Above and Below

by dearg0d

Summary

"I wish he'd go missing."

"He's probably the one doing it."

- AU in which Bowers Gang are behind all the disappearances.
Henry Bowers was a fucking monster. Not a human with a troubled past, not a human with a few mental problems, a pure monster. There was no humanity in him - not a spec. But if there was, Henry was very skilled at hiding it.

The entire town of Derry knew what the young man was capable of, yet nothing was ever done. Evidently, there were perks to having a sheriff as a father. People in town always said that boy would get away with murder. Eddie Kaspbrak was convinced he already had. It would explain the masses of missing kids, wouldn't it? Eddie didn't know what had put the idea in his head, but the more he thought about what he had said, the more sense he realised it made.

"He's probably the one doing it."

The comment haunted him that entire summer. It still haunted him three years on, but there was always doubt, always something that stopped him from truly believing it. Nobody else had really considered the possibility, not even Bill, who always insisted that Henry wouldn't have touched Georgie. It was a debatable concept - Henry Bowers wasn't very particular about the age of his victims.

"If Bowers was behind this," Stanley had once said, "We'd all have vanished a long time ago."

Eddie figured he was right. Stan usually was, and after all, Bowers had more motive to go for them than anyone else in that town. He had a special hatred for the losers club, a hatred that had intensified ever since that rock fight they'd initiated three summers ago. It had only ever gotten worse, making the losers club Bowers 'favourite' victims. But they were still around. Still alive, somehow.

So Stanley was probably right, if Bowers was responsible for the missing kids, the losers would have gone missing a long, long time ago.

There had been another thirty-something disappearances over the three years that had passed, averaging at around ten a year. The conspiracies were endless - some kids speculated that it was the work of a cult, some believed there were monsters lurking in the sewers, others suggested that the cops in town were cannibals and feasted on children. Somehow, that was the most popular theory of them all.

Eddie was trying not to dwell. He had spent three years trying to figure it out and still had no fucking clue as to what was happening in Derry. Ben, ever the fan of extensive research, insisted that this was the first weird thing to ever happen in Derry. Adults and parents were furious with the authorities, who didn't have a single useful lead, even after countless cases and three years of investigating. Bill always said that if the cops couldn't crack it, nobody could. He didn't really believe that.

It was their last summer before college. Eddie couldn't let it be ruined by his weird obsession with the missing kids. He believed they were dead, had believed so ever since they had found Betty Ripsom's shoe in the sewer, but he wasn't allowed to say that. Bill always got defensive about it, still convinced that Georgie was alive somewhere, despite the pitiful looks he received from his friends.
Not that the missing kids case was the only thing going to ruin his summer. Bowers had sworn he was going to make it hell, and the losers believed him. He had made the last three years bad enough - all of the losers knew that even once they left, they'd still be scarred by what the bullies had put them through. It wasn't exactly your average case of bullying; Henry Bowers was more than just a nasty kid, he was twisted and evil, a sadistic sociopath.

Even if Bowers left them alone, Eddie was still uncertain about how good of a time the gang were going to have. There was a lot of tension in the losers club, more than anyone was willing to address or admit.

"Are we going to the quarry tomorrow?" Mike asked, pulling a lump of grass out of the ground. He was probably the only loser who was on good terms with everybody, the only one who stayed neutral during the big Bill vs. Beverly quarrel, and the only one who hadn't tried to cross the line between platonic and romantic with another loser. He also had it a little easier with Bowers, considering he never had to face the gang at school everyday.

"Bowers will find us there," Stan said, gulping. Bev rolled her eyes at him, but she rolled her eyes at a lot of things he said. Their relationship was never the strongest.

"I'm not spending my last fucking summer here hiding away from Henry and his pets," Bev scoffed, "What is he gonna do? He can't get any worse than he already is." She stroked her waist, where her very own Bowers scar sat. None of them were going to argue, none of them could imagine Bowers getting worse. He had already tortured them enough, both emotionally and physically. Beverly was desensitised.

"I'm not willing to fucking risk that," Richie scoffed, siding with Stan, "You think I want to chance getting another one of these?" He pointed to his own scar, a large L on the back of his hand. Loser. That's what Patrick insisted it stood for as Henry had sliced into the flesh. Richie had cried like never before. None of the other losers knew that. He was alone when they came for him.

Bowers and his gang had gotten them all alone at least once. That was when they were worst.

"I have three and I'm not pussying out," Ben said, slapping his stomach where the 'H' from three years ago still scarred. Since then, Ben had been slashed on another two occasions. Like Richie, he had an L carved into him, but his was placed on the back of his leg. Ben had also been slashed on his side, and a deep line ran across as a reminder of the vicious attack. Ben always got it the worst. Somehow, he dealt with it the best. "You haven't even-"

"It's not a f-f-f-fucking competition," Bill cut in, glaring at them all. Bill acted like their leader, like it was his gang. Eddie didn't mind, but he knew that not everybody was a fan of his authoritative attitude. It annoyed Bev - so by default annoyed Ben too, and sometimes Richie would get pissy about it. "Y-You don't have to g-g-go to the q-quarry Stan."

"No," Bev said, "You don't have to go to the quarry Stan. You don't actually have to leave the house, Stan. If you don't like our plans, don't fucking come."

"Stop attacking him," Mike sighed, "It doesn't matter. It was one suggestion, we could always go to the arcade, or-or- I don't know, the barrens." In reality, there were a lot of places they could go around Derry. Bowers knew them all, so the risk of being found by him was there no matter where they ventured to. Stan kind of liked the idea of not leaving the house.

"Go where you want," Stan huffed, standing up, "I'll be at home, all summer probably." He passed a dirty look at Beverly, then stormed away, walking back to the road. He instantly regretted going off on his own, but he was growing more and more frustrated by everyone in the losers club. The
only people he really completely loved being around were Bill and Mike. He supposed Eddie was okay too, but Eddie and Ben always lectured him on his treatment of Beverly, and Ben was never not with Beverly to hang with alone anyway.

Beverly was the biggest issue. She had been acting out for a long time, but only with Stan, which seemed weirdly unfair considering he wasn't the only one who had taken Bill's side during their big dramatic breakup. It was as if she couldn't forgive him, even though Bev was completely fine with Richie and Eddie again. She was even on good terms with Bill again, and had been ever since she began dating Ben. Stanley got frustrated with how quiet she was around him, and how she was always in a bad mood, he started acting out back at her, making snide comments and dismissing her opinions constantly. Stan kind of felt shitty about it, he knew he was just taking all of his bullshit out on her, and wondered if Beverly was just doing the same.

She was.

He never tried to find out though, and despite his unconditional adoration and respect for her, Stanley fucked up. He was the one that spat on their friendship in her eyes, and in the eyes of many of the losers. Because Stanley yelled at her, and not only did he yell at her in front of everybody, Stanley lied to her.

"I never liked you all that much anyway!" The words echoed in Stan's mind like a bad dream. He had never regretted a sentence so much, but it was too late. The damage was done, and the two had been nothing but hostile since.

Richie was another issue of his, forever stepping on his toes and trying to wind him up. He grew tired of those antics very quickly, always snapping as soon as the torment began. Stan felt they got enough bullshit from Bowers and his cronies, he didn't need his own friends attacking him - not that it was anything nearly as bad - but the words still stung, serving a harsh reminder of the abuse they had and would continue to receive. Stan had once shoved Richie on the floor for calling him a faggot. That was the last time Richie had called him it, but there had been an awkward air between them ever since. Stan didn't want to apologise for it. He adored Richie, deep down, but there were few people that wound him up more.

"Wait up," Bill shouted. Stan whipped around, panicked and then relieved in the same second. He stood still, watching as Bill jogged over to him, a small smile on his face. "Are y-you alright?"

"I'm just tired of it all, Bill," Stan sighed, "Bev's been getting at me all day."

"She d-doesn't mean to," Bill said, knowingly. It was his fault that Bev disliked Stan. Bev thought Stan knew all about that, but he didn't. Stan wasn't aware that Bev knew of the one time he had wronged her. He was fucking clueless. Bill half-hoped it would stay that way. "I...I-I'm s-sorry."

"Don't worry about it Bill," Stan muttered, tensing as Bill put a comforting hand on his shoulder, his thumb gently stroking circles. "I need to go home anyway. I told my Mom I'd be home early."

"It's only eight," Bill protested, "You've stayed later."

"She won't want me walking home in the dark," Stan would have given him any excuse. Bill had an answer for everything. Always did.

"I'll d-drive you," Bill insisted, squeezing Stan's shoulder. Bill had been the first to pass his test, and his parents had bought him a car straight away. He struggled to keep up with the cost of fuel, but never refused any of the losers a ride. Stan had passed his test too, but there was no way his father was going to buy him a car.
"Don't you want to stay out?" Stan asked, "I'd feel bad if-"

"If-I wanted to stay out," Bill cut in, "I'd s-stay out." His hand moved away, instead grabbing Stan's hand, and they began to walk again. Stan's hand was always clammy, but it never stopped Bill from grabbing it. Physical contact was normal for them, there weren't many lines that they hadn't crossed, but it still made Stan's heart pound five times faster, and his stomach still tightened at every touch - but in the best way possible. Stan had accepted his homosexual tendencies. Bill was still adjusting.

It felt like every time they took a step forward, they took three steps back. A long time ago, Bill had kissed Stan. Then they didn't speak for three weeks. Stan had once tried talking to Bill about his sexuality, but Bill snapped as soon as Stan used the word 'gay'. Stan once tried to kiss Bill, but Bill acted like the contact had burned him, jumping away as soon as their lips met and running out of the room. They went through phases of hustling after each other, pining like crazy, then phases of barely speaking. Stan didn't understand it, Bill was afraid to.

Every time Bill gave Stan a reason to kiss him, the world gave him two hundred reasons not to. The first time it had happened, Bill felt like the entire town knew. It was pure paranoia and Bill knew it, but that didn't change anything. He still wanted to vomit when his father tried to give him the talk, which included a lecture on boys loving boys, and Bill still cried when his father called homosexuality 'perverted'. Then there was Henry and the gang. Bill couldn't bear the thought of proving him right - Bowers had them pegged years ago, and faggot was one of his favourite nicknames for Stanley - as if he knew.

Victor Criss, one of Bowers minions, had once caught them holding hands. Criss had been walking home from the fair when he saw it, a lit cigarette dangling from his lips. Bill and Stan had been too deep in their own world to notice the boy walking behind them. Criss had gotten their attention by throwing the cigarette. Ash got on Stan's jumper, it burnt through, and the boys had jumped apart.

"Knew you were faggots," Was all Victor had said. Bill thought they got off easy, weirdly easy, but they still refused to hold hands out in the open for six months after that, and Stanley was convinced that Henry knew of the incident, as he seemed to use the homophobic slurs over the anti-Semitic ones after that. Not that they were any worse.

"Can't have you walking home on your own," Bill continued, "N-Never know when B-Bowers is gonna pop up." He meant it as a joke, but there was a truth to it. Stan had been walking alone when Bowers had got him the worst. Stan couldn't think about that night without freaking out, and the indirect reminder made him reel closer to Bill.

"Don't need to tell me twice," Stan mumbled. "I can't fucking wait to get out of here. Never see that ugly fucking face again."

"Not long," Bill reminded him, "We've made it this far."

"Not with ease," Stan sighed. He always felt worse about the things Bowers did, mostly because he couldn't deal with it like the others. Even Eddie had developed a tolerance to their bullshit, and he was always made out to be the weaker one because of his height. Stan thought maybe Eddie was the bravest.

Belch Huggins once locked Eddie in a locker for three hours, even stood guard outside of it, occasionally coughing into the vent. When Belch eventually and reluctantly let Eddie out, Eddie had simply straightened out his clothing and walked away, only crying about the incident when in the privacy of his own room. None of the others seemed to care about the verbal comments either, Bev had once even described the things Bowers said as 'white noise', but every word still stung Stan. He didn't know why he was so sensitive, and couldn't understand how the others weren't. It
wasn't that Bowers and his gang didn't upset any of the other losers, that wasn't the case at all, it was just that the other losers seemed to deal with it much better. They accepted the humiliation, held their heads up high when they had abuse spat at them, often even put up a fight. Stan had a hard time even muttering a word back to Bowers.

"That's n-not the point," Bill said, "Y-You're s-still huh-here." Stan didn't respond, simply climbing into Bill's car with an unreadable facial expression. Bill sighed and got in, but he didn't start the engine. He wasn't done talking.

"Stop staring at me," Stan muttered, looking out of the car window instead of Bill. They had been alright recently, close again. Bill could feel all of that progress slowly crumbling once again. He knew that one wrong move would put him back on the bench, so he looked away, respecting Stan's request.

"Do you really not want to come out this summer?" Bill asked him. Stan had struggled last summer, instead spending a lot of time at the Synagogue, but then Henry caught on and would wait outside. That was when the worst incident happened, and Stan had been afraid of going ever since.

"I never want to go out," Stan sighed, "I won't feel safe. I can't spend my entire summer on edge-"

"B-But you can't spend it all in-inside either," Bill argued. He understood Stan's fear, he had always been aware that Stan couldn't take the heat like the rest of them. It wasn't like any of the losers weren't bothered by it, but they'd simply adjusted to the abuse. The verbal shit was bearable to Bill, not pleasant, but tolerable. It didn't hurt Bill anymore when they laughed at his stutter, he didn't flinch when they called him a waster or a freak. He only winced on the inside when they called him a faggot, or a queer. Now they had grown up a bit, let their scars heal, it only got truly scary when Bowers got physical. The unpredictability was what made it so awful.

"I can try," Stan said, "And I fucking will." Bill reached out, almost cautiously, laying his hand down on Stan's knee. He expected Stanley to shift his leg, slap his hand away or at the very least tense up. He had not expected Stanley to put his own hand over Bill's, holding it there. Stanley was still staring out of the window, refusing to look at Bill, but the contact was enough.

"B-B Bowers will look for you." Bill was surprised that hadn't occurred to Stan already. Henry loved having to hunt people down, it was always much worse if the losers tried to run or hide from their bullies. "Staying in your room won't s-s-st-him." And Stanley knew Bill was right. He hated it, hated that Bill was always so fucking right.

"Yes it will," Stanley scoffed. He was lying to himself more than Bill. Bill was very aware of that.

"I j-just..." Bill let his voice trail off, unsure how to phrase it without making Stanley uncomfortable, "I d-don't want you to b-be alone." Stanley gulped, Bill noticed. His grip on Bill's hand tightened, and Bill slowly moved it further up his leg. Stanley's eyes finally moved from the window, he turned to face his friend, shocked by Bill's sudden confidence.

"Come over then," Stanley suggested, an edge to his voice that made Bill disgustingly excited. "My parents are out tomorrow." The information gave Bill butterflies.

"I-I-I luh-like that p-plan," Bill slowly took his hand from Stan's leg and placed it on the wheel. "Home?"

"Home," Stan repeated. They were silent the entire drive there.
Eddie Kaspbrak and Richie Tozier were the last two of the losers out. Bev and Ben had ditched shortly after Bill and Stan. Mike had left soon after, just before sundown. It was dark now.

"I can't believe this is our last summer together," Eddie said, his voice was monotonous, but he did feel deeply sad about it. Richie knew, he felt the same. They all did, to some extent. It was going to be strange, leaving home, leaving everything behind, leaving the people most important to them. Part of Eddie wasn't ready. No part of Richie was ready, but he was trying to hold it all in.

"It won't be," Richie insisted, "Just our last summer like this, just our last summer in Derry." That was the way he saw it, the way it was easiest to see. Eddie knew better. When he left Derry, he would leave every part of it.

"Maybe," Eddie sighed. He didn't want to crush Richie's illusion, but equally, he didn't want Richie to put his heart on some idealistic fantasy he had conjured up. "But if it is our last summer-"

"You should let me fuck you," Richie cut in, only half-joking. Eddie rolled his eyes. "Last summer, after all. Make the most and what not, Eds."

"We've been over this," Eddie snapped, shuffling away from Richie, who had previously had his head resting on Eddie's lap. His head hit the grass with a small thud, and Eddie rubbed it apologetically, though it didn't actually hurt.

"I'm joking Eds," Richie said, "Guess I'll stick to boning your mom instead-" Eddie wondered what things about Richie he wouldn't miss, in that moment he realised that jokes about his mother would definitely be on that list. It was still going to be an incredibly short list, though.

"Beep fucking beep," Eddie grumbled, snatching his hand away from Richie's head. Richie sat up and moved back beside Eddie, sitting so that their knees and shoulders gently brushed.

"That's gonna be such a good safe word," Richie was half-joking. Eddie could tell, and he was half-bothered. A big part of him kind of did want to sleep with Richie. He wasn't so sure what the other parts of him wanted, but not that. He couldn't handle it, couldn't handle him. Richie's ego had inflated enough for Eddie's liking, and he was far too excitable - Eddie knew Richie would hate not being able to joke about it with the rest of the losers. It would slip out and there was no way that Eddie could deal with that. Richie had already told everyone about their first kiss - so much for a secret relationship.

"Like you'd even use one," Eddie scoffed. "Wait-" Richie was howling, mostly because Eddie never humoured his sexual comments, not even to shoot him down - that was always Stan or Mike or Bev, all in good fun. Eddie usually cringed too much to do anything but produce sounds and expressions of disgust, or alternatively told him to fuck off. Richie liked this better, it was much more amusing.

"You and I would definitely need a safe word," Richie countered, nudging him. The grin on his face was beyond smug, Eddie wanted to curl up and scream. "But I'm glad you've thought about sex with me enough to have come to that conclusion, Eds. Cute."

"I've never thought about fucking-" It was a straight up lie. Richie knew it. Eddie knew it. Eddie knew that Richie knew it. He let his words trail off, instead settling with something he actually believed. "We're not fucking."

"That doesn't drain me of hope, Kaspbrak," Richie said, pressing his mouth closer to Eddie's ear, "You also said you were straight. And that you'd never kiss a guy. And that-"
"Irrelevant!" Eddie cut in. He hated that he was once so...repressed. He blamed his mother entirely, but even without her influence there were things that he couldn't bring himself to do. Sex was one of those things - it was just over the line. Especially with Richie. What if he caught feelings? Everyone heard the stories - how your first is always the most special, how the person who takes your virginity stays with you forever. Eddie did not want that person to be Richie - his childhood best friend. Having sex with Richie made it more than...more than what it was. Eddie just couldn't risk it. The last thing in the world he wanted was to fall in love with Richie fucking Tozier, and knowing his luck that's what would happen. Eddie could tell.

"If you fucking say so, Kaspbrak." Richie didn't believe him, not even a little bit. He had every confidence that he was going to rid Eddie of his purity before they left, and Eddie's adamance of the opposite didn't sway his judgement at all. Eddie always gave in to himself eventually, denying himself something that he wanted for as long as he could bare. He was teasing himself, and Richie didn't mind that - ever entertained by Eddie's sexual frustration.

"I've been saying so for half a year," Eddie scoffed. Richie lit a cigarette and offered one to Eddie, something he did every single time he smoked around him. Eddie was never going to say yes, there was more chance of hell freezing over, but Richie liked seeing the disgusted look on his boyfriends' face. "I'm going to smell of smoke now, you're so inconsiderate- Richie!" He practically squealed as Richie blew smoke back at him.

"You're gonna fucking stink," Richie agreed, but he knew Eddie didn't really mind. He didn't mind at all. "But you love it really, don't you?"

"Shut up," Eddie huffed, but he was holding back a smile. It was something he had whispered to Richie on one of their late night escapades. Richie always snuck through the bedroom window, and they wound up making out, cuddling - sometimes more - but Eddie used to always request for Richie to stay a little longer, pleading with him despite Richie's secret intention to crash from the off (Richie liked to make him beg). One evening, Eddie had let it slip he loved the way Richie smelt (cigarettes, sweat and angst, to summarise it accurately). Eddie had even described it as 'sexy' and Richie wouldn't let him forget.

