

“I love you too, mom.”

Your grip tightens as you hold him close.

Later that night as the stars found their way out of hiding and most of the other guests had gone home, you, David, Gwen, Max, and the rest of your campers sat on blankets under the sky to watch the fireworks. With a simple press of a button, Neil controlled the sparks as they flew away from the island and into the crisp night air. Vivid reds and greens sparkled against the dark of the night, illuminating it for just a moment before the boom resonated in your chest. You lean into David a little more as he puts his arm around you, and draw Max in just a bit closer.

You watched them for a moment, your husband and your son, as their faces were lit up by the fireworks above. It was funny the way the world worked sometimes, as one small change in your
life can lead to massive shifts down the road. Where would you be had Gwen gone to camp that year? Where would you be if Max hadn’t convinced David to ask you out? Where would you be if Jasper never showed up? Where would you be if you’d never met David at all?

You let the questions simmer for a moment until you realized that, in the end, they didn’t matter much. As far as you were concerned, you were exactly where you were supposed to be- in between the two people you loved at the place suited for your family. As much as you’d been through, Camp Campbell really was the place for you and David, along with everyone else who was willing to give it an honest shot.

“I have your present by the way,” David says softly as he pulls out a little gift, drawing you out of your thoughts. You open it to find his yellow camp shirt, the one he wore around his neck, in the box. “I figured since I can’t wear it much anymore, it should go to someone who loves this place as much as I do. And who better than my wife?”

“David, I...thank you. I’ll treasure it forever.” You turn to let him tie it around your neck and smile as it falls into place. It still smelled like pine needles and campfire smoke. Like David. “I have yours too,” you say as you bring out a little rectangle wrapped in silver paper.

David opens it carefully and his eyes widen once he realizes what he’s holding. It was your journal- the one you had written last year. The little book that held your innermost thoughts and feelings about everything that had happened. “_____ are you sure?”

“I am, David. Take good care of it, alright?”

He holds your chin gently and kisses you. “Of course.”

You sigh, content. Tomorrow was the last day of camp and you’d be saying goodbye to your kids until the next summer once again. Max would be going home with Gwen, as you and David would be going on your honeymoon- camping at as many national parks as you could manage in two weeks. David had drawn up the itinerary and while packed tightly, it was going to be a wonderful way to start your married life with him.

But, for now, you were content just to sit and watch the sky as it lit up, changing just as your life had. It seemed everything had worked out just as it should have.

Chapter End Notes

So like I want you all to know that from here on out I was ugly crying while writing.

Campe Diem!
Married Life

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by "Married Life" from the movie UP. Check it out here! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WW2I0S1e0M

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The years pass and it seems like things happened in the blink of an eye. Right before your eyes you watched as Max grew older with the years, eventually becoming taller than you but not quite as tall as David. He started wearing his hair back more to try and keep it manageable, but when you offered to trim it he would hiss at you.

You saw your campers all grow and change as the years passed as well. You didn’t have to ask who was coming back to camp for years until Ered didn’t show up. She’d written you and David a letter explaining that she had grown outside the age limit for camp (17) and would be spending the summer preparing for college. It was the first summer without a family member and it always felt a bit empty. She had been the first to physically outgrow the camp and a few years later, Preston and Harrison had as well. Then Nerris and Nurf. Slowly, you had to come to terms with the fact that your kids were just growing up. It didn’t mean that you had to let them go entirely, but it still hurt to know that they would be gone from your life for who knows how long. You missed them dearly, but you and David (along with a few extra counselors here and there) ran the summer camp year after year without fail, greeting a new generation of campers every summer.

You, David and Max ended up moving to a small cabin in the woods near Sleepy Peak so that you and David could be closer to work. Max didn’t mind much, as he never really got attached to where he lived before. What you didn’t realize was that you’d unknowingly enrolled Max in the same high school Neil was in. Years of sleep overs and late night movie marathons followed, along with the occasional backyard explosion.

You didn’t want to admit it, but you knew Max had grown too old for the camp, too. You blinked and he was graduating high school, smiling as you and David cheered him on from the stands. He had stuck with music all through his schooling, and you and David always made it to his concerts. You blinked again and you were helping him move into his college dorm, crying as you hugged him goodbye until Thanksgiving was to roll around. David at least had managed to keep it together until you and he got back in the car, which upon sitting at the driver's seat he started sobbing uncontrollably out of both pride and sadness from having to let him go. You drove home that day.