"You'll never shut me up," Richie said, wrapping his arm around Eddie's waist. Eddie twisted in his arm, snaking his own around Richie's shoulders. Richie smirked.

"I know a way," Eddie countered, returning the smug look. Richie's smile grew, and Eddie leaned up. The kiss lasted all of two minutes, short but sweet, and the two were smiling through it, causing far too many teeth bumps for it to be considered good. Not that they minded. Richie never did, so long as his lips were on Eddie's.

Eddie pulled away, his point proven. Richie went back in for a final soft peck. "Drive me home, please."

"Anything for you, Kaspbrak." Richie was grinning, and pressed another kiss to the side of Eddie's face before jumping to his feet. Eddie stood up more carefully, taking his time to brush down his trousers and polo before holding his hand out for Richie to take.

Richie would have even walked Eddie home without him having to ask, he always did. His new truck was a blessing. It was old and beaten, not fresh and new and expensive like Bill's, or practical and big like Mike's. He still adored it though.

The drive to Eddie's wasn't too far, and although it was back in the opposite direction for him, Richie kind of liked it. There was something therapeutic about a long, late night drive that Richie enjoyed.
They stopped a couple of houses before the Kaspbrak's to say goodnight. Eddie feared that his mother would be watching out of the window or something, but God forbid Richie let him go in without kissing him goodnight. This night though, Eddie surprised him. The goodnight kiss was longer, only slightly, but noticeable to Richie, who savoured and memorised every second, every motion of Eddie's mouth.

"Sneak in," Eddie said, a mischievous edge to his voice. Richie smirked. "I'll unlock my window in two minutes." It was something that happened a lot, and somehow the boys always got away with it. They were quiet, for the most part. It mattered to Richie too much for him to risk fucking it up by talking too loud.

"Changed your mind about the sex thing already?" Richie asked, a wicked grin on his face. He knew that wasn't the case really, it was just another one of his dumb lines. "Shall I bring my condoms-"

"Mention sex again and I'll retract my offer," Eddie snapped, climbing out of the truck. "Be quiet when you climb in."

- You're late." Beverly tensed at the sound of her Father's voice. It wasn't late, she knew it wasn't late. He was just picking an easy excuse to go at her.

"Lost track of time," She said, her voice monotonous. Beverly knew that there was no point in fighting back with him. Apologising for things she hadn't done was sometimes in her best interest. It wasn't fair, but life wasn't fair, and Bev had grown accustomed to living that way - dealing with what she didn't deserve to deal with. "My bad. I'm sorry."

"Where did you go?" He was in the doorway now, blocking her route to her bedroom. Bev gulped and hung her head, trying to avoid eye contact. She should've expected twenty questions, prepared, but it was hard to prepare when her Father was so unpredictable. Sometimes, he was knocked out on the couch, oblivious to everything she did, other times he was out doing God-knows-what. Sometimes, he was like this - out to get her.

"Just out with friends," She mumbled, trying to duck past him. It couldn't be that easy, his hand went to grip her shoulder and she was quickly pulled back into the room. "I need to-"

"Who were you out with, Bevvy?" He asked, blocking off the doorway with his arm. Bev knew she'd be able to get under with ease, but it wasn't worth the larger fight that would lead to. It was easier to comply, to tell her Dad what he wanted to hear.

"Some girls in my class." Alvin Marsh knew little of Beverly's real friends. He had been told tales from people around town, bullshit stories about the things Bevvy got up to with a small group of boys, but he believed her when she insisted none of it was true. She told him of imaginary friends, girls from her class that never existed, not of her boyfriend or her group of losers. "We just went to the fields."

"Were you behaving yourself?" He quizzed, the hand he rested on Bev's shoulder slowly lowering. Bev nodded quickly and took a step back, breaking the contact. 'Behaving' was a word with many connotations, and they both knew what he meant. Beverly had been decoding her Father for long enough to know by then.

"Always." Bev scurried to her room, and she wasn't stopped again. Relief filled her, and she quickly locked the bedroom door. Her Father hadn't noticed the latch she'd had Mike attach for her
after one particularly bad incident. Alvin had a habit of invading his daughters space, and Bev had reached breaking point with it.

Her father was perhaps the one person capable of scaring her. The sound of his voice could make every hair on her neck stand straight, and the slightest bit of contact created a sickness in the pit of her stomach. Lumps grew in her throat when she thought about him in passing, and whenever she arrived home her legs would shake with anxiety. Nobody else scared her like that.

Certainly not Henry Bowers or any of his cronies. Beverly never denied that they were capable of causing her fear, but she was afraid of the pain they aspired to cause, not the individual people. She feared ending up with another scar, another violent memory - not Henry Bowers. His capability was frightening, not his presence.

She sometimes wished the rest of the losers saw it that way, but they didn't. Mike and Ben were slowly becoming as desensitised as her, but not quite. Bill pretended to be as desensitised as her, and maybe the other losers believed he was - Bev knew better. Beverly Marsh had watched that boy crumble with fear, sob and beg for mercy at the feet of Victor Criss and Henry Bowers. Maybe he liked to think he wasn't afraid, but Bill liked to think a lot of things that weren't true.

Like how he thought he loved Bev for two entire years.

Eddie and Richie were afraid, but they tried to downplay it. They were braver together, Bev thought, but they weren't fearless. Not in the slightest. Richie stood up for himself, but not because he wasn't afraid, because he was a little bit more afraid of losing his pride. Eddie was afraid, panicking at even the idea of crossing paths with Bowers, but he sucked it up and took every encounter like a fucking trooper. Bev respected that, she respected them all for how they dealt with it.

Even Stanley, though Beverly knew that she probably didn't show that very well. Their treatment of each other was quite far from respectful.

Beverly felt bad about that. They weren't always at each others throats, but they had never been close. Beverly believed that Stanley didn't like her, and so she never put in the same effort with him as the other losers, and her life at that time revolved almost entirely around Bill. That was the other problem, but Beverly only realised that in hind sight.

Her relationship with Bill wasn't something she liked to think about. Their friendship was quite normal, and actually pretty strong, but the damage it did to the losers was still present, despite both her and Bill being over their feelings for each other. Beverly didn't love Bill like that, never truly had, but it had been the closest thing she had known to real love.

Ben was a bit of a shock to her system, a welcome one. She realised that she hadn't loved Bill all that much when her heart swelled at the idea of Ben leaving her, when she began to daydream of the same situation repeating itself and cried all night long, when she thought about how much stronger and braver he made her. No part of Beverly doubted that he was the best person to ever enter her life. It had never been that way with Bill.

The relationship between the two formed from their childhood crushes on each other. Beverly realised, in hind sight, that maybe she romanticised the idea of being with Bill a little bit too much - she loved the idea of being with the same man her entire life more than she genuinely loved Bill. Nothing particularly traumatic happened between them, the relationship just started to change.

Bill started spending less time with her, that was how the arguments began. Then, when they did spend time together, it felt different and awkward. Beverly always wrote it down to changing and
growing up, but she knew there was more to it. They began to clash and bicker, not just between themselves, but in front of all the losers.

Piece by piece, they broke apart. Bill lost interest and Beverly lost hope. There was a final argument, and it erupted in front of all the losers - Bev could barely remember what had started it - but it ended with them all screaming at each other. Beverly had walked away, and was only followed by Ben. Mike had walked away in the opposite direction, angry with his friends for letting it get so out of hand. He thought they were both being childish, and in reality, they kind of were. That didn't matter though, the tension had built up for so long, everything they screamed and spat at each other was fuelled by rage and frustration and what (at the time) they believed was heart break.

It took them just under a month to make up, but the damage was kind of done at that point. Beverly only really spoke to Mike and Ben during that time. Richie and Eddie only really spoke to each other, and Mike. Stan and Bill kept to themselves. It had surprised Beverly, when Bill had turned up at her door one night. Her father was out, as Bill knew he would have been, and they spent three hours in Bev's bedroom talking through it all.

It was one of the hardest conversations Beverly had ever had. It made Bill's list too. There were several reasons for that, but the main one being that they were simply forced to be brutally honest. Bill pointed out every flaw she had, and it was more than crushing to hear. Bev had to tell Bill every annoying thing he had done, remind him of every way he had fucked up. He didn't suck it up like she did, Bill had an excuse, a motive. There had been a reason deeper than Beverly had expected for his irrational behaviour and unfair treatment of her.

"We've outgrown each other," Bill had shrugged. Bev could picture it as clear as day. She stared at the wall where Bill had sat on that day, his head back against it, eyes screwed shut as he spoke his darkest truths. It played out like a projection in her mind. "Y-You're not who I want anymore. You haven't been for a long time, and that's not your fault. I-I-I-I-I cuh-could never say anything, because I was so comfortable wi-with what we had. It was un-un-unfair of me."

"Who is she?" Bev mouthed the words that she had spoken on that day, reliving it. It didn't hurt so bad anymore, but she knew that if she thought about it too much, it would.

"It's no-no-no-not a-a-a shhh-she," Bill had stammered, turning redder than Bev had ever seen him before. Quieter, and crying, he confessed, "I think I love S-S-S-S-"

It hit Bev like a ton of bricks. "Stanley."

You see, Beverly always thought Stanley had a thing for Bill, it was obvious in her mind. She had never gotten jealous, or at least would never have admitted that, but she had noticed how they interacted, the seemingly very intimate friendship they had - especially at that time - was always kind of questionable to outsiders. There was a reason people accused the losers of being "a bunch of queers". They always hung out together, and Stanley had been the first to take Bill's side in the entire thing, defending him regardless of the things Beverly tried to explain. Stan simply refused to see bad in Bill. That said it all to Beverly. She believed that Stan was aware of Bill's feelings, that Bill was aware they were reciprocated, that they were going to go off together and be happy. None of that was even slightly true, but she knew no better.

Bitterness was what fuelled the anger at Stan. Beverly never meant for it to get so out of hand, because she hated being mad, especially at someone she loved so dearly. But it did. Things escalated, and something had stopped Bev from standing up and apologising. She felt like he owed her more than she owed him, but mostly, she was just afraid.
By the time things were returning to somewhat normal order, Stan had started being pissy with Beverly too. In her mind, that only further confirmed he was aware of Bill's intention to leave her, that he was aware of Bill's feelings. And then, the big fight came. Stan yelled at her, she had never heard him yell like that before. It wasn't irreversible damage, but it definitely left a mark, re-fuelled all the bitterness.

They would still have died for each other though, unnecessary anger aside. Love was always the foundation of their relationship. It would never change, not deep down. A part of Bev knew that, and that part of her detested herself for taking everything out on someone she considered a brother, a best friend. It wasn't all doom and gloom between them, she reminded herself.

But it was hard for Bev to not focus on the doom and gloom with a life like hers.

Beverly sat on the edge of her bed, staring at the same space on the floor. She didn't want to overthink it, but she had. And for the first time in a while, she began to sob.

A lot of things passed through her mind, her time with Bill. Her time with Ben - and how she was living for it. How much she adored the losers, and how it was going to break her when they all left for college and split apart. The Bowers Gang.

Stanley.

Beverly didn't mean what she had said. The idea of Stanley staying home all summer made her heart hurt, but she couldn't take it back. She could never go speak to him or apologise. And why not? They were supposed to be friends! The best of - yet Bev couldn't even bring herself to tell him how sorry she was for her mistreatment of him.

The scenario had crossed her mind many times. She'd catch him alone, they'd discuss where all the venom had come from. She'd tell him how genuinely sorry she was, and how much she truly loved him, and how she regretted pushing him away out of petty and invalid bitterness. Bev hoped, that he'd apologise too, and tell her how he never meant the things he said, that he didn't mean to yell at her. Bev hoped, they'd share a hug and laugh it off, and everything would go back to how it was.

The scary thing about actually doing it was having to handle the consequences if Stanley didn't want her apology. Part of Bev knew that their relationship wasn't strong enough to keep taking blows like that. If Stanley stood and told her that he didn't care, that he didn't want to be friends, then there'd be nothing left. No hope for a happy future with the losers. No chance of making up for everything. No chance of forgiving herself.

Beverly supposed that she was so afraid, so terrified, because the rejection would wreck her. It was easier to not try at all than to try and get it thrown back in her face. How cowardly was that? Bev thought it was incredibly so.

Deep down, Beverly Marsh knew that she wasn't as fearless as they all thought.

- 

Mike Hanlon walked home alone. He hadn't taken his truck out, saving for fuel was too much of a bitch for it to be worth it.

He was leaving the losers in a much worse mood than he had arrived in, ever getting upset with the constant bickering. Playing peace-maker constantly could be incredibly draining, and it was made harder by the lack of acknowledgement and appreciation from the other losers. Nobody really listened to him when he was trying to be the voice of reason and it was frustrating to say the least,
but he knew someone had to stay calm. It had to be him, of course.

It was only a matter of time. Mike could feel it, the tension constantly present when the losers were all together, how every single one of them sat on edge every day. He wondered if it had gotten that bad at school, when he wasn't there to tell Stan to shut up, or tell Bev she was out of line, or put Bill in his place. The cracks were too big to be ignored, he thought, they were caving more and more everyday. How long before someone exploded? And who would be the first?

Mike was almost certain it would be Stanley. He was always on edge, and seemed to have a much shorter temper recently - shoving Richie, yelling at Bev, snapping at anyone that annoyed him. Mike didn't think it would take much more to break him, but the thought didn't sit well with him. He loved Stan, not in a romantic way, but the adoration was no less meaningful. Mike despised watching him crumble, he despised it more knowing there was nothing he could do. He had held the losers club on his back for far too long - the weight was getting to him too.

Their last summer together was going to be ruined by childish self-devised bullshit. And of course, Bowers.

Mike was walking up the road to the farm when he saw movement up the street, just outside the porch. It had only just gotten dark, but the streetlights weren't on and the silhouette was hard to make out. He squinted, not that it helped his vision at all. There was no way to tell who it was, not from so far away, but the fact there would be anyone there at all made Mike uncomfortable.

He lived a little further out than the rest of the losers, on the outskirts with his Grandpa, on the farm. The street he was walking up was a dead end, with only a tiny path leading to his home. The other houses scattered down the street didn't belong to anyone who would be out roaming so late, if Mike's memory served him correctly, the block housed elderly people only.

Mike knew in the back of his mind that someone was waiting. Maybe not for him, but waiting all the same. The silhouette, definitely male, was sat on a car bonnet, a cigarette between his notably long fingers. He seemed to be facing Mike, but his head was down, not staring forward at him.

Slowing, Mike contemplated turning back, running and going in through the back. That was because the voice in Mike's head told him something bad was about to happen.

He didn't though, raging curiosity getting the better of him.

"Hanlon," The voice said, monotonous. Mike knew, in that moment, exactly who it was. The fear he had felt a couple of minutes ago returned, but the curiosity was overpowering. He was either about to get ambushed and beaten up outside his own home, or he was going to have the weirdest social interaction of his life. Mike thought it would be the former, and froze on spot - running would only trigger them to come out, which was risky when he didn't know their positions.

"What the fuck?" Mike called back. He was about four metres from the front of the truck, and could very clearly make out which boy was sat on the front of a car smoking: Victor Criss.

Victor was one of Henry's sidekicks. Never the initiator, never the violent one, but he had quite the bark. He was slightly more human than Henry and maybe more so than the rest of his goons, not much more human, but that slither of humanity had made a difference once or twice. There was no reason for him to be sat outside Mike's, not without Henry's involvement, and if he was involved, violence would be. Mike was afraid, but he tried his best not to show it. Henry detested courage.

"This is going to be confusing." Vic said, in a tone that Mike couldn't really read. "But you need to listen to me."
He couldn't pin point it, couldn't figure out exactly what it was in his voice, but something told Mike he was being deadly serious. He wasn't smirking as he usually would, his eyes weren't lit up devilishly how Mike was so used to seeing them. The fear running through Mike quickly turned to curiosity as he realised this was no ambush, this was no attack.

"You need to go," Mike spat, though he didn't really want him to, too interested in hearing whatever the fuck Victor had to say. For any of Bowers' minion's to interact with the losers without Henry's knowledge or say so was rare. There had been a few incidents that had occurred without Henry's presence, but nothing too scarring or serious - and Mike had no doubt those were still his ideas. This was different.

"I don't plan on staying long you fucker," Vic scoffed, obviously incapable of speaking to mike without dropping at least one insult. Mike didn't feel threatened though, he didn't feel afraid. Even if Vic had come there to fight him, Mike reckoned he could take Vic in a fight. Criss was skinny and lanky, little muscle and little strength. In the past few years, Mike had really buffed out, and he was still stronger than he looked. If he had come to the farm looking for a fight, Victor was much more stupid than Mike thought.

"How long have you been sat there?" Mike asked, finding some humour in the idea that Vic had sat waiting for hours - how the fuck did he know Mike was even out? "How did you know I was out? How did you--"

"I saw you all walking down town earlier," Vic shrugged, "I came here like a half hour ago, knocked on your door. Old man said you were out, so I waited. Ain't nothing better to do." His tone was different to how Mike was used to hearing it, softer. Victor wasn't there to hurt him, Mike could tell. He was confused, more than anything. Mike wondered how the other losers were going to feel about this - maybe wonder why Mike was even humouring this bastard with a conversation?

Mike wondered that himself. Victor Criss had terrorised him for years, called him almost every racist name under the sun, taken a fair share of swings and held him down so that the rest of his friends could. Victor Criss was twisted and evil, and Mike had no good reason not to go over and beat the living shit out of him there and then. Curiosity was the only thing in the way.

"Why the fuck are you here?" Mike quizzed, "What do you want from me? What the fuck is going on--"

"Keep fucking quiet," Vic cut in, his usual hiss back. Mike wasn't at all swayed.

"Does Bowers know you're here?" Mike continued, just as loud, "Does Belch? Patrick? Are they sat in the bushes? Are you trying to pull some fucked up stunt-" Another possibility occurred to him. The house. They could be in the house. Mike's eyes flashed to it - but he couldn't see anything out of the ordinary, not that it comforted him in any way. What if Bowers had gone for his Grandpa? Mike started running.

"Don't you fucking-" Vic didn't finish his sentence, shoving his cig into his mouth and jumping off the car. He grabbed Mike before he'd even gotten past the car, holding Mike's arm with an iron grip. "I'm trying to help you, you stupid fucking ni-"

"Keep fucking quiet," Mike imitated, cutting him off. Vic sighed and took a step back, holding his hands up in surrender. Mike wiped his arm where he'd been grabbed, then turned back to Vic, who put his cigarette out against the car. Mike tried not to wince - what did he expect? This boy was still his enemy. "Help me? How? Why?"

"Consider this a warning," Vic began, his tone calmer. He sounded genuine, enough for Mike to
take him seriously. "For you, and your faggot friends."

"Warning?" Mike scoffed. If this was about Henry, they didn't fucking need warning. The losers had spent years living on edge because of Henry. They were well aware that he was out to get them, they were well aware that he was capable of inhumane bullying. Mike thought it was kind of patronising to offer a warning. "Is this a message from Bowers?"

"No," Vic explained. He seemed nervous, and Mike got the impression Henry wouldn't like that Victor had paid Mike a visit. "I'm warning you about Henry - just fucking listen to me, Hanlon. I know he's always out to get you-"

"You're always out to get us too," Mike reminded him, unable and unwilling to remove the anger from his tone. Vic gulped and quietened for a moment. Mike didn't know what reaction he was going to get, but that was not what he had expected. "So what's so fucking different?"

"I can't tell you everything," Vic said, "I'm not here to fucking snitch him out, alright? Let me say what I gotta' say. He's got nasty shit planned, way fucking worse than ever before. I can't stop him - you know I can't." Once, Victor had tried. He suffered for it immensely, and never bothered again. Mike knew that, he witnessed it.

"Right." They both shuddered at the memory, but Mike had no pity for Vic. He wished suffering upon Vic, upon all of the Bowers gang, but he didn't particularly want to watch that suffering.

"He wants you all alone," He continued, "If you and your losers stick together, you're safer. I'm serious, Hanlon, don't let them go off. No walking home alone. Keep Tits away from that library. Keep Jew-boy away from the Church-thing, and Four-Eyes out of the arcade. Just- Don't go off alone. You're fine if you're together."

Stunned. Stunned was the only word Mike felt accurately described how he felt. He didn't even know how to conjure up a response to that, but Vic continued anyway. He had time to process it all, figure out exactly what it meant.

"I'll do what I can," Vic said, "I'll go looking in the wrong places. I'll catch you when you're together. But if he gets ya, it's out of my hands. I ain't doing shit for you. I'm giving you warning because I wanna play fair-"

"No," Mike snapped, "You're trying to ease your guilty conscience." He wasn't wrong, and Victor didn't dispute him, instead simply shrugging. He didn't give a fuck what Mike Hanlon thought of him. He wasn't doing it out of love or to be a good person, Victor knew he was too far gone for redemption, but he needed to try for the sake of his soul.

"What do you care?" He scoffed, "I'm doing you a fucking favour. You tell anyone about this, and you're fucking dead." His tone was back to normal, the snarl that Mike was used to. As if to reiterate his point, Vic got up and shoved Mike to the ground. He only managed to do it with so much ease because for some reason, Mike hadn't seen it coming. But it didn't stun him for long.

Mike saw his chance and took it. Vic started walking off, lighting another cigarette for his journey. He hadn't gotten a metre before Mike was on him, sending him straight to the ground with a grunt and a thud. Mike kicked and kicked and kicked, enjoying the feeling a little bit too much. It was an adrenaline rush to say the least, and half-satisfying to see someone who had terrorised him for so long finally getting it back. It wasn't quite what Henry had done to him, but it was bad enough. Victor wasn't fighting back, instead laying and grunting at every blow to his ribs.

He stopped himself, panting, then spat at the bully below him. "Thanks Vic. See you around."
Hello! Thank u for bothering to read my nonsense, I've had this idea in my head ever since the first time I watched the movie and heard that line, so I'm running with it. Throwing in some romance because I'm hopeless and gay. Feedback is always adored and appreciated.
Bill felt weird on his walk to Stan’s, as if he was being watched. He knew it was silly, and was sure to keep looking around every minute or so, checking for anything out of the ordinary. There was nothing. Bowers wasn’t about, never was so early. It was just his brain, and he knew that.

But rationality didn’t push past the looming feeling that something bad was about to happen.

By the time he had walked up Stan’s empty drive, he was borderline panicking. It was nothing but relieving when Stan opened his front door and pulled him into a hug. He let himself relax.

“How are you feeling?” Stanley asked him, sitting on the bottom of the stairs as Bill removed his shoes.

“I’m good,” Bill said, as casually as he could. He didn’t want to alarm Stan, especially not when he had no real reason so be so anxious. Especially not when they were probably about to fuck.

That thought alone was enough for Bill to calm down enough. He kicked his other shoe off and stood straight, offering Stanley a small smile. “And you?”

“Really good,” Stanley said, also standing. He gestured for them to go upstairs, and Bill followed silently, closing the door behind him and locking it as he entered Stanley’s room, out of habit above anything. “Why’d you walk today?”

“I’m trying to save gas,” Bill shrugged. He wasn’t all that invested in the conversation, his mind more focused on how Stanley was wearing the shirt he knew Bill loved, the one that fit perfectly in all the right places, and how good his body always looked. How good it would look under him. He was trying to shake the thoughts off, but once he started with that thought track, it was hard to just brush it off. He really didn’t care for this bullshit small talk.

“If you want to save gas, stop driving me round everywhere-“ Stan liked walking. He didn’t so much like it alone, but the losers never usually allowed him to walk alone - well, Bill never allowed him to walk alone. Not because Bill thought of him as more fragile or weak than the others, simply because he knew that if anything were to happen, Stanley would simply let it. He wasn’t a fighter.

“But I like driving you around everywhere,” Bill cut in. “It’s not like you live far.”

“It’s an inconvenience though,” Stan protested, “You don’t need to give me rides-“

“It’s not the only kind of r-ride I want to g-give you—“ Bill couldn’t help himself, laughing as soon as he’d finished speaking. Stan held back the smirk, shaking his head disapprovingly.

“You sound like Richie,” Stan scoffed, disgusted. “I swear you have a one track mind.”

“You’re worse than me!” Bill spat, moving over to sit with Stan on the bed. Stan smirked, not willing to argue that one. He was. Stanley was usually the initiator, and he wrote it down to him being needy as fuck. It was always him pining after Bill, never the other way around. Or at least, never to his knowledge.
There was never certainty with Bill, no security or promises. Stanley wondered if that made him want him more? Or maybe that was all just natural adoration. He had always had a thing for Bill, their leader, their protector, king of the losers. It was just overwhelming at times, to the point where Stan just gave in to himself and his needs, no matter how inconvenient the timing.

“I’m not that explicit about it,” Stan said, and it was true. Stanley had more subtle ways of expressing his wants for the most part, such as touching Bill’s bicep or thigh, calling him Billy in that voice that always went straight to Bill’s dick, giving him those bedroom eyes. He could also be blunt though, going straight in for a kiss regardless of it’s necessity or relevance to their conversation.

“I l-like it when you’re explicit,” Bill whispered, slowly sliding his arm around Stanley’s waist. Stan smiled, leaning into the touch. He knew that Bill most definitely had a thing for dirty talking, but Bill could never hack it - always stuttering too much to try. Stan thought it was hot, but Bill just got embarrassed. If ever Stanley wanted to get absolutely ruined, or watch Bill completely fall apart, he’d speak in that low, desperate voice that Bill loved so much, and whisper absolute, pure filth into his ear.

“Did you bring the stuff?” The question made Bill blush. It didn’t help that Stanley was sliding his hand up Bill’s thigh, or moving in to kiss his neck. Stanley had never directly asked him to bring ‘the stuff’ and had only vaguely implied that sex would be on the cards, but truth be told, Bill always left it in his backpack just in case, and kept spares in his nightstand. He was ever so hopeful for a boy in crushing denial.

“Yes,” Bill mumbled, “Bag.” Stanley pressed another kiss to his neck, then to his lips. Bill pushed into it, quickly taking control of the kiss, but Stanley pushed him off before it really went away.

“Get it,” Stan demanded, crawling backwards into the centre of his bed. Bill huffed, but complied, fishing out the bottle of Aloe Vera and the box of condoms that he’d had for far, far too long. He couldn’t have been quicker, practically leaping back onto the bed and throwing them down on the bedside table. Stan was beaming.

“You’re so fu-fucking pretty,” Bill gushed, his heart in his throat. He went back in to kiss him, wanting nothing more than to finally get to it. He’d wanted to for over two years, but Stan was never ready, and Bill was never willing to willing to confront his sexuality. He still wasn’t, but he figured nobody was ever going to find out, and it was just sex, and he was on top so it was no different from fucking a girl like that - and he could close his eyes and pretend it was a girl, but even if he didn’t, it was just Stan. Stan was feminine enough, he told himself, pretty enough. Oh, so fucking pretty. He wanted it too much to care about justification.

Stanley knew he wasn’t special though. Just because Bill touched and kissed like he loved him, didn’t mean he really did. It was just good sex, he told himself, refusing to let himself truly believe Bill felt the same way that he always had. That was too much for him, it made his heart hurt, imagining what those words would sound like tumbling from Bill’s lips. He let himself imagine from time to time, especially when he got so close to saying it himself. There had been an embarrassing amount of incidents involving Stanley having to bite down on his lips to stop himself from fucking screaming out, “I love you”. He wondered if he’d ever get to say it, or if that would be the end of their friendship.

“So fucking p-pretty,” Bill repeated, pressing a kiss against Stanley’s exposed collar bones. His hand began moving down, and Stanley moaned, bucking his hips up again. “Oh f-f-fuck.“

“Are you sure about this?” Stanley asked, freezing up below him. Bill paused, detaching his lips from Stanley’s chest and looking up at him, a confused expression on his face. “Are you sure
"Yes," Bill insisted, his voice firm and certain, "Are you?"

"Yes," Stan said, his tone matching Bill’s completely. "I just…I just worry that we’ll do this, and then you’ll panic and tell me you regret it and- and I don’t know, Bill, I’m just scared you don’t actually want me or that you’re going to freak out after-"

Bill cut him off with a long, drawn out kiss.

He knew exactly what Stanley meant, and with his track record he could hardly blame Stanley for being wary, but he didn’t want to think about any of that. It was something he’d deal with later, all he wanted in that moment was to bed him. He’d wanted that for a very long time.

"Wait-" Stanley pulled away, “I’m not done talking about this.” He sat up, forcing Bill to do the same. It was kind of killing the mood, but Bill was almost glad because the longer they built it up, the better it was going to be. He left his hands on Stanley’s waist, softly tracing patterns there.

"What is-is it?" Bill asked, trying to hide any frustration in his voice. “Talk to me.”

“Have you done this before?” Stanley questioned. He refused to look at Bill, refused to look at his expression and try to read between the lines. He trusted Bill to be honest, but he couldn’t stop himself from overthinking. Instead, Stanley stared at the floor to the side, his eyes fixing on the messy heap of clothes Bill had left. He resisted the urge to fold them up, unwilling to get out of the bed.

“No,” Bill confessed, unsure why Stanley would have assumed so. He and Beverly never gotten sexual, they were too young and clueless for that. The entire two years never went beyond making out and occasional over the clothes feeling. Bill had never really wanted any more, he had never put much thought into what it would have been like to touch her or fuck her, not like he did with Stan. It was so much different, so much more passionate, like an unrelenting need he could never quite satisfy. “No-Nobody.”

“No girls? Beverly?”

“No,” Bill insisted. He didn’t need to ask Stanley the same. Bill knew he had been Stan’s first everything, and Stan would never have had it any other way.

“Good,” Stanley said, “But, like, why not?” It was a pretty fucking loaded question, and Bill didn’t want to think too much about that. Why was he so desperate for this? For Stan? Why was it him and nobody else? Bill knew, deep down.

“I want you,” Bill replied, as honest as he was willing to be. “I just want you.” Stanley felt his heart melt, every hair on his body stood on end as his brain replayed the words on a loop. They sounded like poetry, like art, like God had personally come down to whisper sweet nothings in his ear. He didn’t know how to respond to something so raw, not without uttering those forbidden three words.

So he didn’t. Stanley simply kissed him, hard and passionate. He always kissed Bill with everything he had. This time he kissed Bill with everything he had, and more.

When Mike arrived at the quarry, the rest of the losers were already there. Minus Bill and Stanley, but he hadn’t expected to see Stanley, and it wasn’t unusual for Bill to be late.
He’d already gone against Vic’s advice, and drove alone. But that would be the last time, he promised himself. He wondered if the other losers had come alone, if Bill was making his way alone, or Stanley was wondering round Derry - all by himself. There was a panic in him, it was building the more he thought about it.

“I have something to tell you all,” Mike announced, before even saying hello to the group. If he was trying to hide the urgency in his voice, he failed dramatically. “It’s bad, you guys. It’s really fucking bad.”

“Spit it out then homeschool,” Richie said, his face furrowed with concern. He hoped that nobody would be able to tell he was wearing the same clothes as yesterday.

“Are you okay?” Ben asked. Mike shrugged, that wasn’t easy to answer. He supposed, in most senses, he was okay. But what had happened was far from okay, and Mike wasn’t going to keep his friends in the dark about it. Plus, he kind of wanted to tell them all how he kicked Victor’s ass. It was out of character for him to be proud about it, but after the torture they’d all endured, he was. Mike didn’t hurt Victor because he wanted to, or for his own sick satisfaction. He did it for his friends.

“I think so,” Mike said, “I just need you all to listen. This is weird, and important.” There was a pause, he waited for one of the losers to interject, to ask him something else. They all remained silent, too curious to delay the story any more. “Victor Criss stopped by my house last night.”

“No fucking way-“ Eddie spat, his jaw dropping open.

“Did you kick his ass?” Richie asked, punching the air theatrically.

“Oh my God,” Beverly gasped. They were the reactions he had expected, to be honest, but Mike didn’t give any of them direct responses, instead continuing with what he needed to say.

“He was weird,” Mike said, “He didn’t come by for a fight. He was alone, and he told me he needed to…he was giving me a warning. He was giving us all a warning. I didn’t get it at first, I thought he was like, I don’t know, setting me up, but he seemed too genuine, like, he seemed…scared.”

“How can you be certain it isn’t a set up?” Beverly quizzed, “How do you know it’s not part of some long winded plan to fuck with us even more-“

“No fucking way-“ Eddie spat, his jaw dropping open.

“Are you okay?” Ben repeated, standing.

“Did you kick his ass?” Richie asked, punching the air theatrically.

“Oh my God,” Beverly gasped. They were the reactions he had expected, to be honest, but Mike didn’t give any of them direct responses, instead continuing with what he needed to say.

“He was weird,” Mike said, “He didn’t come by for a fight. He was alone, and he told me he needed to…he was giving me a warning. He was giving us all a warning. I didn’t get it at first, I thought he was like, I don’t know, setting me up, but he seemed too genuine, like, he seemed…scared.”

“How can you be certain it isn’t a set up?” Beverly quizzed, “How do you know it’s not part of some long winded plan to fuck with us even more-“

“Just listen,” Mike cut in. Beverly complied. “Basically, Vic said that it’s dangerous for any of us to be alone. At any given time. He said that Bowers is out for us, but he wants us alone. We’re in serious fucking trouble if he gets us, and Vic said he’ll be looking all summer.”

“We can’t be joined at the fuckin’ hip all summer,” Richie scoffed, but there was a waver of concern in his voice, like he was kind of re-evaluating that idea. Maybe they needed to be joined at the hip. “What the fuck is he going to do?”

“I don’t know,” Mike shrugged, “It’s Bowers, Richie. Maybe we haven’t seen the worst of him. But it has to be bad, for Victor to come by, talk to me how he did, even that guy is afraid. He said that if he got us alone, it was out of his hands. He wouldn’t go into more detail, so I don’t know what the fuck is going on. I don’t even know if I want to know, man.”

“You think he’s going to try and kill us?” Beverly sounded almost amused. Mike shot her a glare, but his face softened quickly. He understood her skepticism, but it was misplaced. He knew it was
misplaced. For some reason, Mike trusted what Victor had said to him.

“I don’t know,” Mike said, “And I don’t want to chance finding out. So here’s the deal, we’re going to stick together. All summer. The absolute bare minimum of alone time.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Bev scoffed, “How can that work?” She was thinking about it rationally. It was different for her though, she couldn’t have those stupid sleepovers every night like the boys did.

“We’ll figure something out,” Mike said. He hadn’t thought it through entirely, mostly because he needed the rest of the losers to do that, but one idea he’d had was for them to travel in twos. “But we need to talk to Stan and Bill about this too. As soon as possible.”

“Where even is Bill?” Eddie asked, as if he had only just noticed his lack of presence. It suddenly felt unusual to Eddie, when he looked around to see the group two losers down, with the looming threat of Bowers somehow much, much bigger after Mike’s announcement.

“Probably with Stan,” Bev said, taking a completely wild guess.

“We need to find them.” There was an urgency in Mike’s voice. None of the losers wanted to protest, much too concerned about whatever the fuck was going off with Bowers and Victor.

“Now.”

“Try Stan’s house,” Bev suggested. “Or maybe Bill’s-“

“Do you have your truck?” Richie cut in, his urgency surprisingly obvious. Mike nodded. “You go Bill’s with Bev and Ben. Me and Eddie will go for Stan-“

“No,” Bev cut in, “I want to go to Stan’s.” That had them all silent, for the first time that morning. Ben frowned at her.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea, Bevvy?” Ben said, trying his best to keep a neutral tone. Nobody else thought it was a good idea, but they didn’t know what her thought process was, they didn’t know that she wanted to make things better.

“Yes,” Beverly shrugged, “I’ll go with Richie. Eddie, you go with Ben and Mike.” Eddie and Richie exchanged looks, but Eddie was happy to go along with it. It didn’t matter really, so long as nobody was alone.

“Fine by me,” Eddie said, “What if they’re not at Bill’s? Or Stan’s? How will we know where to meet back up?” Nobody had thought that far ahead.

“Uhh,” Richie was struck dumb, but he was never expected to be the brains of any operations anyway.

“How about…” Mike began, but then he shook his head and let his voice trail off. “Well, we could just…”

“Meet back here?” Ben suggested, as if it was obvious.

“Right,” Richie said, clapping his hands twice, “Let’s fucking go losers.”

The car ride to Stan’s was painfully awkward, which was alien for Bev and Richie, who had
always been solid friends. Richie was just itching to question Beverly on why she wanted to go to
Stan’s, but Beverly was just playing with the radio and humming along to songs, doing her best to
ignore the elephant in the room.

Eventually, Richie cracked. “Why the fuck did you want to come with me?”

“Hm?” Beverly mumbled, as if she hadn’t quite caught that. Richie turned the radio down a
considerable amount, something that he very rarely did. “What do you mean?”

“Bev,” Richie sighed, “We both know he won’t appreciate you showing up on his door step
demanding he comes to the quarry-“

“What difference does it make?” Beverly cut in, “There’s just as much chance they’re both at
Bill’s. I just haven’t been to Stan’s in a while, and I- fuck off, doesn’t matter.”

“If Bill isn’t with him,” Richie said, “There’s a high chance we’re getting that door slammed in our
face.” He was half joking, a small smirk on his face. Beverly laughed at the idea, but she wondered
if that had any truth to it. Did Stan really have that much bitterness? Did he hate her that much?

No. He didn’t have it in him. Bev knew that, but the idea still made her uncomfortable. She was so
afraid that it was too late to make things right.

“No,” Bev said, almost certain, “He would never. He’d be too curious. And we’re going to be nice
- no bullshit Richie. This is too serious.” Richie rolled his eyes.

“Noted chief,” Richie chimed. Beverly rolled her eyes back, but she was smiling again. “What do
you think then? Bowers out to murder us all then? Or is this some elaborate scheme to fuck with
our heads?”

“I have no idea.” To be fair, she didn’t. Beverly wished there was something, anything, that
explained it, but nothing in her mind made sense. Killing them? That seemed too extreme, too
much like something from a dumb seventies slasher. A darker part of her mind knew that Henry
was capable, though. She didn’t want to write the possibility off completely, just despised that it
was a possibility at all.

“It’s fucked up,” Richie huffed, his tone more serious than Beverly had heard in a long time.
“Beyond fucked. I can’t think of anything, not unless this is all one big prank, another fucking joke
at our expense. That, or we’re all gonna get fucking axed.“

“Maybe we should tell someone else about this,” Beverly suggested, “Someone bigger than us.”

“Cops?” Richie scoffed, "Parents? Nobody’s gonna do shit, Bevv. We know all too well. Gotta
handle this alone.” As fucked up as it was, he was right. For years, the same shit had been going
on. They weren’t the only kids in Derry having to live with the wrath of Bowers, but they were
definitely facing the worst of him.

People were aware of that, too. Of the losers, only Alvin Marsh was oblivious to the bullying his
child faced. The other parents were all aware to some degree, but none to the full extent, which was
most probably for the best. They were powerless to do anything anyway.

Wentworth Tozier found his son’s physical scar and went ape shit at the discovery. He wanted
Henry Bowers dead, much like the rest of Derry. More than that, he wanted his father dead.

But nobody fucked with Oscar Bowers.
Oscar Bowers, known to most as ‘Butch’, or the Sheriff, was untouchable. Always had been. Mostly because of his position, but also due to his well known psychopathic tendencies. Butch Bowers was no stranger to murder, nor abuse or violence of any kind. He was also well known for bribery, which was definitely an influencing factor in how he got away with his corrupt antics. That, and just how completely intimidating and terrifying his presence was.