You and David did manage to keep in touch with the kids through the years, writing letters or sending messages to keep tabs on them. And, while he was away, you made Max send you daily texts, just like you had after your first year at camp.

As for your work, David made a phenomenal ranger during the off season, and would often go around to schools to teach kids about the different kinds of plants and animals of the forest, showing them which were good, which were bad, and how to tell the different. He would also help mark and create new hiking trails along with checking to make sure the off limits areas were left undisturbed. You, on the other hand, would frequent the trip to and from Camp Campbell, monitoring the population of hawks that had begun to repopulate in the Sleepy Peak region. You
were devastated the day you’d found that Timothy had passed on, but it seemed that his son, Timothy Jr. (as named by Nikki) would carry on his legacy, just as majestic as his father had been.

Max ended up switching majors in college, finding that he didn’t like communications much, but music he could relate to. It wasn’t long after that he managed to release a few original tracks of his own, gaining him some popularity around the campus. He wasn’t quite sure what to do with the attention, but he managed to find a way to balance it all out. He always did, after all.

He and a few people he met ended up starting a band together, and once they graduated, they stuck with it. At first, they were small- playing local gigs in garages and bars, but they slowly managed to gain quite a bit of popularity, rising to the ranks of semi-stardom. They weren’t huge like Paramore or Green Day, but they did open for both of those bands at some point in their careers. You and David were always proud to say you had a rockstar in the family, and were eager to hear about everything when Max came home for the holidays.

You blinked again and you and David were older, now in your late forties and celebrating your twenty fifth anniversary at camp with a reunion. It wasn’t the first you’d had, nor would it be the last, but it was still great to see how far everyone had come in their lives. Harrison was a world-renowned magician, reaching stardom levels greater than that of David Blaine and Criss Angel. He was the world’s next Houdini.

Nerris had taken her love for nerd culture and turned it into a career, lending her voice to many video games and running her own DnD sessions in live streams with other prominent people in the industry. She was known well in certain groups, and she was happy to say she’d found her first party here at Camp Campbell.

Ered had followed in the footsteps of her dads by becoming an agent, though she was more one to go undercover James-Bond style. She couldn’t tell you many stories due to sensitive information, but from what she could tell you about jumping out of planes with nothing but snowboard and the top of a remote mountain rapidly approaching her, it seemed she was living the life she wanted.

Preston stuck with his love of theater and managed to land a few roles on Broadway. He had yet to become a lead, but it seemed to him being able to say he was even on Broadway was a dream come true. You had faith he would land a larger role soon, and what no one even knew yet was that he’d been nominated for a Tony for ‘best supporting role.’

Nurf had managed to keep up blacksmithing as a hobby, but ultimately decided to go into counseling for troubled youth. He felt that his experience as someone who had gone through it as a kid gave him the insight into the minds of the pupils he worked with. He became very successful, helping improve the lives of the kids that came to him, and becoming a huge influence in the movement for better mental health for minors.

Dolph was accepted into a major art school right out of high school as his portfolio had been deemed ‘daring and impressive.’ Luckily, he realized one day the hidden symbolism he’d unconsciously placed in a lot of his work, and managed to get rid of it by the time he was in high school. His studio was set in New York City, so he and Preston would often get lunch together when they could find the time. His work was mainly being shown in MOMA, though his influence was seen in a multitude of places.

Nikki had become a park ranger just like David, and had returned to work as a counselor at Camp Campbell with you and David during the summer. She was a bit of a mix between the two of you, as she would often be in the woods helping with your research, as well as helping David manage the campers. You were both a little older now, so you both appreciated the help she gave you.
Neil was working as a scientist in a medical laboratory, trying to study the effects of voice modulators on human subjects. It had taken a lot of convincing, and a lot of testing, but he’d finally managed to perfect his serum, allowing the person who drank it to change their voice at will for hours at a time with little to no side effects. Their voices would change back later to its original state, and everything would go back to normal. It was what he was working towards with his Phd, and Ered and her dads had already ordered cases of the stuff when it had been finalized for use in the field. Being able to change your voice had its benefits as a spy.

Space kid (or AJ as you’d come to call him in his later years) had to be streamed in as he was currently on the ISS. He was going to lead the world’s first manned mission to the mars next summer, and you couldn’t have been more proud.