The bottom line was, there was nobody ‘bigger’ than the losers. Nobody was more equipped or capable of stopping Henry, not the police, not their parents, not the school. All of the above were equally as powerless when it came to Bowers - Butch and Henry. The losers had learnt that the hard way.

“We can’t do shit, Richie,” Bev sighed, “Not until we figure out what Bowers is up to, and even then I highly doubt we can stop him.”

“It’s not about stopping him,” Richie said. He pulled up outside Stan’s house, but remained seated in the car, staring at Bev with an almost pitiful look in his eyes. “We can’t stop him, no fucker can stop a beast like him. We just have to survive, Bev. We just have to make it through this summer alive and get as far away from this hellhole as possible.”

It wasn’t an approach that Beverly liked, but that had always been Richie’s attitude. Bev had always wanted to do something about Henry before she left Derry, but they all knew it was too much of a dangerous game. A couple of years ago, a kid had gone to the police about Henry. In a normal town, Henry would have been sent to court, charged with assault at the very least, and be rotting in prison somewhere. In Derry, that kid simply went missing a week later. Nobody investigated.

“He’s never going to stop,” Beverly said, “This doesn’t end when we leave.” And she was right, because if they did get out, Henry would find someone else to take all of his venom out on.

“I’ll be gone,” Richie countered, “It’s really not my problem.”

“That’s not a-“ Before Beverly could finish her sentence, Richie hopped out of his truck and slammed the door. Bev sighed before she rushed to follow, catching up just before he pressed the doorbell.

They were not finished.

Bill did not know how he was magically lasting so long, but all he knew was that he did not want it to end. Or maybe he did, because the thought of watching Stan finish like that beneath him, well, that made him feel things.

But that didn’t seem to be happening either, and neither of them really knew why. Wasn’t it supposed to be all magical? It was far from it.

Because here’s the thing, they were both kind of clueless. Porn for gay men wasn’t exactly easy to get hold of in a place like Derry, home to about two gay couples and a flock of closeted kids. They were barely eighteen. They’d never researched properly, they had just kind of figured it out one step at a time. This, by far, was the most complicated of all their little experiments.

The middle was not as hot or romantic as the start. It was awkward. It hurt. It was messy. And Stan was kind of worried he wouldn’t be able to walk right for a bit when Bill was finished. The end was going to be the best and the worst, Stan thought.
“Is this okay?” Bill asked, for the fourth time. Stan nodded, although he secretly had expected better, it was definitely okay. Stan thought it would more ‘okay’ if Bill shut the fuck up and went a little bit harder. Not that he was in a position to critique, equally as inexperienced and clueless.

“Did you hear that?” Bill froze and Stanley held in a whine. He hadn’t been paying attention, and the only sound his ears had picked up was the loud slapping of skin against skin and the deep pants coming from the boy on top of him.

“Hear what?” Stan asked, curiosity overpowering the awkwardness of having to stop midway through their first time because of a fucking noise outside - of all things. He should have expected some bullshit like this, to be fair.

“It sounded like-“ The doorbell ringing throughout the house cut off whatever Bill was going to try and explain.

“Fuck my entire life,” Stanley whispered. Bill laughed, and the sound helped drain some of the tension in the room. Stan found himself laughing too, seeing the comedy in the situation because yes, of course this was going to happen again. “Ignore it.”

And if the bell hadn’t rung again at that exact second, they probably would have. But whoever was down there, pressing the bell, was not going to fuck off any time soon. They were repeatedly pressing down on it, and it was taking everything Stan had to resist getting angry about it.

“Fuck.” Bill couldn’t have been out faster, rolling off of Stanley and shuffling over to the window. He held the curtain over his nude body to prevent exposing himself to the entire neighbourhood.

“It’s Richie’s truck-“

“I’m gonna kill him.” Stan practically leaped up, then winced at the pain between his legs. “I’m going to fucking kill him-“

“It m-must be important,” Bill said, though he was just as disappointed about their activity being cut short as Stan was. “But we c-can just tell him to fuh-fuck off and keep going-“

“I’ll see,” Stanley mumbled, pulling his clothes back on. It didn’t take much to get him out of the mood, so this had definitely done the trick. The doorbell was still going off, and Stan found himself trying to speed up, almost running down the stairs to the front door (he had been right about the not walking part - it was fucking sore).

He froze when he opened it to see Richie Tozier and Beverly Marsh staring at him with the most innocent smiles they could muster. One part of him was tempted to slam the door in their faces and go back up to Bill, but he was curious. And maybe a little bit relieved.

“What the fuck?” Stan spat. Richie and Bev exchanged cautious glances as Stanley glared at them both, awaiting a response of some kind.

“Uhh,” Bev was waiting for Richie to speak. He never usually let her down in that department. “I uh…”

“Come out,” Richie cut in, demanding. It took Stanley a minute to register what Richie actually meant, his first thought being that they had turned up on his door step to force a gay confession,
before realising they just wanted him to actually leave his house.

Maybe if Bill wasn’t upstairs, naked in his bed, he would’ve said yes.

“Absolutely not,” Stan said, “Is that all you’re here-”

“I wasn’t asking you to,” Richie cut in, stepping inside. Stan sighed and moved to the side, welcoming Beverly in behind him and then shutting the door loudly, hoping it would alert Bill that they had come inside. If that didn’t, he was certain the volume of Richie’s voice would. “Stan, I’m telling you. You have to come out. It is of paramount importance that you get that skinny Jewish ass to the fucking quarry as soon as humanly possible-“

“What the fuck is this about?” Stan found himself getting more pissed off. Maybe it did have something to do with Richie calling his ass skinny. Maybe it had more to do with the fucking audacity they both had. Of all people, of course it had to be Richie and Bev that showed up. “You can’t just turn up at my house and demand I come out with you. I’ve said no, Richie. Just fuck off and leave me alone.”

“Stan,” Beverly spoke up this time, “It’s serious. There was an…incident, last night. We all need to be together right now, whether you like it or not. It’s safer that way.”

“What happened?” Stanley asked, concern overtaking the curiosity. “Is everything okay?”

“We have no idea,” Bev said, she looked at Richie, who nodded in confirmation. “I’ll let Mike explain the full story when we’re back at the quarry. It’s so fucked up, Stan. We need you right now.”

Stanley thought for a minute. He knew he couldn’t leave at that exact moment. Bill was upstairs, expecting Stan to go back up to him and any moment. Probably still half-hard and naked, if Stan knew Bill at all. But after that revelation, how could he tell Beverly that he wasn’t willing to come with them? Differences aside, when things were bad, the losers never ever failed each other. Stan’s pride didn’t matter to him more than his loyalty to the losers club.

Plus, there was still a little satisfaction in the fact Beverly had come by at all. And she was being nice. Stan had missed that. She had too.

“I uh, I’m kind of in the middle of something,” Stan explained, “I’ll walk up as soon as I can, alright?”

“That isn’t gonna work.” Richie said. Stan couldn’t remember the last time he’d heard Richie speak to him with such a serious tone. “It’s urgent. And you can’t walk on your own.”

“What?” Stan scoffed, “Yes I can-“

“None of us can,” Beverly cut in, “Not anymore.” She didn’t offer any further explanation, and neither did Richie. They stared at Stanley in silence, watching as the cogs in his brains turned and he tried to respond to what he had just learnt.

“I don’t get it,” Stanley said, sounding frustrated. He always got annoyed at things he didn’t understand. Usually, he opted not to think of those things. “Why the fuck not?”

“Fuckin’ Bowers, Stanley,” Richie spat, and it was explanation enough. “Come on, we have to bounce. Mike’s gone to pick up Billiam so we’re meeting back at the quarry.” Stan was too panicked and confused to find it truly funny, but he did find himself holding back a smirk. They were going to have a hard time finding Bill if they were looking for him at his house. He knew that
he was supposed to tell them, but he couldn’t bring himself to inform them that Bill was with him. It felt too much like he was exposing them. Like they’d suddenly realise everything just from that alone.

“I told you,” Stan sighed, “I can’t go just yet.”

“Fine then,” Richie said, “We’ll wait with you.”

“You can’t-“ As if to explain exactly why, a large bang from upstairs cut Stanley off. He looked at the ceiling, knowing the bang had come from his bedroom, and sighed heavily. Bev and Richie stared at him, clearly confused. “Wait.” Stanley finished.

“Is someone else here?” Beverly asked. Stan could hardly deny it after that, but he knew it was going to look weird that he hadn’t informed them of Bill’s whereabouts as soon as they said his name. Weirder than if he had simply told them from the start. And now, they were going to have more questions - what task was so important that it prevented Stan from leaving with them immediately? “Did we interrupt something.“

“Is Stan the Man doing some entertaining, hey?” Richie was laughing. Fucking laughing. And then running to the stairs. “Who’s the lucky lady-“

“Richie!” Stan screamed his name like it had a bad taste, “Richie don’t you fucking dare-“

“Richie,” Beverly yelled, her own voice stern. Richie was at the top of the stairs, staring down at them both with raised eyebrows. “Don’t be an ass.”

“When is he n-not an ass?” It was Bill’s voice, speaking up as he came into view at the top of the stairs - fully clothed, and looking much more put together than Stan for once. Beverly flashed Stan a look, something between confusion and annoyance. Why hadn’t he told them Bill was there? She brushed it off, knowing there were more important things to worry about than whatever that was about. “What’s going on?”

“What the fuck-“ Richie was cut off, his question left unanswered.

“Quarry,” Beverly said, summarising it simply. “Mike has something to say. And we have a hell of a lot to talk about.”

“Got that fuckin’ right.”

They drove back to the quarry in silence, Bill and Stan trying to act as casual as possible, like they hadn’t been interrupted during what was supposed to be their most important experience yet, like they weren’t beyond anxious about whatever it was Mike had to say.

Mike, Eddie and Ben were waiting for them by Mike’s truck, relieved to see it pull up with both Bill and Stanley in. They didn’t bother going anywhere to have the conversation, instead standing in a circle where they stood. Mike went back over the story, in slightly more detail, and then the questions began.

It took them an hour to work it out, figure out how the fuck it would be possible for them to never be alone, only to realise it wasn’t. But it wasn’t as complicated as they had first expected it to be. Ben and Beverly were to stick together as much as possible. When Beverly was home, two other losers would go by to meet her. Naturally, Eddie and Richie figured they could stick together most of the time - they usually did anyway. Mike, Stan and Bill, would somehow get round as a three -
but one of them could always switch with Eddie or Richie. That arrangement wasn’t completely set in stone.

Obviously, there were still going to be times when they couldn’t be with the others. Stanley knew his parents would want him home for dinner alone, or at the Synagogue. It was harder for him when he had no car to get round, he couldn’t speed back to the others. They concluded that during times like that, two losers could go by in a car to make sure nothing happened. When Mike was working on the farm, another loser could help, or just sit and watch - so long as he wasn’t there alone. Driving was probably going to be a safer bet too, whenever possible.

It was going to be a fucking draining summer, they realised, trying to constantly work around everyone’s schedules. And it was fucking dreadful not knowing why they had to go to these extremes, unsure of the danger they did face if they were caught alone. Unsure if that danger was even real, or just an empty, pointless threat from Victor.

“This is going to be hell,” Eddie concluded, as the discussion came to a close.

“That’s Derry for ya, Eds,” Richie shrugged.

“That’s life,” Stan countered, rolling his eyes. Eddie wished that Stan wasn’t right, that he couldn’t find a ring of truth in the statement, but he could. Their lives had always been hell, Bowers had made fucking sure of that. And he wasn’t going to stop.

Chapter End Notes

I had this draft saved for an entire week and I forgot that I’d finished it. This fic is gonna be slow, but mostly because I want it to be genuinely well written and well thought out. Comments are encouraged and valued and appreciated xo
Bloody Billy

Chapter Notes

coming at you nearly a month later with 7k, hope there's still like 1 person interested :)

warning for violence even tho it's lame violence

Victor knew, he knew that Mike would tell the rest of the losers about his warning. He didn’t care, so long as that didn’t get back to Henry. If it ever did, he was a dead man.

Henry had been in a particularly bad mood all day, furious after one the bastards he was trying to mug got away. They had almost caught him, almost, but he was small and fast and had nails like talons and then Belch had tripped and-

Henry was still angry.

“We gotta do something big today boys,” Henry said, as if it was a matter of fact. It was a phrase he used a lot, and the gang always knew what it meant. To put it simply, it meant Henry was out for blood. He loved blood, did Henry. Human blood, more so than any other (though torturing animals was also a hobby of his), and always took great pleasuring in finding new ways to draw it.

Belch didn’t like it all, Vic could tell, and he knew Henry could too. Belch was a little squeamish at times, but he never let it get in the way, not anymore. He had adjusted relatively well since the first few occasions in which he panicked and once, shamefully, vomited. Victor wondered if it was the guilt, more so than the actual sight of blood.

Vic kind of liked blood too. He wished he didn’t, but he couldn’t lie about the rush of adrenaline it gave him when he saw it leak out, when he saw the poor bastards squirming and screaming. He loved it. There was a sense of pride too, like making them bleed was an achievement, a better milestone than humiliation or intimidation. More than that though, Victor loved the power it gave him. So yes, as vile as it made him, Victor also loved making their victims bleed, just like Henry.

But not as much as Patrick. None of them, as much as Patrick. It was almost animalistic, like Patrick had some sort of weird fetish for blood. He loved gore, lived for it, to a much more extreme degree than Henry - which was worrying, really.

“Who to go to for, ey?” Patrick wondered out loud, running his car keys along the metal gates of the school. It made a horrific clanking sound. Summer had started, and the boys had left school three years ago (two in Henry’s case, he was kept back), but they still found themselves lurking outside the grounds a considerable amount. It was convenient for finding people to prey on, mostly because it was so central - lots of people passed by.

“But they can’t know about Mike,” Belch suggested. “And that’s a while.” By their standards, it had. Two weeks, to be precise. Well, for those three at least. Vic knew different, but there was no way any of the gang could know about his visit to Mike. No way they could ever find out about Mike kicking his ass. Vic was going to get him back for that, somehow. Even if they didn’t get the little shit alone (and he hoped, for his own sake, they wouldn’t).
“Got big plans for those rats this summer,” Henry chuckled, smiling to himself. Vic wondered if it was going to be worse than the rest. He didn’t think his mind could handle that, not anymore. He had seen too much, done too much. But he was trying to prevent or at least delay doing it again. “Big, big plans.”

“Let’s go shit ‘em up a bit,” Patrick said, nodding knowingly at Henry. Henry smiled at the thought, he had a lot planned - it was going to be an intense summer for the losers club, and he wanted to start it with a bang. “Hunt them down, start with something brutal.“

“I want them fucking shaking,” Henry said, his tone vicious, “I don’t care about beating them up or calling them names. I want them to piss themselves walking down the fucking street in fear of me. I want them to fucking vomit when they remember the things we’ve done. And then, we’ll start taking them. Leave Big Bill for last.”

“Who’s first?” Belch asked, “Can we start with the bitch?” Beverly had stomped on his balls once, so hard that they’d throbbed and ached for an entire week afterwards. He had never gotten over it, and had it out for her harder than any of the others. Belch had a temper, and Beverly Marsh always managed to fire it up.

“I haven’t decided,” Henry shrugged, casually, “Guess we’ll just see which poor bastard we come across first. Order doesn’t matter, so long as Bill’s the last.” It was by far the riskiest game they had played. Going after the losers club held much more danger than picking some random kid off a block once a month. Seven disappearances of well known kids in the community was going to create more of a stir, and people would be quick to point to Bowers - their famous tormentor. For some reason, he wasn’t worried. Bowers didn’t know worry.

Victor and Belch did, but they had considered that angle, and they had a plan. It went against everything they knew to try and rebel against Henry, but Belch had been just as happy to plan for it as Victor, despite his loyalty. If everything finally went south, if they finally got caught, they could disappear themselves. It would look like another kidnapping case, and Henry wouldn’t be able to do a thing about it without drawing more suspicion to himself. There was no way he’d do that. Vic and Belch would go somewhere far away and restart, maybe sell bud on the side for extra cash or do the odd ‘job’ for people. The only thing that had kept them in Derry was fear, but now it was starting to push them away.

“Let’s start hunting boys,” Patrick said, smirking. He began walking towards the car, and slid in quickly. They had everything they’d need in the trunk. This had been planned for a very, very long time. Patrick was more excited than anybody to finally kick it into action. Chaos was about to ensue, and there was nothing he loved more than chaos.

It was five in the afternoon. The losers were up in the field, sat in a circle on a patch where the lengthy grass ceased to grow. It was shielded by the height of all the nature around them, and made them feel somewhat sheltered and safe.

Richie and Bev were sharing a cigarette, her head on his shoulder, Ben’s head in her lap. Eddie was in between Stan and Bill, looking awkwardly between the two. Mike was on the other side of Stan, separating him and Richie. The conversation was light, but the mood wasn’t.

“If I go bald I might as well just fuggin’, I don’t know, die,” Richie rambled, “Bald guys don’t get bitches-“

“You and bald guys have that in common,” Stan piped up, raising an eyebrow. The other losers,
minus Eddie snorted.

“Touche,” Richie said, raising his eyebrows.

“You’re not gonna go bald anyway,” Mike explained, “‘Cause your dad isn’t, and that’s how it works.”

“No it’s not,” Bill countered, “It’s ah-about your hairline. I-If it re-recedes then you’re p-probably gonna. Buh-But if not, you’re all good I guess.”

“Does mine-“ Ben was cut off by the unmistakable sound of a motor. There was a car approaching. That was peculiar for two reasons, the first being that nobody ever drove up on the fields, and the second being that it was technically illegal to do so. They only knew one person that ignored the latter. They had only ever seen one car drive over the fields. “Who the fuck-“

“Bowers,” Eddie gasped. Beverly stubbed the cigarette out, and they simultaneously tried to lower themselves, but it was impossible to do so without laying down completely, and that would only look weirder when Bowers did inevitably find them. They made the mistake of going to sit on the same patch every time.

The engine shut off, and the sound of car doors slamming and low voices filled the losers with a familiar sense of anxiety. They weren’t surprised though, it had been a good two weeks since any of them had last dealt with Bowers wrath.

They could have run. That was an option, of course, but they’d tried that one before. It resulted in them splitting up, and Ben, being the slowest runner, was caught and to summarise it quickly - that did not ever end well. They did try going back for him, but they didn’t even know where to look. If that were to happen again now, knowing what Vic said, they didn’t know what would be in store. The risk was too great. Running carried a risk worse than staying put, they all knew that.

It only took Henry a minute to find them, huddled up and evidently afraid on the ground. He smiled, flashing his crooked teeth at them all as he stared down with a spark in his eye. “Long time no see losers.”

“What do you want?” It was Mike that spoke up. Recently, he had been more of a leader than Bill - who was constantly distracted by Stanley, too distracted to bother with any of the issues within the group. And too distracted to give a toss about Bowers. Even then, Bill’s gaze was fixed on Stan - worry clouding his vision as he saw the fear across Stan’s face. He was shaking.

“Just came for a friendly conversation,” Bowers chimed. Behind him, Victor and Belch walked up. Patrick’s lack of appearance didn’t go unnoticed. Mike flashed Victor a look, but the bully looked through him, as if he didn’t even want to acknowledge what had happened only the previous night. As if it had never happened. But he could feel all seven of them looking at him, knowing exactly what he had done. It didn’t sit well.

“We don’t want to talk to you,” Mike shrugged, rising. Maybe it was the thing with Victor giving him the boost of courage, or maybe he just didn’t feel threatened. It was seven on three. Easy. They weren’t the weak children that they once were, and Henry was just as scrawny as he had been back when he was sixteen. The only one of the three with actual muscle was Belch, but Mike wondered if his own were stronger.

The afraid part of Mike knew that the Bowers Gang would know that. If they had come for a fight, they had come armed. They were never not these days.
Henry laughed at Mike’s response, and Belch and Vic were quick to join in. The sound was menacing. “Like you shitbags have a choice.”

“What’s this about?” It was Beverly that spoke up, her voice cold and hard as she addressed her tormentors.

“Fun,” Victor said. “We only want one of you.” That time, he did flash a look to Mike, then watched as the entire group tensed up. It wasn’t just his way of giving a nod to his conversation with Mike, it was the truth. Henry did only want one, but not to take away like he planned on later, he just wanted one to fuck with right there, in front of everyone else - while they were powerless to do anything (because they would be, they fucking would be).

“Can’t you take us all?” Mike quizzed, stepping forward. If he hadn’t have spoken up at that moment, none of the other losers would have seen as Patrick emerged from the grass behind him. He was as quick as a fox, and silent too, so when Mike felt the cold, sharp edge of a knife against the small of his back, he was naturally very shaken. “Fuck-

Patrick’s other arm slid around Mike’s neck. Choke hold. Mike despised that Patrick towered above everyone, it made him look even creepier, but he had never hated that fact more than in that moment. “Don’t you worry doll face, we will take you all - *just not today.*” His voice was slimy and quiet, sending an uncomfortably cold shiver down Mike’s spine.

“Is that a knife?” Mike asked, unable to see it. It certainly felt like one, and Mike was familiar enough to know. “How creative.”

They had used worse.

“Snark again and I’ll show you fuckin’ creative,” Patrick snarled. “We’ve got a fun new game for you fucks today. You’re gonna love it!” The smiles that all four bullies were wearing made Stanley feel quite sick. He had a funny feeling that this was going to end very, very nastily. And not just because Mike had a knife pressed to his back - that was tame for Patrick.

“Doh-Doh-Don’t-” Bill tried to speak up. Tried. But Henry never had the patience for that stutter.

“Sh-Sh-Shut the fuck up,” Bowers mocked. “Damn it Billy, if you *can’t speak* then *don’t speak.*” Bill bit his lip, knowing that any retaliation would be fucking idiocy. He didn’t want to make anything worse.

“I’m gonna speak on his behalf and say fuck you, inbred freak,” Richie retorted. He stood too, inviting some form of violence. He half regretted it when Bowers shoved Belch forward, and he came at him with a harsh punch to the face. His nose bust, a trickle of blood instantly pouring out, but Richie still shot one back, a solid upper cut. Naturally, Belch had the upper hand in the fight, and went for him with the wrath and force of a bull.

“Richie no-“ Eddie.

“Stop it-“ Beverly.

“You’re gonna get yourself killed-“ Ben.

“No, no, no, *no-* “ Stan.

“You don’t talk about Henry like that,” Belch spat, giving Richie a final shove. Richie barely budged, a smug smile across his bloodied face. “Sit your ass down four eyes.” He complied, reluctantly. It was the wise thing to do, they all knew that.
“Time for games,” Henry said, sharing a smile with Patrick. It was a game only suited to that of a twenty one year old psychopath. It was a game nobody else would dream of playing; a game straight from the combined imaginations of Patrick and Henry.

“Can’t we cut the bullshit?” Mike asked, “Skip straight to the part where you beat the shit out of us and fuck off.” The knife twisted. It wasn’t inside of him, but it was threatening to be, and the prick of it stung. He knew, already, that he would not leave this uninjured.

“Shut up,” Patrick hissed, “Keep talking shit and this knife is going in you.” Mike was afraid, but no more so than he had been in the past. This was almost the norm. Two weeks without Bowers meant they were forced to see his worst when he got back to them, they had expected it. Violence like this was never not scary, but it was no longer a shock.

Every single one of the losers had seen Bowers and his gang do worse, and that by no means made it easier, but it meant they were never in a state of shock when faced with extreme and inhumane situations. Growing up in Derry had forced them to adjust.

“We’re not gonna beat the shit out of you all,” Victor said, smiling almost innocently, “That would be too easy. No, no, no. Only one of you has to take shit today, we’re being nice.” The losers exchanged looks of dismay. Someone was going to have to step up and take one for the team.

“And even better,” Bowers continued, “Your buddy Mike here gets to pick which one of you takes the brunt.” The sound that Mike made was straight from his stomach. He wretched, looking between the losers horrified faces with a completely fresh feeling of fear. There was no way he could do that, no way in hell.

“Pick me-“ Naturally, it was Bill piping up.

“Shut your fucking mouth you scrawny stuttering shit!” Bowers pulled his own knife, pointing it in Bill’s general direction, though there was too much space between them for it to be a threat quite as harsh as Mike’s. Bill was still scared enough to be silenced.

The losers talked back to Henry a lot, but only when he didn’t hold such a big threat. Today was not a day they could get away with acting tough, they had already learned that. Instead, they were silent, lips pressed together, breaths quick and quiet as their hearts raced.

“That’s against the rules, Big Billy,” Belch chimed, sliding a small pen knife out of his own pocket. Bill didn’t know why, he had watched Reginald Huggins vomit over the sight of blood. Not one of the losers thought he was capable of using a knife on someone - baseball bats were more his forte. Still, the threat was scary, they knew his loyalty to Bowers could probably push him to try with knife, and if they angered him enough…

“What are the rules?” Eddie asked, sitting up straighter. He knew in the back of his mind, he would be willing to volunteer to take whatever Bowers had in mind. He wanted it to be him. But he knew Mike would never pick him, Mike would go for someone he knew would fight back - he assumed.

“Glad you asked pansy,” Bowers said, “They’re very important. If you follow them, only one of your asses get kicked.” The losers silently agreed that they would follow them. They had to. “But Big Bill here already broke one, so Mike here has to be punished - that’s how it works.” Patrick began to laugh, and the knife pressed in the smallest bit. It punctured the surface the tiniest bit, scratching just enough to draw blood, and then dragging it up quickly. Mike grunted, and if the hold around his neck hadn’t been so harsh, he would probably have cried out or tried to lunge forward. He was being slashed. It wasn't the first time, but it wasn't an easy pain to get used to.
“Don’t hurt him-“ Beverly cried out. If there was one thing that tortured Bev more than anything else, it was watching her friends hurt. “Please I-“

“Rule number one,” Bowers cut in, “You don’t talk unless I talk to you. No screeching like little bitches. No fuckin’ crying. You’re silent unless I tell you otherwise. You talk, you whimper, you sob- Mikey gets sliced.”

“Number two,” Victor continued, “If Mike refuses to pick a victim, he gets slashed. And then we fuck with two of you, so if he doesn’t pick one of you, two of you get hurt. Can’t do that, can you Homeschool?” Mike closed his eyes, unwilling to let anybody see the tears forming in them.

“Number three,” Patrick said, dragging the knife back down, “Every minute you take to pick, is another hit your loser takes. So you better pick fast, clocks ticking Hanlon.” Mike was ready to start hyperventilating.

“Four,” Bowers snarled, “You don’t pick Denbrough.” Bill had half expected it, but the idea of it being anyone else was borderline unbearable. He didn’t want to watch that - couldn’t bear it.

“Five,” Patrick said, “Any of you other losers try ’n stop us, Mikey here gets it bad. No funny business, leave that to us.” He laughed at himself. “Five simple rules. Let the game begin - choose wisely kid.”

Mike’s mind was racing. The losers were staring at him, silent and expecting. Bill wasn’t a possibility, but if he had been Mike would have probably gone for him - he knew Bill would take it well, and Bill would want to take one for the team. He knew, in reality, that any of them would be willing to. It was about the betrayal. Bill would never see it as betrayal. Bill wasn’t playing though, instead crouched on the floor with his hands balled into fists, eyes screwed shut and jaw clenched. He was about five snarky Bowers comments away from losing it.

Then, there was Richie, who had already taken a beating. His nose was still bleeding, and there was no way Mike could allow that to get worse. That wasn’t fair - not that anything about their situations, or lives at all, was ever fucking fair. Richie wouldn’t have minded though, Richie would gladly take one for the team, Mike knew that much. Richie was looking at him with raised eyebrows, nodding ever so slightly as if urging him to hurry, or pick him.

Mike considered Bev, but fucking hell, how could he do that to her? Ben would be fucking traumatised, and it wasn’t that he thought she was weaker because she was a girl, Mike never doubted her strength, it was just that he knew that would be harder for everybody else to watch. There was no way he could send her up like that, never. Much like Richie though, she looked as if she wanted to, her position suggesting she was ready to stand in any given moment.

His eyes drifted to Ben, but he didn’t want to do that either. Ben always got it the worst. If he sent Ben into the line of fire again, even if he did put up a fight, he would leave with yet another marking. Mike couldn’t do that to him - throw him under the bus like that, not that he wanted to do that to any of them. Ben would have done it. Ben would have done it any day of the week, but Mike wasn’t going to allow that.

“Tick tock,” Patrick whispered. The smile on his face was sickening, and the smug expression was also present on Bowers himself, but no focus was on him in that moment, every one of them staring intently at Mike. It only added to the pressure on him.

Mike’s mind drifted to Eddie, but he thought Eddie was too fragile - much to Eddie's irritation. He knew how bad it would look if he allowed the smallest one of them to be brutally beaten. And he had no doubt Richie would be fuming if he chose Eddie over him. Eddie was out of the question.
But that left Stan, and Mike knew Stanley would fucking crumble. They made eye contact, and Mike spied nothing but fear in Stanley’s blown pupils. He saw Stanley as fragile as he saw Eddie, if not more so, because he knew Stan was so, so afraid of being hurt. His incident with Bowers seemed to traumatise him on a deeper level than that of any other loser. Mike didn’t know why, he didn’t know all the details. But Stanley wasn’t an option. They held eye contact though, and Stanley’s eyes were pleading.

“Tick, tick, tick,” Patrick repeated, melodically.

“I don’t think he’s gonna do it,” Vic said, stepping forward, “I think he’s too afraid.”

“Fucking pussy isn’t he,” Belch snarled, running his finger down his blade. Mike tensed. “Pussy, pussy-”

“Tick tock, tick tock.” Patrick’s voice in his ear sent shivers down his spine, it was that fucking intense. Patrick was minutes away from frothing at the mouth, he was that eager to get his blade into Mike. The panic Mike felt was like nothing he had ever felt before, and he briefly wondered if this was the worst thing they had ever done to him. It was different when he was the one taking the pain, but having to pass it on to someone he adored? That was true torture; knowing that even if he refused that more pain would be inflicted made it an impossible battle to win.

“I…” Mike couldn’t. He fucking couldn’t. Maybe if Bill was an option, it would have been different, but that was out of the question and the guilt would’ve still been there, even if Bill wanted to do it. He wished more than anything that running was an option, but it wouldn’t end well.

There was a time when antics like that were possible, but as the Bowers Gang got older, they became stronger, faster, more violent. Impossible to shake off, especially considering how above the law Henry believed himself to be.

The losers were all staring at him, each of them willing for Mike to pick them. All except for Stan, who was praying it would be anybody but him, and Bill, who was praying it would be anyone but Stan. And of course, every single one of them trying to brainstorm some way out of this one. Mike was still holding eye contact with Stanley.

Vic noticed the way he was staring, with sympathy and hopelessness and fear. It satisfied him to see Mike so fucking wrecked after the beating he had taken - his ribs were black and blue, and he was going to make sure Mike paid for that some way or another. This seemed to be working, but not enough. Vic wanted more.

Of course, every member of the Bowers Gang was curious as to who Mike was going to throw under the bus. They had put some thought into it, each reaching a similar conclusion. If Mike did in fact pick in time - something they all very much doubted - he would go for Bill. Only, Bill was out of the game, so that left Richie. Richie would take it like a champ. Or Ben, who always found himself in the line of fire. There was no way he would pick Beverly, they knew that much - chivalry wasn’t dead. And then there was little Eddie Kaspbrak, who Patrick considered an absolute treat whenever he got his hands on him. Eddie was always fun, mostly because they never knew how he was going to react. Or Stanley, who was the most fun of all. They loved getting to him because he always gave them the reaction they wanted - fear. Unlike the others, he never tried to mask it. He didn’t know how, and that was his weakness.

“Thirty seconds,” Bowers snapped, “You’re boring me. We can’t have that, can we? I came to play.”
“What is it?” Vic asked Mike, Patrick was twisting the knife again. Mike bit down on his lip, hard, to silence his grunt. “Think you’re too old for games? You’re never too old for games, not these games.”

“I…I…” Mike didn’t think his mouth could even form a name. He opened his eyes again, finding them still fixated on Stanley. Patrick was whispering the count down in his ear, and his anxiety grew with every passing second. As he got to the final five, Mike got an idea.

“Two-“

“Stan,” Mike yelled, but he wasn’t finished, “Run! All of you, run! Go!” He felt the knife scratch up, and it was painful enough to make him want to vomit. It was painful enough to hinder any movement of escape he could’ve made, and shook him too much for him to pay attention to his surroundings. But he kept shouting. “Run!”

Mike did not see as Bill grabbed Stanley’s collar and shot into the distance, all of them yelling and screaming. Mike couldn’t make out the sound of Ben shouting his name, begging him to run too. Mike doubted he could walk in that moment. He knew it wasn’t going to be that deep, not damaging enough to do anything too fatal, but bad enough for him to need a long lay down. And a maybe few stitches.

Henry bolted, eyes evil and fixed on the fleeing losers. Bev and Bev took off in one direction, hands clasped as they ran. Richie had ran after Eddie, who fled faster than Richie had ever seen him before, like he was on some sort of mission. He was, but Richie wasn’t so aware of that.

Belch took after Ben and Bev, fast, but not fast enough. He didn’t stop, but he let himself slow knowing that there was little point in the chase. Patrick dropped his knife and shot after Richie and Eddie, letting Mike fall to the mercy of Henry, who simply stood there taunting him with racist slurs, awaiting the return of his gang.

It was Victor that went hunting Bill and Stan. To begin with, the boys had been holding each other, running as close as possible, but as Vic got closer they began to realise that speed wasn’t on their side, and went in separate directions. Initially, Vic followed Stan, assuming him to be the easier target, but Bill began running back towards him, and he quickly learned that Bill was far too protective for his own good. Vic sped up, pulled the knife from his pocket, and ran at Bill Denbrough with everything he had.

Stanley didn’t think twice. As soon as Vic went for Bill he turned around. There wasn’t a doubt in his mind that he was doing the right thing, because he knew that someone had to - why not him? He wasn’t the coward the all thought. He was going to prove it, and the anger, the fear, the hurt, were all fuelling one hell of a fire.

Even from a distance, the scene looked sickening. The back of Mike’s shirt was soaked through with blood, and he was laid out in something close to a fetal-position as Bowers threw another kick into his ribs, yelling things that made his skin prickle with anger.

Stanley ran at Henry. He was defenceless and physically weak, afraid and underprepared, but he still ran at him. Somehow, it knocked Henry to the ground.

And somehow, the knife fell out of the bullies hand.

And somehow, Mike managed to stand.

The next thing Stan knew, him and Mike were throwing kicks at Bowers like bats at pinyatas. He
felt liberated. Sickeningly liberated. Henry was yelling, and Stan and Mike were screaming things back, awful, awful things, but things that Bowers was well overdue hearing.

It happened too fast for anybody to realise everything that was going on. One moment, Stanley was furiously beating Henry with Mike - something he had never done, nor dreamt. The next moment, he was on the ground, pinned down by Victor Criss, he stopped fighting back. Patrick was back on Mike, blade out and ready for round two. At the same time, Bill had shot back to them, and was struggling in a verbal fight with Bowers, who was holding his own knife only inches away from Bill. Belch had returned too, sweating and panting. The losers were outnumbered this time, but only just.

The other four were at Mike’s truck, gasping for breath and shaking with a mixture of anger and fear.

“I’m going back-“ Eddie tried marching off, but was pulled back hard by Richie. “Let me go!”

“We can’t split,” Beverly reminded him, suddenly taking the threat much more seriously. “Two go, two stay. We can’t leave Mike with them like that - fucking hell - we’re idiots, running like that-“

“He told us to,” Ben reminded her, “He wanted us to get away. But we do need to go back for him, this isn’t right.”

“What about Stan and Bill?” Richie asked, “Where the fuck did they get to?”

“Stan probably flew to the other side of Derry,” Eddie said, which was an unfair underestimation of Stan’s strength. “Come on Richie, we’ll go get Mike.”

“Please be fast,” Ben called as the began to walk off. Richie turned back around, running backwards.

“Aye, aye captain,” He replied, fit with the hand gesture. They did speed up though, and Ben was filled with relief. The longer Mike was stuck with the Bowers Gang, was more torture he’d be inflicted with. Mike was too good for that, and they were all infuriated by the position Bowers and co. had put him in. And then they’d fled, which made them feel worse, even if it was what Mike wanted.

It took Eddie and Richie all of two minutes to get to them, shooting back to their old spot the fastest their legs would take them. What they saw, was not what they had expected.

Mike was not alone, and it was both relieving and terrifying to see Bill and Stanley there with them. Eddie reminded himself to retract his earlier comment about Stan flying off, because that, evidently, was not what he had done. Or maybe he had just failed, but that was less impressive. Eddie wanted to think highly of his friend, and he was right in his assumption anyway.

“Guys!” Eddie yelled out, stupidly. Richie cursed under his breath, but couldn’t bring himself to be genuinely annoyed at Eddie announcing their presence. He had done so to distract them, as well as to reassure the losers. But they didn’t look pleased or relieved. They looked anxious, more so than they had two minutes before.

Upon hearing the voice, Patrick dropped Mike and span around. Henry was too preoccupied to give them the time of day, much too focused on fucking with Bill. The same went for Victor, who was having a blast trying to make Stanley cry again. Belch shot over to Mike before he could make any attempt at an escape.

“This just got a lot more interesting,” Patrick said, his usual sinister edge even more present in the
“Go back you idiots!” Mike yelled. He would have continued yelling, but decided against it once Belch’s foot collided with his rib cage.

“We came to get you,” Eddie said, as if it wasn’t obvious. Patrick laughed at that, and stepped closer to the two of them, knife extended. Richie and Eddie both froze, only a meter away from their friends.

“That was unwise,” Patrick chuckled, “Oh, so unwise.” Eddie and Richie exchanged looks. They realised in that moment, that for once, Patrick Hockstetter was probably right. But just because it was unwise didn’t mean it was wrong, Eddie didn’t doubt for a second that they had done the right thing.

There was a silence, long and drawn out as they all weighed out the options and possibilities. Richie and Patrick held an intense stare-off. Eddie reviewed the scene before them, which seemed to be frozen in a tableau.

The first thing he noticed was the state of Mike. There blood down his back, not much, but enough for it to be noticeable and concerning. His face was flushed and he was sweating, something Mike did intensely when he was stressed or panicked. Belch had him pinned down with his foot, which was definitely better than Patrick pinning him down with the knife.

Then there was Bill, who Bowers had in a seemingly tight choke-hold. The knife in Henry’s hand wasn’t aimed at Bill though, instead pointed forward at Eddie as if he was threatening him with Bill, who was still managing to gasp at some air, and gripping Henry’s arm like he was clinging on for dear life. He kind of was.

Finally, Eddie’s eyes flicked to Stanley, who was laid out on the ground, his eyes flickering open and shut slowly. He seemed dazed, and there was blood around his face, but no obvious cut. Eddie quickly realised it was Victor’s blood, and it was everywhere. Victor was sat on Stanley, straddling him with one hand around his throat and the other over his mouth. He was bleeding, somehow, and Eddie really fucking hope that it was Stanley that had caused it.

“Can we have our friends back, please?” Richie asked, strangely polite. Patrick laughed out loud at him, and Richie didn’t know why that surprised him so. He tried again. “Leave us alone you fuckin’ rats or I swear to fuckin’ God-“

He was cut off by the sickening laughter erupting from the Bowers Gang. Bowers himself finally spoke up, “You won’t do shit, Skeleton.”