You blinked again and you and David were retiring from the parks service. You’d done all the research you possibly could have in the region and you were ready to pass the torch to someone else. As for David, he was sad to be retiring, but then you reminded him that you and he would have more time to travel now, exploring the world and discovering its secrets. It cheered him up immensely to know you were still willing to go on adventures with him, all these years later.

There was also the question of who would take over the camp now that you two were gone but the answer was obvious. Nikki would be taking over as head ranger as well as operator. It just seemed fitting for her, and she was honored when you’d given her the news that you and David wanted to entrust the camp to her. She accepted immediately.

Your small home was filled to the brim with pictures of your humble little family. Everything had been documented: your time in college, your wedding day, Max’s graduations, various pictures of the different generations of campers, Max’s tour photos, yours and David’s world travels, as well as the pictures your kids had sent you as they lived their lives.

You were in the kitchen cutting peaches when you felt two familiar hands come up and cover your eyes.

“Guess who?” a cheerful voice asks.

You smile. “Hey David.”

His arms find themselves around your waist as he leans in to give your cheek a kiss. He had a small beard now, so it would tickle you every time he did it.

“What are we making today?” he asks.

“I’m thinking cobbler. Want to help?”

“You know it!” He squeezes you momentarily before moving to start the crust. Soon, the house smelled like peaches and cinnamon as you and David fed each other the sweet treat.

You spent the rest of the afternoon doing puzzles and just enjoying each others company. It was pleasant, watching David carefully look over the little pieces as he tried to form them together.

“I think we’re missing a piece,” he tells you.

“Oh?”

“Yeah right here, look.” He pointed to a single missing section in an almost solid portion of the puzzle.
You raise your eyebrows in a slight smirk. “Are you sure it’s not that one right in front of you?”

David squints as he picks up the piece and tests it out. It was a perfect fit. He chuckled. “Looks like your eyes are better than mine. I must be getting old.”

“You’re not that old, camp man,” you tease, and the two of you laugh with each other.

You crawl into bed beside him later that night, still finding yourself the slightest bit giddy to be near him. He kisses the top of your head before turning out the lights.

“I love you David,” you whisper in the darkness.

“I love you too, _____."

Life was good.

Chapter End Notes

So. Here we are, one chapter from the end. I can't believe just how long you all have been reading this. I can't believe I freaking WROTE this. When it's all said and done, I think the wordcount on this alone is somewhere around 180,000? Basically, the length of the first Eragon novel.

I'll be doing a few special thanks and shoutouts next week after the last chapter as a small thank you to everyone, as well as a rather exciting announcement! I love you all, thank you for the support and love you've given my little story.

And, as always,

Campe Diem!
The Last Rose of Summer

Chapter Notes

This chapter's title was inspired by "The Last Rose of Summer." It's an old Irish folk song, the composer escaping me. However, my favorite version is from the game "Endless Ocean." Check it out here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFrGl0YNV4

See the end of the chapter for more notes

All good things must come to an end eventually. You and David had been married happily for 55 years before he passed peacefully in his sleep. You’d known it was going to happen soon, as he was moving slower in the end, his mind not gone but his energy sapped from him completely. So when you’d woken up beside him to find his eyes had been closed for the last time and a smile still on his features, you’d wept over him for some time, not wanting to admit to yourself that he was really gone. You managed to pull yourself together long enough to call Max, and he was over as soon as he could be. The two of you cried together, mother and son over the loss of a wonderful father and husband.

That had been a week ago. Now, as you stood on the docks back at Camp Campbell waiting for everyone to arrive, you knew that this had been the right choice. He would’ve wanted it this way. Max stood beside you as you held his urn. Nurf had been the one to make it- it was the shape of the sleepy pine and a temporary resting place for your beloved. One by one, your campers made their way to the grounds, much to the confusion of the current campers, but Nikki explained to them that there was a special reunion of past campers that day and that she was going to be busy for a while. Once everyone had made their way to the docks, you turned to face them. They all had their old yellow shirts tied around their necks in solidarity to the man who’d truly believed in them. The man who’d given as much as he could and more for them in their childhoods so that they could succeed in their lives today. You had worn your old counselor shirt with his yellow one around your neck.