“Fuckin’ try me shithead,” Richie snarled. He was like this a lot when they were faced with confrontation - mouthy. He liked to put on a show, if not a fight, and tried despite the likelihood of him losing. He never wanted to look weak in front of his friends, and after being bullied so harshly for so long, Richie had grown thick skin and the ability to snap back without overthinking. It angered them, and Richie loved it.

“Give me a fair competition and I might have a fighting chance,” Richie suggested. He didn’t doubt his own strength, which everyone else present considered to be a mistake. As far as anybody else was concerned, he was either underestimating Henry or overestimating himself. Fair fight or no.
“I don’t fight fair,” Bowers sneered, “That’s no fun.”

“Richie don’t do this,” Eddie pleaded as his friend began to walk forward, “Let’s just—” Eddie stopped himself. He couldn’t think of an alternative option. This always had to end in a fight, it usually did with Bowers. If they were lucky, said brawl would be verbal. Today, after two weeks of peace, the losers could not be so lucky.

“Knife down,” Richie demanded, completely ignoring Eddie, “No weapons.”

“You don’t make the rules rat,” Bowers chuckled at him, shaking his head. “But I haven’t got blood on my fists for a while.” And with that, he threw the knife to the ground and let go of Bill, who staggered back - free, but waiting with clenched fists - he wasn’t stupid enough to try anything yet.

Richie tensed, he hadn’t expected that. None of them had, but Bowers was always full of surprises, usually ones much more horrific.

“So what are the rules?” Richie asked, dreading this being anything like the last ‘game’. How could it be worse? They’d lost that one.

“We don’t got none this time,” Henry shrugged, “Free reign. Take the first shot, Trashmouth.” It was almost too good to be true, and Richie knew it. He was a smart boy. So did the others, so when Richie actually went in for a punch and managed to hit him square on his crooked little nose, there was a communal gasp. Henry Bowers did not take that well. To say he went ape-shit would have been an understatement.

It all happened quickly, but nobody was paying enough attention to catch all the small details, each loser trying to escape their own battle. Bowers launched at Richie with the wrath of someone possessed. Eddie, with matching anger, launched at Bowers.

As soon as everyone was distracted, Bill reached for the knife on the ground. Belch, panicked, took his foot off of Mike at went for Bill, who blindly slashed at Belch’s fist. He cursed, loudly, and jumped back, shaking his bloody fingers dramatically.

Belch Huggins didn’t handle pain well, he just inflicted it well.

“Bastard,” Patrick hissed, launching at Bill. Mike, still sore, bleeding and dazed flung himself at Patrick, jumping on his back and wrapping his arms around his eyes. It was a tactic they had used in the past, a stupid stunt that always seemed to work - despite how cartoonish it looked. Patrick, blinded, threw his arms about wildly, cursing and screaming variations of racial abuse.

Bill took that opportunity to aid Stan, who had wound up in yet another fight with Vic. He wasn’t being completely passive - actually attempting to resist for once - but he was struggling. Vic had him on his knees with his back to him, and was holding his hair with one hand and the back of his shirt with the other. He threw a huge kick into Stan’s back, forcing him forward.

A chunk of hair remained in Vic’s hand, and Bill once again held the knife out, surging forward with a dangerous lack of aim and completely reckless energy.

He didn’t intend to do much damage, he didn’t think himself capable, but the knife went into his thigh, and Vic dropped back, ripping Stanley’s shirt in the process. He screamed.

With that, everybody froze.

Eddie and Richie, who had been attempting to fight Bowers, both stilled - Richie holding one of
Henry’s fists away from him, Eddie tugging somewhat comically at his shirt. Unsurprisingly, they had been losing.

Belch stopped shaking his blood-covered hand and gasped. Mike dropped from Patrick’s back, and Patrick, finally able to see, stared with an almost amused smile.

“Fuh-fuck,” Bill whispered, mostly to himself. He had just stabbed somebody. That seemed unreal, it seemed almost false, like this was all just a nightmare. “Shit, shit, shit.”

“Oh Billy,” Bowers said, his own tone laced with shock, “What the fuck have you done?”

“I duh-duh-didn’t m-m-meh-mean to,” Bill swore, “I-I-I-I was juh-just-“

“You fucking stabbed me,” Victor cried out, holding his seeping wound with one hand, the other was still clutching the ripped fabric of Stanley’s shirt, his fist squeezed around it tightly. It wasn’t deep, closer to a slash than a serious stabbing. Fatal? Not even nearly, but the consequences for Bill were sure to be.

“I could tell my Dad on you,” Bowers chuckled, walking over to Vic. The comment seemed almost childish, but his voice had a threatening and dark edge.

Eddie and Richie found themselves huddled together, backing away as if they really regretted even coming back for Mike after witnessing Bill react so violently. Stan was still frozen, eyes piercing the dry ground beneath him. He had felt his shirt rip, and it was making him increasingly more uncomfortable, but he couldn’t make himself move. Whatever was behind Stanley, whatever mess Bill had made of Victor Criss, he did not want to see.

“Could swing by home right now and let him know what little ol’ Billy Denboy’ just did to my good friend Vic here.” The threat, naturally, shook the losers to the core. But none as much as Bill.

“Do it Henry,” Vic yelled, staring at his wound with panic-ridden eyes. He was looking at it as if his leg had been sliced off, when in reality it was nothing more than a light pierce. A quarter of an inch, at very most, but wide. “Lock him up-“

“Where’s the fun in that?” Patrick cut in, walking forward with a devilish smirk on his face. “You’re fuckin’ fine you pansy, it’s a cut.”

“He fuckin’ stabbed me-“ Vic protested, motioning to the blood that was staining his jeans - the patch growing by the minute. “-Stabbed me! With Henry’s knife!” Belch was the only one of the Bowers’ Gang that seemed remotely concerned, gulping and stepping further and further back.

“You should put some pressure on that thing,” Mike chipped in, helpfully. They turned to him, even Stanley found himself looking up. “Bandage it up. Thigh wounds can be deadly. You could bleed out-“

“Holy fuck-“ Bill thought he might faint. To quote his mortal enemy, what the fuck had he done? His train of thought changed. What if Victor died? What if it was his fault? It seemed ridiculous, when he saw how small the blood stain was, but still-

“I’m just saying,” Mike continued, “Me and Eddie can easy patch him up, we're good at that. If we do, you leave us the fuck alone. And you don't tell a soul.”

“Done,” Vic cried out, much to the dismay of his friends. He felt a rush of respect for Mike, who after everything was still willing to help him. He supposed he owed him one after the beating he willingly took the night before, but that wasn't the case. Mike Hanlon would never owe him shit,
but Mike wasn't willing to lose himself in the evil of his tormentors. He saw a man that needed help, and an opportunity to get his friends out of a sticky situation.

Eddie rushed forward, silently thanking Sonia Kaspbrak for raising him with a strangely wide range of medical knowledge. He was forever playing at the group medic, but he had never had to do that for the enemy before. At least it was only Vic, the softest. Eddie doubted he would ever be willing to do the same for Bowers or Patrick, maybe not even Belch. But Vic was a pussy, and Vic had warned them. Eddie supposed it was a fair trade, and he had grown skilled when it came to knife wounds.

“You need to take your pants off,” Eddie said, crouching beside him. Vic snorted.

“Not for you fairy,” He spat, but then seemed to recoil, realising it was kind of necessary. They needed to see what they were going to heal, and Vic would have done anything for that.

"Bleed out then," Eddie shrugged, but Vic grabbed his wrist and furiously shook his head.

Richie rushed over too, though purely to support Eddie, and maybe a bit because he wanted to see the wound. Patrick and Belch too strolled over, but Bowers stayed back, watching from a short distance. He didn’t give a fuck about Vic’s leg, finding it amusing above anything, and enjoying the fact they had more reason to taunt Bill.

And boy, did he have some torture in store for Bill Denbrough.

- 

It took them twenty minutes to sort Victor out. He was relatively uncooperative, and failed to get through it without calling all the losers at least one disgusting name. They requested that Stan give up his ruined, ripped shirt to bandage it, but he outright refused, so they were forced to clean it and bandage it with Victor’s own tee. Eddie had tissued to help clean up some of the blood, which had stopped flowing as soon as pressure had been applied, and Belch even offered vodka to pour into it. Eddie insisted that wasn’t called for, but the gesture was somewhat decent of him. They also wiped up his bloodied finger, which was a pathetically small injury.

Thankfully, Bill Denbrough was not skilled with knives.

They departed as soon as they were finished. Henry spat at Stanley, mostly just because he was the closest loser to him, and bid the losers yet another harsh goodbye before he marched back to the car. Patrick and Belch helped Vic limp back, though Mike said it shouldn’t really affect his walk that bad. It was a slash, a scratch about 3 millimetres deep. Eddie had once fixed up similar on himself.

By the time they got back to the car, Bev and Ben were shaking with panic, and even more so once Mike explained what had happened. Bill wanted to cry, but did his best to maintain a brave face, even though he was ready to piss himself from fear about what Vic and Belch were going to do to him on their next encounter.

Stanley was in shock too, and the other losers with him. He had put up a fight. For Mike. For himself. For all of them. He wasn’t entirely certain what had fully spurred him on to do so, but he was glad of it, despite the heaviness of it all. It didn’t feel real, and Stan could hardly believe that only hours ago he had been getting fucking.

Part of him really regretted answering the door to Bev and Richie. It had been one hell of a day. Somehow though, still not their worst.
“Vic wasn’t fucking with us,” Ben concluded, his voice shaky, “We really can’t split up this summer.”

So when they inevitably had to for bed that night, every loser was shaking with fear.

Their last summer in Derry was sure as fuck going to be a memorable one.

Chapter End Notes

lol pls comment i need validation (and get at me on tumblr, @dearg0d)
Eddie Kaspbrak was shaking. He always found it hard to sleep, but even more so after a day so painfully eventful.

His mind wouldn’t shut the fuck up, and it was frustrating above anything, because he knew all too well that there was no way to tune out of his own mind. Defeated, he climbed out of bed, giving up on trying to sleep. It was hard enough on an average night, and this was far from one of those - it was a bad night. The worst in a while.

What was plaguing him, above anything, was the fear of what was going to happen now they had hurt Vic and Belch. In the past, no serious damage had ever been inflicted to Bowers or his Gang, despite the frequent self-defence. The first time they had done so, during the infamous rock fight, Bowers had flipped. It had only ever gotten worse as a result, and Eddie dreaded to think about how much worse it would get now Bill had drawn blood from one of Henry’s trusted friends.

It got him questioning what Henry Bowers was truly capable of, and that was something Eddie never really wanted to contemplate. He already knew, deep down. There was no solid evidence, there was no big bold clue, it was just intuition.

Henry Bowers was a cold blooded killer.

There was nothing anybody could say to Eddie that would convince him otherwise. His own friends even considered the idea to be far fetched. That was unwise underestimation after everything Bowers and his goons had put them through.

Since being thirteen years old, Eddie Kaspbrak had conspired that Henry Bowers was the one behind all the mysterious disappearances in town. There were a lot of reasons people didn’t like his theory, and all were pretty fair, but Eddie always refused to let it go - he just learned to believe it in silence. People were always going to believe what they wanted to believe, and Eddie was dead-set on this.

It made sense, even more so after what Mike had told them. Why couldn’t they go alone? What would Henry do if he got them alone? What could Henry do that was bad enough for even Victor Criss to try and prevent it from happening?

Murder.

It was the obvious answer, Eddie was sure of it. Even if that did mean his friends would think him bat-shit crazy again. It wasn’t a reach, not when you really thought it through. The losers often underestimated his intelligence, accidentally of course. They didn’t doubt his capabilities, and knew he was an absolute brain-box. Even though all of the losers were pretty smart, Eddie thought that he was considered lower on the list. In reality they were all mentally gifted in different ways, Eddie simply had far too much self-doubt.
Where Mike was wise and logical, Richie was quick-thinking and witty. Where Stanley was all numbers and unique facts, Ben was literature and abstract interpretation. Where Beverly was understanding and interpersonal, Bill was existential and retentive.

And in fairness, they were all capable of being any of the above. Eddie didn’t see where he fit into it, though he indisputably did. There were parts of every one of them in each other, the best and the worst. Lots of the worst, because they were all flawed and fucked - Eddie knew, because he was too. Trauma often did that. That night though, he had bigger demons than the damaged dynamic of their friendship group and deep-rooted, negative personality traits.

To him, this was life or death. His last summer in Derry was going to be about survival, not making memories and cherishing his friends.

Assuming and believing that his theory was factual, Eddie decided that maybe Stan’s desire to stay curled up at home wasn’t all that bad. No child ever went missing in the safety of their own home, though Eddie found himself acknowledging that not every loser had a safe home to begin with.

Beverly was out at every given opportunity, which was definitely for the best. And he didn’t like being home so much either, the less time he spent with his Mother the fucking better. Especially this summer - he knew she’d become more insufferable as the leaving date closed in.

Still, Bev was his main concern. There was no way she could stay home all summer, her friends were the last good thing she had, and it wasn’t like staying with any of them all summer was an option.

That was yet another thing Eddie found himself pondering - how were they going to manage no alone time? Beverly needed it, more so than they did. Her father would never let her stay out every night, and it wasn’t like they could go over and stay at her place. If Alvin Marsh found a boy in Beverly’s bedroom, they’d come out castrated.

And then they had to work that around their parents, which was an issue within an issue. Parents. Because it wasn’t like the losers could tell them what was going on. Bill was hardly going to sit his Ma down and tell her he stabbed a boy in the leg. Mike could never inform his Grandpa that there were four grim white boys hunting him down. Eddie could never tell Sonia - or being housebound wouldn’t be his own choice.

Eddie was deep, deep in thought about it all, writing things down in his little notebook. He tried to be vague, just in case his mother ever went snooping, but found himself pouring his heart out to the pages of the book. It was cathartic. He wished he had the motivation like Bill did to write so often, but Eddie could barely keep his diary up to date.

He had been jotting things down for over an hour when he heard the familiar knock on his window. In all honesty, Eddie hadn’t wanted nor expected, Richie to show up that night. It wasn’t a daily thing, but it was getting to be almost that way. Eddie was anxious about it for a whole number of reasons, most obviously because he dreaded them getting caught, which seemed inevitable with the frequency and length of Richie’s late night visits. But now, on top of that, Eddie feared Richie taking the trip over at all. Roaming the streets, alone, at night, seemed like an awfully dumb thing to do, and it pissed Eddie off that Richie had taken that risk at all. It told him that Richie wasn’t taking this seriously, and considering Eddie’s beliefs on the matter, that was not good news.

As far as Eddie was concerned, Richie was gambling with his life by coming over. That angered him.
“What the fuck are you doing?” He spat, slamming his journal shut as he watched Richie clamber through the small gap and into his room.

“What the fuck does it look like I’m doing?” Richie shot back, slowly sliding the window back shut. Eddie stared at him, anger evident in his expression. Richie didn’t understand why, and was a little shocked after being met with such a cold tone. “I came to see you, same old, Eds.”

“Do you really think that’s wise right now?” Eddie scoffed. He was struggling to keep his voice down, the volume naturally rising as a result of the stress. “Walking through Derry alone? At night? Are you fucking insane?”

“It’s never bothered you before,” Richie said, completely taken aback. In his mind, it was a regular night. It wasn’t so much that he wasn’t taking the whole Bowers situation seriously, more so that he very much doubted any of that gang would be roaming around so late at night. It wasn’t something he had put much consideration into when he had slipped out of his house twenty minutes ago, and there hadn’t been a single moment on his journey that felt off. If someone was watching him, Richie would have known. “Don’t worry. Nobody’s out there, it’s safe, I’m safe.”

“You don’t know that,” Eddie exclaimed, “You can’t take risks like that anymore, Rich! What if he’s driving around, waiting? How do you know he isn’t?”

“You’re being overdramatic,” Richie insisted, reaching out to take Eddie’s hands. Eddie snatched them away and stood, crossing his arms over his chest. “Come on, Eds. I’m here now. I’m alive, for fucks sake.”

“That could be dumb luck, Rich,” Eddie said, “How can I let you go back out there on your own now? You’re gonna have to stay the night, and- Oh fuck, and my Mom might find you, and then we’ll have to lie and she’ll-”

“Calm it!” Richie stepped forward, grabbing Eddie firmly by his shoulders, this time, pulling him into a hug. Eddie was acting as if he didn’t want the physical affection, as if he was too angry for that, but Richie knew better. Eddie always wanted the physical affection, even in his emotional state, the touch was never unable to comfort him. He found himself failing to resist, melting into Richie’s strong grasp instead. “I’m fine. You’re fine. We’re all gonna stay that way, all summer. I promise you. And if Mrs. K finds me tonight we tell her I had a fight with my Dad and came round in the night, she isn’t gonna suspect anything.”

“Right,” Eddie mumbled, hoping to God that Richie Tozier was right about something. He was right a lot more than he got credit for, in all fairness, but Eddie was so used to dismissing the things he said as a joke it was hard to take him seriously even in the darkest of situations. “Can we just- I just, I don’t wanna think about it.”

“Pretty fuckin’ hard not to,” Richie sighed. It was bothering him as much as the next loser, but he was much more concerned with how the losers were going to protect each other than whatever it was Bowers had in store.

“I’m scared, Rich,” Eddie confessed, unwinding himself for Richie and sitting down on his bed. Richie sat beside him, silently waiting for Eddie to continue. “There’s nothing any of us can do, is there? We gotta wait it out, and wait for what? ‘Bowers to snatch one of us up? It’s bullshit, absolute bullshit.’”

“He isn’t gonna snatch any of us up,” Richie said, with a tone much too certain. Eddie didn’t believe him for a second. As far as he was concerned, the losers were about to start dropping like flies. And with his theory, that concept was fucking mortifying. His fear was not misplaced. “Trust
me on this. Nobody’s going missing. Nobody’s getting killed. We made it this far, sticking
together, and that’s how we’re gonna get out - alive.”

“But what happens if we don’t all get out alive?” It was worst case scenario, and Richie could
barely even process everything that idea meant. He didn’t want to contemplate it, that made it too
real. Eddie had already given it an excessive amount of thought.

“But we will,” Richie insisted, “Fuck, Eds. You really think Bowers is out to kill us?”

“I think he always has been,” Eddie confessed, embarrassed by his own revelation. He knew that
Richie was going to consider it stupid, and the admission of his belief was either going to scare him
or amuse him. Eddie didn’t know which reaction he would rather. “And I don’t think we’ll be the
first. Or the last. Bowers has always wanted us dead. Now we’re gonna leave, he probably wants
that more than ever.”

As much as Richie despised it, he couldn’t help but wonder if Eddie was actually right. There was
logic to what he was saying, there was basis, too much for Richie to just straight up shut him down
-as much as he wanted to.

For once in his life, Richie was speechless. Eddie took that as an opportunity to continue, “I don’t
know why nobody else can see it. Bowers has done enough to prove he’s capable of murder -
we’ve watched him kill more than once.”

That, sadly, was true. No humans though, but murder was murder. The first time it happened, they
watched as Henry drove over Mike’s dog, Mr Chips, and then reversed back over him until the
animal stopped whimpering and stilled, fur matted with his own dried up blood. Mike had been
distraught. He still was.

The second time, Bowers had stabbed a rat in front of them, then proceeded to throw the dead
rodent at Eddie - who vomited after the thing hit him hard in the stomach. The memory still
managed to make him feel queasy. Oh, how the Bowers Gang had laughed.

The third and final time was much more recent, Eddie recalled it to be less than three months since.
It had been an attack not on the losers, but aimed entirely at Stanley. They didn’t get him alone
though, and when it had taken place Eddie and Beverly had been there to witness it; they were only
slightly less traumatised than Stan. A few weeks prior, Bowers had found Stan’s bird book when it
fell from his pocket. He had spat on the page before throwing it back at Stan, but Eddie had no
doubt that was what inspired such a gruesome attack. They had known of his love of birds and
nature long before that, it was one of the things they used to love teasing him about, less so as they
all grew up, but still every now and then a comment or an old nickname would come up.

It had been late one evening, and the three losers had been cornered by Bowers and Patrick before
the two other bullies showed up bearing a small wire cage. In that cage, had been two birds. How
people with brains like Belch and Victor had managed to capture two intelligent birds (Eddie could
not have recalled the breed to save his life), was beyond any of the losers, but that was what they
had done. Only to then kill them. They did it in the most brutal of ways, and made sure Stan saw
everything by forcing him to his knees and having Belch attempt to hold his eyes open.

“We’re going to put on a little show for you,” Patrick had hissed, “Sit back and relax Bird Boy.
You’re gonna love it.” The first bird, Patrick had set on fire, laughing as it desperately tried to fly
with scorching wings. The second bird somehow had a more painful end. Henry sliced it wings off
first, then simply held it in his fists and squeezed until the bones were crunching and the blood was
spilling through the cracks in his fingers. Stanley had been shaking and screaming the entire time,
desperately trying to free himself from Belch’s grasp. Victor was quick to shut that action down,
swiftly kicking Stanley in the chest. And that had been bird one.

Eddie Kaspbrak fully believed that Henry could, and would, kill a human with the same apathy.

“Not only that,” Eddie continued, “But if it wasn’t that serious, there’s no way Victor would bother warning us. For him to have a reaction like that, it must be that bad. There’s no other explanation, surely you know that deep down?” And he did, because Richie Tozier was an intelligent person, intelligent enough to understand that if Victor Criss - someone who had violated their safety for as long as Richie could remember - was now concerned for their safety, there was something to worry about.

Something more horrific than any of the losers imaginations could conjure.

“"He can’t hurt us here,"” Ben insisted, for the forth time since his arrival. They were all gathered at Bill’s, which had always been their indoors base, open to any of Bill’s friends at any time. The Denbrough’s didn’t care - they didn’t care about much at all anymore, Bill claimed ignorance to this.

“But we can’t s-stay here forever,” Bill countered, which was a fair point. Bill reckoned that even if he did remain housebound for the rest of his summer, Bowers would eventually find a way to get to him. He was no stranger to breaking and entering.

“We’ll figure something out.” Mike’s voice was calm and comforting, authoritative as if he truly believed himself to be right. Bill’s own voice had once had the same powerful ring to it, the tone of a leader. Bill sounded weak and defeated in comparison. “I swear it, guys. Hell, I’ll handcuff myself to each and every one of you if that’s what it comes to.”

“That sounds hot,” Richie said, fronting. He had to be the comic relief, now more than ever. After the conversation with Eddie the night before, Richie felt truly shaken, to a degree that he feared would be obvious. They weren’t used to seeing him emotional very often, not like that, and he didn’t want that to start now. Nor did he want them to. Cracking jokes and spitting stupid one-liners gave everyone a sense of normality, something Richie knew they all needed. “I didn’t think you were into the kinky shit-“

“You think handcuffs are kinky?” Bev asked, one eyebrow raised. Ben’s jaw fell open, and he was honestly surprised that no sound managed to come out. Richie made a few, as did the other losers - something between laughter and grumbles of disgust.

“You say it like you and Haystack don’t have the whitest, dullest sex-“

“Beep beep Richie!” Ben cut in, covering his face with his hands, though this action did little to hide the blush that was covering his face completely. It didn’t help that Bev was laughing along with them all.

“Our sex is far from vanilla-“

“Bev I swear to God I will Beep you too,” Ben snapped, but there was no real bite. He was holding back a smile, and it had them all laughing - even Stanley and Bill, who had been nothing but morbid and down since the losers had gathered at Bill’s only half an hour ago.

“I’m kidding,” Bev chuckled, “I regret bringing sex up. You virgins get too overexcited.”

“Richie brought sex up,” Eddie pointed out, “Richie always brings sex up. You just insisted on
telling us all that you and Ben are into fucking strange-“

“We are not,” Ben insisted, hoping and praying his friends believed him. The thought of anything like that - like any of the strange sex things Richie spoke of - made him slightly uncomfortable. His friends didn’t need to know that though, and he was pretty sure Bev already knew that. He wondered why she had made the joke in the first place, if for any reason other than to lighten the mood. The last thing Ben wanted was to have his friends asking about his sex life, mostly because it was exactly how Richie had assumed it to be: Vanilla. Vanilla and rare.

Still, as far as he was aware it was more than any of the other losers were getting.

“Sorry Ben,” Bev pressed a small kiss to his cheek. Richie pretended to gag, but the others simply laughed along. There was an air of normality in the room as the conversation continued along a similar line. Mostly just talking about Bev and Ben and sex and other stupid weird shit that Richie would call to topic. Nothing that mattered. But in the safety of Bill Denbrough’s basement, nothing else ever did matter. That was the beauty of it.

But in that moment, Bill couldn’t really see the beauty. None at all.

Naturally, it was Stan that noticed this first. Bill’s bad mood was obvious to them all given his lack of enthusiasm and interest in everything the losers spoke about. Most of them chose to ignore it, writing it down to the obvious but unwilling to bring it up in fear of triggering a worse reaction. They left him to wallow in self pity all he wanted.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want to partake in the conversation or join in the fun, he simply couldn’t. Bill was too wrapped up in all the bad to think about anything good, the guilt and regret from the previous day suffocating him completely. And it made it almost frustrating to sit and watch his friends act like none of that had happened, because it was making him ill.

He had spent the entirety of the previous night sobbing over the day. None of it felt real, not being with Stan, not hanging out on the fields, not slashing Vic. It was like some warped dream that he couldn’t wake up from. There was no way out, no changing any of it, and that realisation pushed him to throw his guts up that morning - only minutes before his friends had arrived.

Bill didn’t want to tell any of them that.

“Bill?” It was Stan’s voice that drew the boy out of his thoughts, snapping him back into the room. He didn’t know how long he had been staring at the wall, zoned out.

“Huh?” He looked back at his friends, forcing a smile.

“You good?” Mike asked, knowing full well that Bill was far from good. That fact had been obvious ever since the incident. Why they were all ignoring this, Bill did not know.

“Yeah, fine,” Bill lied, “I, uh zuh-zoned out. What were you s-saying?”

“I was just telling Mike he should ask Nancy out before we leave for college,” Bev explained. Nancy was a girl in their grade, Bill couldn’t quite remember all that much about her, he just knew Mike had a thing for her and that she was stupidly pretty.

“Right y-yeah, do it,” Bill said, “Nancy’s hot.” Stanley really tried not to cringe.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea,” Mike shrugged. Bill feigned interest, nodding along as Mike explained reason after reason. The other losers seemed to care, offering alternative ways to look at things and words of understanding. Bill wished he could find a fuck to give, he truly did, because
“Just fuck her before you leave,” Richie suggested, “Man, I better get laid before we go - again, I mean. Gotta get more action in before I bounce, you know?” Eyes around the room rolled - Eddie's into the back of his fucking skull.

“I’m not just fucking her,” Mike scoffed, disgusted by the suggestion.

“I would,” Richie said. Eddie ignored the twinge in his gut. “Her friends too. All at the same time. Fuck yeah - imagine that!”

“No thank you,” Stanley mumbled. “Who even are her friends? Does she have any?”

“She was friends with Greta,” Ben informed them, which was a warning above anything. Greta was known for being a bitch, and contributed generously to their traumatic middle school experience. Since high school, she had calmed slightly, but mostly just because she had a crush on Eddie. And Bill, but then, who didn’t?

“Oh,” Mike failed to hide any disappointment in his voice.

Bill kind of wanted to point out that dating wasn’t possible anyway this summer. Dating meant time alone. Dating meant endangering someone else, giving Bowers someone else to torture - if only for a few weeks. He said none of this though, instead wondering if anybody else was going to. He hoped that they’d all considered that much anyway, and were simply going along with the conversation for the sake of distraction.

“I’d fuck Greta,” Richie announced, smirking to himself.

“Rich—” Eddie cared because she was a bitch, but mostly because that was his boyfriend, and though he didn’t want anybody else to know that, he also didn’t want anybody thinking that Richie was out looking to get laid. It wasn’t that he was possessive, or jealous. Except he was, to a painful degree, because Eddie was insecure and afraid that maybe Richie really did want to fuck other people. Especially since Eddie was refusing to sleep with him. Still, he tried to keep all of that bottled up, and Richie constantly bringing sex up did not help that matter.

“Just put a fucking bag over her head and you’re fine,” He continued, laughing at his own moderately sick joke. Stan snorted, which caught the attention of them all. He had a dark sense of humour, but nobody had really expected that to get him. Especially not Richie. “Wanna get in on that one Stan the Man? You can take the back door!”

“You’re vile,” Stan spat, but he was laughing. “But no way. Greta needs more than just a bag over her head to be even remotely fuckable.”

“You boys fucking disgust me,” Bev huffed, rolling her eyes at them. She considered having an in depth rant about misogyny, again, but knew the words would be wasted. “Can we not talk about who you want to stick your cock in for once, Richie, is that too much to ask?”

“But we’re not talking about who I want to stick my cock in,” He protested, “We’re talking about who Stanny wants to stick his cock in, right man? Come on, chime off a few names.” That got Bill’s attention.

“Oh fuck off,” Stan mumbled, shooting a look to Bill, who forced a smile. It wasn’t like he cared, he told himself. They weren’t… anything. They certainly weren’t a couple, which was where they differed from Eddie and Richie, who had long since faced up to their feelings. Stan and Bill were all lust and sexual exploration, it was easy for Bill to tell himself that was all they were and would
ever be. Stan was okay with pretending like he wasn’t dying for more. “There isn’t a single name I can tell you.”

“Bullshittery, Stan,” Richie said, “No hot Jewish babes? Or hot Jewish boys? Hah, wait, is sausage even kosher-“ Richie was howling at his own joke. Stan threw a pillow at him, scowling. He ignored the muffled chuckles of his other friends, appreciating that they had the decency to try and disguise and mute their laughter. Bill wasn’t laughing at all, instead cringing at private memories as the question rang in his ear.

“Beep beep Richie,” Stan snapped. Richie realised that he’d hit a nerve, and part of him wanted to pursue it. But that went against the nature of Beeping, and he had to obey The Beep.

“I’ll take that as a no to the Jewish babes,” Richie muttered, “Fuckin’ shame.”

“Stan’s the only Jewish babe in this town,” Bev chimed, smiling at him. Stan laughed at that. Bill laughed louder, which caught the attention of Beverly if nobody else.

“Got that fucking right,” Stan said, matter-of-factly.

“You’re forgetting his Mom,” Richie joked, smirking. He threw the pillow back at Stan, playfully, who threatened to return it again before settling it behind his head. “Anyway, what about you, Big Bill?”

He had zoned out, again, kind of. Bill snapped back to look at Richie, frowning. “Huh?”

“He’s asking if you’re into anyone,” Mike provided.

“Oh-“ Before Bill could even get his solid ‘no’ out, Richie was continuing.

“Anybody gonna be seeing Little Bill this summer?” He asked, smirking, “Or are you going to leave Derry a virgin too? Y’know, like Stan.”

Richie didn’t know. There was no way that Richie could have known, but there was something about the way he said it that struck a chord with Bill, enough to make him believe otherwise. Enough to make him believe that Richie was messing with him, playing on the fact neither of them were actually virgins, and doing so subtly enough for nobody else but him and Stanley to notice.

That, paired with everything else that took place yesterday, was enough to send Bill over the edge. He said nothing, instead rising and shooting out of the basement with an inexplicable haste.

“Bill?”

“Are you alright?”

“Bill!”

A collection of voices called out. He didn’t turn back though, and a few losers rose to their feet, ready to go after him.

“What the fuck is his deal?” Richie scoffed, evidently oblivious. Stan had caught on to the comment, but it didn’t really strike him as anything completely unusual. He knew that Richie had no idea, because if Richie knew the truth they all would. He could never let them live that down.

“Let me go talk-“

“I’ll go,” Stan said, and rushed out before anybody else could stop him. He did expect someone
else to come running out with him, so it was a relief when the other losers all sat back down, happy
to let Stan deal with Bill’s break down. He was the best man for the job, but mostly for reasons the
others were not aware of.

Stanley found Bill sobbing in the bathroom, hunched over the toilet with tears running down to his
shirt. The sight was crushing, and he collapsed beside his friend, silently placing a hand on the
small of his back. If he knew what to say, he would’ve said something. Thankfully, it was Bill that
spoke up first, “It’s tuh-too much.”

“What is?” Stanley asked, because he knew there were a whole multitude of things in their lives
that were ‘too much’ at the minute. “Is this about what Richie said?”

“No,” Bill said, because it really wasn’t. That had just been the straw that broke the camel’s back,
to put it simply. “This is everything. I fuh-fucking s-stabbed Vic ah-and you’re all acting s-so nuh-
nuh-normal! Sitting around ah-and laughing and juh-joking, like yesterday wah-wasn’t fucking
hell.”

“Bill…” Stanley let his voice trail off. He needed to find a nice way to put what he wanted to say,
he didn’t want to make Bill feel any worse, but equally Bill needed to hear the truth. And it was
going to be hard to swallow. “It was awful, yesterday. Nobody’s happy, or okay with it. We’re all
afraid, you know I fucking am. But Bowers isn’t here right now. We’re safe. We’re together. And
we’re trying to have a good time. You can’t be mad at them for wanting to pretend everything is
okay. Fuck, Bill, we’ve been doing it for long enough.”

“I can’t anymore,” Bill cried, “I can’t!” It was true, he was finally drained, and finally caved in
from the fear. What had happened the previous day was too much for him, the guilt, the panic and
the anxiety were overwhelming. More so than ever before.

You see, Bill had always got it a little easier. Since Georgie’s disappearance, people at school had
treated him with softness, as if he was fragile and breakable. For a little while, even Bowers had
been easy on him. And since, always a little more so than the other losers. It wasn’t that he hated
Bill any less, on the contrary, he just had more making Bill watch his friends hurt. Bowers liked to
show the losers that Big Bill Denbrough wasn’t the hero they believed him to be. Bill couldn’t save
them.

And for the first time in his life, Bill had realised that fact. He couldn’t even safe himself, which
was maybe the source of his absolute despair.

“We don’t have a choice,” Stan said, because he knew that there was no way to sugar coat
anything anymore. Bill didn’t need sugarcoating, he needed to face the brutality. Stan knew better
than anyone. He also knew that Bill never dealt with truth well. “Bill, believe me when I say I
understand what’s going on in your head, I get it. I know. But this is our reality, we have to find a
way to cope, just until summer ends. Then we’re free, okay? We’ll never have to step foot in this
hell ever again, Bill. It isn’t that long.”

“How am I guh-gonna be able t-t-to l-leave the house?” Bill asked, as if his friend held any
answers at all. Stanley was just as clueless, just as hopeless.

“You don’t have to.”

“I do,” Bill sighed. Stan disagreed, and planned on leaving his own home as little as possible, but
he knew that Bill wouldn’t enjoy that. Bill was an extrovert, and Bill had an image to uphold. He
would be judged much more harshly if he failed to show his face than Stan ever would - it was
expected of him. “I can’t be wuh-weak.”
“What?” Stan quipped, “Like me?” He knew what they all thought of him, knew they doubted his strength, considered him a coward. It was an incorrect and unfair judgement, but Stanley understood where it came from, and he would rather them think that than have unrealistic expectations of his capabilities. Weak wasn’t the right word though, ‘weak’ invalidated all the bullshit he had survived.

“No,” Bill mumbled, as if that hadn’t been his exact thought. Stan didn’t believe him, but he let it slide. “I-I-I don’t think you’re e-even a little bit weak. I th-think you’re one of the strongest people I’ve ever met.”

Coming from Bill, it meant more than Stanley knew how to express. He stayed silent, but moved to slot his arms around Bill from behind, pressing his head into the crook of his neck. The small kiss he pressed there expressed his gratitude enough.

“What bullshit,” Stan chuckled. Bill laughed too, but shook his head, insistent. He meant what he said, he meant most things he said. Once the small giggles died, there was a heavy silence. Stan stayed put holding his friend.

“What do you th-think Richie knows?” Bill questioned, voice small.

“Nobody knows,” Stan said, but there was no way for him to be certain of that. “There’s no way-”

“Nobody knows what, Stanley?” The voice made Bill practically jump out of his own skin. Stan jumped back, instinctively.

“Didn’t realise I needed to,” Bev said, folding her arms across her chest. She hadn’t seen it all, but she had seen enough. The tense air told the story anyway, the way Stan had shot backwards as if he had been caught doing something he shouldn’t. Of course, Beverly had long ago been given reason to question their relationship, this was no great shock. “Everything okay in here?”

“Fine,” Stan lied, only thankful that she hadn’t continued to question what it was that ‘nobody knew’.

“You sure?” She asked, motioning to Bill, who was wiping tears from his face with his sleeve. Stan sighed as Bev sat herself down on the floor with them both. “Doesn’t look all that fine to me.”

“It is,” Bill mumbled, flashing a look to Stan. It wasn’t fine, less so now that Beverly had seen Stan all cuddled up to him. She was eyeing him suspiciously, unashamed of the fact she didn’t believe his lies. “I-I-I juh-just got overwhelmed.”

“Richie thinks it was his fault,” Bev said, “I wouldn’t let him come up.” Both boys were thankful. Better Bev catch them being intimate than anyone else.

“It wasn’t,” Bill said, “I just cuh-cuh-cuh- couldn’t huh-hold it together. I’m sorry.”

“You don’t be sorry.” Beverly reached out, placing a gentle hand on his knee. “We all break sometimes.” She recalled her own last melt down, only two days prior. She knew of Ben’s, the small cry he’d had at the bottom of her apartment steps. And every other time she had watched her friends cave in on themselves.

She had seen Bill do this several times. He generally liked to be alone, ever the fan of self-pity, but her nor Stanley were going to allow that this time. This time was different, he was opening up. Bill didn’t usually do that so well. He had failed when he had broken up with her. He had failed when
Bowers got him alone that fateful day. He had failed, consciously, when Georgie disappeared. When Bill did open up, it was usually in the middle of one of his empowering speeches, not in the middle of a cry on his bathroom floor. He opened up to help his friends, not offload his issues onto them. That wasn’t something a leader did in his mind.

“I-I-I’m not broken,” Bill said, though he wasn’t sure how much he believed it. He wanted to, if that counted for anything. He didn’t want to give up, for his friends above anything else. “I’m juh-just fuckin’…”

He didn’t continue, interrupted by the sound of footsteps running through the house. Bev and Stan also turned to face the door, where their four other loves stood.

“I’m scared,” Bill confessed. The tears fell harder then, but he wasn’t the only one sobbing. The others filled into the room, all sitting themselves on the floor, forced into each others spaces.

Stan let his head slip back onto Bill’s shoulder, and he pressed it down there as silent tears fell through his closed eyes. Beverly threw her legs across Ben and cried onto Bill’s other shoulder, loud and heavy. Ben was choked up, the tears falling slow. Mike, surprisingly, was loud and liberal with his tears, letting out his grief unashamedly. Eddie was weeping, head buried in his hands as if he didn’t want his friends to see. He was pressed up in the corner, as if he was truly attempting to hide himself.

And then there was Richie, who had been the first to well up when they got into the bathroom. Seeing Bill like that had been too much, he wasn’t usually a crier. But now, now they all were. And there was a safety to it. Richie didn’t feel so bad about dropping the clown act, instead fucking wailing with his friends.

Somehow, crying felt much more therapeutic than laughing.
Prank Calls & Gun Falls

For an entire week, the losers did not hear from Henry Bowers or his gang once. Nor did anyone else in Derry. It was as if they had fallen off the face of the earth, and there was something almost peaceful about Derry, for once. That didn’t last, it could never last.