Gwen arrived shortly after also in her old counselor uniform. You’d never actually seen her in it, and you imagined she looked great in it when she was younger. She held you and you allowed yourself to shed just a few tears more before you start the process. Carefully opening the urn, you spread a little bit of his ashes in the water right where you’d been married. One by one, your kids took a small piece of David and spread him around the camp. Max rowed you over to the island so that you could put a little piece of him where he’d said goodbye to Jasper all those years ago, and Max put a little bit of him near the entrance of the mansion where you’d almost lost your life. He walked with you out to the Sleepy Peak look out where you’d first told him you loved him, and watched as the ashes were carried away on the wind. You manage a small smile, hoping that the wind would carry him over the forest he’d known and loved so dearly. It was truly his home. Where he belonged.

You meet up with the others in front of the flagpole and each give it a salute in honor of David. You and Max take the last few handfuls and scatter it around the base, ensuring that a little bit of him could be nearby it at all times.

When it was over, no one really knew what to say. You heard Max start singing quietly.
“There’s a place I know that’s tucked away
A place where you and I had stayed
Where we had gone to laugh and play
And had adventures everyday.” He kept his eyes down as the tears started to swim in his vision.
“I know it sounds hard to believe, but guys and gals it’s true.
Camp Campbell was the place for me and you.”

You take Max’s hand in yours and continue. “Well we swam through lakes and climbed up trees.
Caught fish bugs bear and honey bees.”

Nikki chimed in, “There were endless possibilities.”

“And it was never hyperbole,” Neil said, and the rest joined in to finish the song.

“Our motto’s Campe Diem and that means I’m telling you, we did archery, hiking, search and rescue, biking, horseback, training that will save you from a heart attack, scuba diving, miming, keeping up with rhyming, football, limbo, science, stunting, Pre-Calc, spaceships, treasure hunting, bomb defusal, no refusal, fantasy, circus trapeze, and fights, and ghosts, and paints, and snakes, and knives, and chess, and dance, and weight–It’s Camp Camp!”

A small fit of laughter comes over the group as you manage to spit out the last half of the song.
How David managed to do it on cue every time without fail never once ceased to amaze you. The group converges to the campfire pit for a while, as your all reminisce about summers past and the fun and mischief that had been made at this very camp. You found each other to be smiling and laughing as everyone told their versions of the stories you’d only heard rumors about. This was how David would’ve wanted it- everyone smiling and laughing and remembering the good times, not mourning over the fact he was gone.

Later that afternoon, after everyone but you and Max had left, you had made your way over to the docks where you sat with Max, the empty urn at your side. You were watching the sunset as it turned Lake Lilac it’s beautiful golden color in the early summer sun. The sky was pink and the clouds looked like cotton candy as they stretched across the sky, unaware of the cooling shadows they formed below.

“Hey mom?” Max asked. “I think I’m going to head in, are you going to be ok?”

“I’ll be fine, Max,” you say gently. “I’m right behind you.”

With your reassurance, Max stood and left, leaving you to gaze out over the water. Yeah, you’d been through a lot for this camp, but you wouldn’t have traded it for the world. You smile at the memories you’d made here, both with and now without David. Even if they were painful, you’d made it through them all, and now were lucky enough to be able and look back on them. You chuckle at the memory of David’s words: *I can’t picture my life without you.*

“David you ass,” you say heartily. “I didn’t think that meant you’d die on me!”

“I *never meant for it to be this literal.*”

You whip your head around so fast you nearly gave yourself whiplash. There he was, sitting next to you on the docks looking just as young as the day you’d met him in his old camp uniform, minus
the yellow shirt you wore around your neck. He was ethereal, not as solid as Jasper had been, but not 100% see-through either.

“David?”

“In the flesh! Wait…” He scratches his head and you let out a laugh. Yeah, that was your David.

“Here to crash your own funeral?”

He shrugged. “I think it’s a bit late for that, don’t you think?” His voice had a slight echo as he spoke. “To be honest, I’d thought about what you said when we freed Jasper, about how you’d want to see me one more time. I thought I’d follow through.” He gives you a sheepish smile and you feel tears starting to fall from your face again. “Hey now, don’t cry. It’s all ok.” He reached for you but found that his arm went straight through you. You laughed just a little.

“That would’ve scared the shit out of me had Jasper not done it first.”

“Hey, language!”

“David oh my God. You’re actually lecturing me from beyond the grave. Do you realize how absurd that is?”

“Well it’s not my fault the swear jars overflowed!”

You laugh with each other before silence comes over you, admiring the sunset one more time with him at your side.

“I suppose I’m not allowed to ask what comes next, huh?”

“I don’t really know myself,” he admits, “I’ve kinda been waiting for you.”

“David,” you say, ”you don’t have to wait for me.”

“But, what am I going to do without you?”

“Look the place around, maybe meet up with Jasper. I don’t know, whatever you feel like doing I guess. Then when I get there, you can show me around, just like you did at camp.”

“Promise you’ll come?”

You lean in and kiss the area where his lips were. It was icy cold- a literal ghost of a kiss.

“I promise. I love you, David. I’ll see you soon.”

“I love you too, _____. More than I ever think you’ll know.” He gave you one last look before disappearing into the light of dusk. He may no longer be there with you, but you knew David would never truly be gone. Whenever there was a light breeze on a hot summer day, that would be David. Whenever the cool rains of September come to wash away the hot dust of August, David would be there. When the birds would sing at first morning’s light, filling the air with the inspiration of ancient music, David was there. He would always be the woods as they spread out over the mountains and hillsides. His spirit was forever ingrained into the camp at which he’d spent his life loving and caring for. Yes, David would always happily be watching over Camp Campbell.

And, soon enough, you joined him.
Some say that if you listen to the wind on a still summers day as it rustles through the evergreens, you can just hear two voices speaking the old camp motto:

Campe Diem.
Author's Note

8 months, about 8 archs, tears, laughter, trauma, and almost 170,000 words later, we made it. We made it to the very end.

I can't believe it either.

When I first started writing SOWK, I thought I might get around 1000 hits total, and now look where we are. I can't believe that my little daydreams about Camp Campbell have been so lovingly received. It's unbelievable that you all showed such amazing support for me and the fic, and I cannot thank you enough. For a short period of time, it almost felt like this fic was what kept me going during the year- and I know that some of you have expressed the same sentiment in the comments.

To think that something I created has moved, inspired, and helped so many people is nearly indescribable. I honestly don't know what to say other than I know where you've been, and thank you so much. Every comment brought a smile to my face, and a few brought tears. Your words have brought me as much joy as mine have to you, and I'm sad it's over!

I really am going to miss interacting with all of you here, but I didn't want to let you all go completely. There is the blog of course and if you let me know who's who on tumblr I'll follow you with my main! But, I also made an email account if anyone ever wants to chat about stuff. I know it sounds strange but, I do feel somewhat of a connection with a lot of you, as I memorized quite a few usernames when comments would pop up!

Find me at: ao3ram423@gmail.com

I do have one final announcement about SOWK, however. As I was writing and releasing, I received a few comments about how a lot of guys read this fic. It really made me sit and realize just how geared towards the female perspective fanfic often is and as a woman myself, it's not something I'd ever really noticed before. So, because everyone should have the chance to love David, I'm planning on re-releasing SOWK with both he/him/his and they/them/their pronouns.

This will take time as I'll essentially have to reread the whole thing and change a few things around here and there, but i'm going to shoot for the end of January. Relive SOWK with your preferred pronouns or throw some OC's into the bunch! Everyone should be able to love David, and I think he'd agree.

Lastly, I want to do a few quick shoutouts to some people.

QueenofDarkness13 - I think you're one of if not THE longest commentator I have. I can't thank you enough for your support for all these months.

DorkyWriter - As a silent admirer myself, it really meant a lot to have someone come out of their comfort zone and leave such a nice comment. Thank you!

talkshitgethit - I'm still laughing at the 'good shit fanfic' comment to this day dude.

kalliblast - You've been around for quite a while as well, and seeing your icon in the comments always made me smile. Thank you for sticking around for so long.
E- I saw you at the beginning and you're still here at the very end. Dude I'm seriously blown away that you're here with us all now. Also, HOW THE HELL DID YOU GET A ONE LETTER NAME?!

Zainieboo- You gave me a chance to explain a few things in the fic that I wasn't sure I was going to have the opportunity to do, and are the reason I'm re-releasing SOWK. Seeing that a guy wanted to read this fic really opened my eyes and I can't thank you enough for it.

KeeKee- You're one of the people who's usernames I have come to recognize and are one of the first people I thought of when I wanted to do shoutouts! Thank you for everything. The fact that my fic made you smile after a rough time is amazing. It's one of the highest compliments I think I could recieve, knowing that my writing helped someone.

daughterofthebillionaire- I think we could power a city with how many kudos you wanted to leave this fic. I appreciate each and every single one of them, even if you can only officially leave one. Here's one for you <3

Hannah- I hope everything lived up to your expectations, seeing as you wanted David and Reader to adopt Max and all ;) (Also, please keep your first born, I don't need kids XD)

TheQueenOfAshes- You were another who popped into my head when thinking of shoutouts. You showed up after having read 1-39 in a DAY which...holy shit man. Since then, your love and support has not gone unnoticed. Thank you.

MidnightRose023- I loved receiving comments like yours. I LIVED for the reactions to this fic and gosh you gave me some great ones.

WAGL- I always looked forward to seeing your reactions to the chapters. Your comments always made me smile because I knew the reactions you were giving ere 100% genuine.

Ooga Booga Boys- Seeing the words "Like Matilda but with an Edgy little boy" made me laugh a lot harder than it should have. I really appreciate all the kind words you game me, and I thank you for the support you gave.

Saffi- You were 100% ready to fight Campbell and we stan a queen for it. I loved seeing your comments as the reactions you gave were so lively! I could here you yelling at me through the computer.

Catoptromancer- "So this is major character death" is the exact response I was looking for. I loved that comment so much and it might very well be one of my favorites of all time. Thank you for being around so long- I recognized your comments in the past, but that one was amazing as a writer to read.

Jozlyn- So many comments of yours made me smile I don't think I can pick just one. Thank you for all the joy you brought me.

Keleuh- Your comment congratulating the 60+ chapters actually moved me to tears. I can't thank you enough for your kind words.

SpellBoundNova- I'm so glad you stuck around. I really enjoyed the back and forth I saw not only in the comments to the fic, but in the replies to other readers as well. You're so much fun to have around dude, thank you. And hey, something big did end up going down. Just maybe not what you expected eh? ;)

Rose :) - You solved the crossword! And I was glad to see you back in the comments after a bit of
a hiatus. It's nice to see just how many people are coming back to the fic chapter after chapter, you
know?

Sharpshooter McClain- Totally get the silent reader vibes dude I'm the same way. But I'm touched
that you think so highly of my little story. And I'm sure you're a better writer than you think.

RosieRoo- A lot of screaming and fangirl sounds was my reaction when writing this so, I'm glad it
could be transferred to the readers! Thank you for everything.

I also have a few very special thanks to give out:

To Ki: I am beyond flattered that my writing has inspired not one but TWO projects for you to
embark on. I love the writing you've done and the art you create-it's all absolutely incredible. I'm
honored that someone with your talent has decided to take up the job of continuing with this fic in
your own little ways. I'm excited to see what you come up with next, as I think you may very well
be one of the reasons this fic will live on for a while. Thank you for everything dude, I'm proud to
be your friend.

To Cecil Elijah Faustus: You are truly one of my best friends, and even if this fic never got off the
ground, meeting you because of it would have made everything worth it. As one author to another,
the amount of dedication you put into your work is inspiring, and it blows me away every time you
show me a new piece of art or writing. I feel more than lucky to have met you- I feel blessed. We
joke about 'being on out bullshit' but what else could it be? You understand me in a way few
people do, and I mean it with every word when I say that I love you.

And lastly, to my mom: She read the whole damn thing as I wrote it, and even gave me ideas for a
few character lines. Namely, Quartermaster. I got to see her reactions live and it was amazing to
watch her laugh and worry and even cry over my writing. The morning she read what happened to
reader with Cameron, she walked into my room stony faced, looked me dead in the eye, and went
"how fucking dare you." She's on the couch with me now as I write this, unaware that I'm writing
about her. She was my biggest fan and gave me undying and unending support. I love you mama,
and I always will.

And of course, thank you to everyone who made it all the way through this absolute monster of a
fic. It's a novel through and through, sitting at around 400 pages in my google docs labeled
"important Writing 1 - 4." I still can't believe I sat down and wrote this whole freaking thing. I
hope to look back on it in the future and smile as much as I do now. And, for those of you
wondering if I'll write more, the answer is I'm not sure. This hit me out of nowhere and I finally
decided to do something about it. If I do write another, it will most likely be another summer
project, as I have a tendency to throw myself into things and not stop until it's done. And, with
school and various other things in my life, I can't dedicate the 6 - 12 hours a day I did when writing
this over the summer.

Thank you everyone, I love and appreciate each and every one of you. My life will feel strange
without the updates in it but, I know that it's here for us to return to when we want or need to.

Sincerely,

- Ram423
End Notes

This is my first fanfiction! Comments and criticisms appreciated!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!