Henry hadn’t gone anywhere. They all knew that he would never leave Derry, because his criminal and twisted antics would never have been passable anywhere else on Earth. He got away with everything he did somehow, a privilege he would only have so long as his father was running that town, and Butch intended to do so until the day he died. A day many citizens in Derry prayed would come sooner.

Butch was not just a Sheriff. He was a business investor, he was a property owner, a landlord. A man with more power than he knew what to do with. And he did not fear anyone or anything. Not as far as anybody else was aware, at least, and that was the way Butch intended it to stay.

God forbid anyone ever find out that his only fear was his own son. That was the brutal truth, a man with more money and more power than anyone in the history of Derry had ever possessed was afraid of his own offspring: a skinny, stupid, twenty one year old with a future less promising than that of a homeless, deranged drug addict.

Butch wasn’t stupid. He knew his son belonged holed up in a mental institute somewhere far, far away. He knew that Henry would not last two minutes outside of Derry. And he knew that Henry would one day rot for everything he had done. But that was one thing Butch could not control, no matter how much power he had over Derry, Henry would always have more over him.

It was his own fault, and not a fault anybody would take lightly. Henry had never let him live it down, never would, he knew. Henry loved having that control, he loved most kinds of control, a trait he most definitely inherited from his dad. Henry had so much of it because Butch Bowers was a killer.

*Like father, like son.*

Butch never needed to question where Henry got his sick, psychotic tendencies from. He didn’t question much at all, anymore. Whenever his son returned home covered in blood and another innocent person got reported missing, Butch would know the whole story without asking a single thing.

The first time, he had helped Henry clean it up. The second time, and the many, many that followed, Henry didn’t need help with cleaning, just covering up. Butch always did it every time, no questions asked, and he was no stranger to seeking out his son’s service whenever he wound up in a situation too messy for his own good - the town were devastated when the deputy’s own son went missing. Henry had a lot of fun with that one.

But Butch had no choice but to help his own son, because the alternative was death row, and he felt himself much too good for a place like that, despite the immense list of crimes he had committed over the years. He knew Henry’s list was longer, but that was probably his own fault.

Nature was a pig to Henry, but nurture was so much worse.

One of his first memories was that of his father beating his mother to death. He grew up listening to her screams, and watched them get silenced that night, even felt the blood spatter across his face.
He was ten years old. And he **laughed** - laughed as his father sobbed. Swore himself to silence. Helped destroy the body.

And then, when Henry took his own knife to a human five years later, Butch tried to scold him, tried to push his child to a different path. He was never going to be in the running for father of year, but he did love his son, and it did infuriate him that Henry had done something so careless - mostly in fear of what that would do to his own reputation. Of course, nobody ever found out. Butch made sure of it. And he did so every time, under the threat of Henry exposing what the famous Oscar Bowers had done to his own wife. Everyone thought that she had run away in the midst of the night, backed up by the fact five hundred dollars and all her jewellery went missing with her body. And the fact that had been her original intention.

The Bowers family didn’t like letting people leave. They didn’t like leaving at all, and the assumption that Henry wasn’t around that week was very incorrect. He was around, watching and waiting in the shadows, something he had been doing far too long.

Henry had spent the week, along with his friends, in the Neibolt House. It was one of the many properties in Derry that his father owned, only this one had never been renovated, and its state of disrepair meant that anyone with common sense stayed away. Once upon a time, the deputy had suggested to Butch that they search it in connection to one of the missing kids, but Butch had refused, stating it was his own private property and he was certain there was no need. He then conducted his own search, and beat the shit out of his son for leaving it in such a careless state. Every room bared enough evidence for his son to get shot on sight, which would’ve done the world a great favour, but Butch wasn’t having that. He made them clean it up, a little, though there was only so much control he had over what Henry did and didn’t do. He couldn’t make him listen, and he didn’t really need to, because the fight for a warrant to the Neibolt House was quickly dropped.

The house exuded bad energy, and that was how Henry wanted it. People that went into the Neibolt House without his permission would never leave alive, but so far nobody that would be missed had ever stumbled in - a few homeless people over the years, one drug addict, and more than a fair few wild animals. Henry had ended every single one of them, and the basement was littered with remains.

The intense odour had made Victor throw up last time he went near the door. He and Belch played ignorance to what resided down there, and hoped they could continue to do so, knowing the truth was far too unbearable. They knew enough. Henry didn’t really enjoy it down there, seeing it as more of convenient storage space than anything else. Patrick, on the other hand, adored it. Vic swore he got off in there, always offering to clean up for Henry - a task which included cutting up the remains and throwing them into the well. Patrick, like most things he attempted, did not do this very well. He often left body parts, and always insisted on keeping at least one trophy - something that Henry always enjoyed doing too. The risk was thrilling to them, and the house was decorated with belongings from their range of victims. Usually, Vic and Belch did not recognise the random new items that would turn up in one of the rooms. Or sometimes they did, and they’d pretend like they’d never seen it before in their life, like they didn't recall the face of the child they had seen wearing or holding said item only days before. Like they hadn't taken the child to Henry themselves.

One week in that house, to Vic and Belch, was long enough. The upstairs was just as hellish as the basement, riddled and littered with reminders of violence and death. There were blood stains in each room, dirty weapons abandoned, cigarette butts and broken lighters, collapsed floorboards and punched through walls. Vic didn’t spend much time up there, finding it a bit of a blow to his guilty conscience. The ground floor, surprisingly enough, appeared and felt almost normal. It was sparsely decorated, but it was somewhat clean and the smell was partially masked by air freshener
and cigarette smoke. The electricity worked, as did the plumbing (though they found themselves pissing into bottles regardless) and the couches weren’t completely moth bitten or uncomfortable. It was tolerable, Vic supposed, it had to be. Henry was planning, and he had to be at Neibolt when he was planning. It was his thinking place, because he naturally required an environment just as fucked up as his mind.

Weeks like this happened a lot, and they found that Henry didn’t force them to stay with him for conversation and bonding, he needed the company, needed their brain power and their physical help. Belch would cook for him and Patrick would sit and brainstorm while Vic wiped down his knife collection. Their was something calming about it too though, and Vic felt safe in the confines of their own little murder house. He felt sane too, at the side of two men much more unhinged than he, and in a place so warped by insanity and psychotic behaviours. Being there made it feel like their normal. Henry even had an office! That seemed fucking hilarious, because it added some air of professionalism to what people knew, deep down, was serial killing. Vic thought it was comical, anyway, but his humour was too fucked to be rational.

They were sat in that office right then, as they had been for seven hours straight. Henry was insisting they stay until everything was finished, though he had disappeared home to see his father and sleep in a bed that didn’t stink of piss and decay.

“I think we jammed the printer,” Belch said, prodding the machine unhelpfully. Vic just sighed. It was an old Epson that Belch had robbed from his mother’s office block about two years ago, and it was forever freezing up and jamming. Belch got frustrated every single time, and usually wound up kicking at the desk which the machine sat upon.

“You jammed the fuckin’ printer,” Vic corrected him, “Printing your two hundred posters—”

“We need ‘em!” Belch growled. Vic snorted, shaking his head. He liked this part of the plan, usually, it was the part he was good at - luring them in, psychologically breaking them down. This was a big part of it, but they were going harder than usual, and something about this didn’t sit well with Vic. There was too much. Too much that pointed straight to them - and that was the issue.

“You did too many,” Vic said, “Now the printers fucked, and Henry’s gonna go ape and start fuckin’ shootin’ shit again.”

“I did like twenty,” Belch argued, “Two of each! And then the ones of the kid and—”

“Don’t act like you don’t know his name,” Vic cut in, glaring. Belch sighed. He wished he didn’t know, wished he could block it out. “You’re gonna have to fuckin’ use it soon.”

“Denbrough’s gonna go insane,” Belch said, and then laughed. Vic found himself smiling too, inexplicably amused by the idea of Bill breaking down. He looked at his leg, where a scab now sat, and the burning hatred for all the losers returned. They had to get him back for that. Mike too, for humiliating him.

“That’s the fuckin’ point,” Vic mumbled, though he knew that was far from the truth. The real point was much more warped. Belch didn’t quite catch the comment, instead fiddling with the buttons on the side of the machine. Louder, Vic continued, “You need to hurry the fuck up. We’re doing a round tonight. Gets dark in an hour and we need to get the shit ready.”

“Right.” Belch didn’t sound so enthusiastic that time. “We hurting ‘em tonight?”

“Doubt it,” Vic said, though he wasn’t hopeful. It really depended on circumstance, much like the entirety of Henry’s plan. The Gang could only pray that circumstance played in their favour.
“They’ll be home, probably.”

“You think we’ll catch one alone?”

“Hope not.” Victor wouldn’t have confessed as much to anyone else, but there was a safety with Belch, who was just as afraid of their situation as Vic was - if not more so. But Belch didn’t have the brain that Vic did, Belch found it easier to pretend that the things he had seen, the things he knew to be true, were nothingness and nonsense.

He found it easy to pretend that one of his best friends wasn’t a cold blooded child killer. Despite seeing it with his own eyes.

“We won’t get caught,” Belch said, though he didn’t sound so sure. They never were anymore. At one time, it had all been seamless, but ever since people had gained an interest in the Neibolt House, any security Vic felt disappeared. He felt far, far from safe in their arrangement. Belch had never felt safe, but knew he was safer on Henry’s side than any other. It was why he played by the rules - the sake of ease. And maybe, partially, to satisfy his own sick and violent delusions.

“No yet,” Vic agreed. There were too many holes, he knew, holes that could be filled in with ease by the end of their summer. Henry thought it was worth it, but then he didn’t have to worry like the rest of them. If it really came down it, Vic and Belch didn't doubt that Henry would pass the blame to Patrick, or themselves. “Give it a month.”

“We still shootin’ off if they come for us?” Belch whispered, knowing his words were forbidden. Vic nodded, quick and certain.

“When they come for us, Belch,” He said, because he knew, better than anybody, that it was only a matter of time. Vic had betrayed Henry on a level he could not come back from. If - when - Henry found out about that, life for him would be over. Bolting with Belch was their last resort. Vic knew it was going to be the one he went through with.

-

Beverly was alone, kind of. She had to be, but that didn’t make it easier. The losers were coming for her soon, she knew, but she prayed that would be before her Father returned from wherever he had ventured. If he saw them, Bowers would be the least of her worries.

He was not violent in the way Bowers was, did not aim to draw blood for his own pleasure. Alvin Marsh took out his frustration on her, frustration Beverly did not want to understand the roots off. His violence was different, but equally as sickening. Unlike Bowers, the scars from her Father were not physical.

Her Bowers scar sat on her waist, and she dreaded the day her Father would discover it. He had seen some of the damage left, noticed the change in her after that one fatal incident, but he never saw the carving in her waist, not yet. Hopefully, not ever, but life wasn’t that kind to her, and it was definitely a possibility she couldn’t rule out. Ben had seen it. He had cried.

Bev was all out of tears, but that didn’t mean she didn’t wince every time her eyes flashed over it.

-

Bev had been walking home, returning from Bill’s. She was upset, frustrated. Bill was being an asshole, again, and Stanley had been insufferably condescending all day. Richie had wound her up too, making one too many ‘accidentally’ sexist comments. She left early, mumbling some excuse about her Father coming home. When Ben offered to walk with her, she had declined, insisting that
she wanted to go alone.

Beverly was filled with regret about that only five minutes into the journey. Belch Huggins car pulled up at the side of her, and attempts to ignore this went wasted. Eventually, the four men climbed out of the car, surrounding her.

If she had been anywhere else, Bev would have been able to call for help - to run - but she was short cutting over the bridge, and it was dark and late. People were not around, and people were not going to save her. She had known that immediately, and fear flooded her.

Her first fear, and realisation, was that they were going to sexually assault her. The entire gang had expressed interest, and intention, of doing so on many occasions. She did not doubt that they were sick enough to take pleasure in that, and she began to scream at the idea. Beverly continued to scream when they held her against the brick wall, when they ripped open her dress, when Belch began to make vile and violent comments about her body. They didn’t touch her though, not like that.

Belch tried, and upon instinct she shoved him to the floor. In less than a second, found herself jumping with as much force as she could muster onto his crotch, which did intense damage to his testicle. Damage he was still bitter over despite deserving much, much worse. He cried, not that it gave her any satisfaction at all. The action only made them more violent, grabbing her hair and dragging her to the floor. Henry began to chop at it with his knife, slicing off the long curls here and there until it was, by most standards, ugly and entirely dishevelled.

She cried as she watched her hair fall to the floor. Cried more though, as she was hit soon after, hard in the face. They held her down with ease, and continued to snarl abuse, though she wasn’t paying attention to their words. Bowers knew that. Maybe that was why he decided to carve them into her, assuring she would never forget what Derry thought her to be. Or maybe it was just because he was just a sick fuck.

Regardless, that was how Beverly Marsh wound up with the word ‘SLUT’ carved into her waist. Her screams had been muffled by Patricks hand, and then they had left her there, rotting and bleeding until the rain began to fall. That was what had snapped her back into reality, though she did not know how much time had passed.

She practically crawled back to Bills, disgraced. The losers were completely unaware that this was the beginning of a series of attacks equally as vicious. They held her, sobbed with her, and helped her to clean up. Though Bill’s parents were out, Bill found Beverly a dress of his mothers to wear home that night, and somehow Sharon Denbrough had never even noticed it was gone. Stan had played with her hair, trimming it a little more to make the damage less noticeable, and styling it until it was somewhat neat. Eddie cleaned and dressed the wound, crying as he did so, tears of rage. Richie and Ben had paced around, enraged, while Mike had held her close before driving her home.

Beverly had many bad days, and always believed that would be up there with the worst. Now that Bowers was expressing interest in doing worse, she wasn’t so sure.

-

She stood in front of the bathroom mirror, painting her face with makeup that she wasn’t entirely sure how to use, but enjoyed all the same. The phone rang, which was rare. Nobody ever called the Marsh residence. Her Father had no friends, as far as she was aware, and distant relatives were limited. Any friends of Beverly’s knew better than to call the house phone. Warily, she abandoned the makeup and answered.
“Hello?” She said, then waited. There was no response. She could hear someone though, a heavy breath in her ear. “Hello?”

The breathing got louder, and for some reason, the sound was disturbing her deeply. It was chilling, the sound of fuzzy crackling from the line distorting the wheezes. And then, a laugh, before it finally spoke.

“Bevvy.”

Bev slammed the phone down without thinking, then backed away from it like it was about to hurt her. Before she could even compose herself, there was a loud thumping at the front door.

“Shit!” She screamed out, body shaking from the shock. She stared at the door warily, willing the person behind it to knock again. They did, of course, and there was nothing sinister about the sound.

“Bev?” The visitor called out, a voice she immediately pinned as Ben’s. She relaxed a little after that, flashing one more glare to the phone before going to answer, almost embarrassed about freaking out so much. Nobody had seen though, nobody knew. On edge was still a fitting statement though.

“Hi Ben.” She melted into his hold then, throwing her arms tightly around him. If Mike hadn’t been by his side, smiling awkwardly, she may have kissed him.

“Are you okay?” Ben asked her, as they pulled apart, “I heard you yell.”

“Fine,” She lied. Bev did think about telling the truth, she really did, but did not know what to say. It would make her sound stupid, she felt, if she were to admit that a stupid phone call worked her up - not that Mike and Ben would ever pass judgement. But there was more to it than that. It was the sound - the name - the motivation behind it that bothered her.

It went without saying that this was the work of Bowers, or maybe Patrick, Vic or Belch. It went without saying that they trying to shit her up, trying to put her on edge, probably because they knew Beverly did not fear them all that much. But the phone call, in it’s purest form, had not scared her. The voice did. It wasn’t clear enough for her to pinpoint which bully it belonged to, however that did not matter too much. The name did.

*Bevvy* sent chills down her spine. It was a nickname that many people had for her, her aunts, some soft teachers, the woman from the post office, and even her friends. They called her it in good heart, she knew, and for the most part, when it was used in normal passing conversation, she could just stand to hear it. Never, by any means, was it a nice name to hear, but it was always tolerable enough. And she didn’t want to tell the losers why she hated it so much. They knew a lot about her abusive Father, but some things she struggled to get out, and some things she felt they would not benefit from knowing. Having them call her Bevvy once in a blue moon was better, she felt, than having to explain to them all why she winced every time she heard the name. Bev doubted she could even make it through the story.

Hearing one of her bullies call her it, in such a sinister tone, had made Beverly Marsh want to vomit. It made her feel violated. And she couldn’t explain that to Ben and Mike, nor any of the losers.

“You sure?” Ben asked. Bev knew that if she wanted to speak up, that was her chance. She knew that she should have, that purely because this was Bowers trying to get under her skin, that she should tell them. They needed to keep tabs on every move he made, really. But she didn’t tell them.
She couldn’t.

“Certain,” Bev insisted, forcing a smile, then she turned to Mike, who was smiling fondly at them. “Hey you.”

“Hey you,” Mike returned, then opened his arms. She fell into his grasp too, finding a homelike warmth in his arms. Her relationship with Mike had always been strong, and she had a respect for him above some of the others, mostly for his unwavering strength.

“How’s the back?” She inquired, unwinding herself from him. Mike turned around and raised his shirt. The line was thin and scabbed, but it wasn’t going to scar, and it wasn’t infected. Those two things were a blessing. “You need to cut down with the war wounds, Hanlon.” She was joking, of course, and Mike chuckled at the light comment.

“I’ll stop with the wounds when Bowers stops with the war.”

Bowers had left them enough scars each, the last time he had gotten them alone. Beverly did not thinking scaring was his intention this time round.

The losers met out in the open, braving it once again. Stanley had hesitated when he left, but found himself unable to refuse Bill and Richie, who were at his door with hopeful eyes and pleasant smiles. Now, they were on the way to collect Eddie, after which Richie would drive them down to the quarry to meet Mike, Bev and Ben.

Bill was silent. Stan and Richie were engaged in some meaningless conversation about a subject beyond Bill. He wasn’t even tuned in, mind entirely focused on the small handgun tucked into his waistband.

Bold, he knew. Brave, he wasn’t so sure. Having it made him feel more in control though, and reassured his conscience that the losers would respect him as a leader if they were to find he possessed it. He was doing it for them, after all. If any trouble were to break out, he had no intention of using it, simply holding it up as a threat.

The idea had occurred to him a long time ago, when he took a self defence class that specifically discourage weaponry. That lecture had the opposite effect on him, but he never had the courage to steal the gun he knew his Father locked up in the safe. Now, after stabbing Vic, he figured extra precaution was absolutely necessary, and knew the Bowers Gang would probably be more wary now that he’d really reacted violently to them.

Still, he was worried. It made him feel on edge, and almost psychotic. Bill had told nobody of his idea, mostly because he knew it would make them doubt his sanity, and he had already spent enough time doubting that himself. He didn’t, couldn’t, plant that suspicion in anybody else’s mind. Plus, he knew the others probably wouldn’t approve. Violent behaviour wasn’t something many of the losers encouraged, unless absolutely necessary. They had always survived before without needing weapons. Bill didn’t even think that Henry had pulled a gun on them. He’d had guns with him, of course, but he never aimed them at the losers, mostly because Henry knew if he did that he wouldn’t be able to resist pulling the trigger.

Bill feared he’d have the same reaction.

When they pulled up at Eddie’s house, Bill snapped out of his thoughts. Richie jumped out of the vehicle first, followed by Bill and then Stan, who got to the door almost a full minute after Richie
had rang the bell. There had been no answer though, which immediately struck them all as peculiar. Eddie should have been expecting them, they had arranged all of this in advance.

Richie pressed the bell a second time, and waited. Still, no answer. Sonia’s car was in the driveway, which was the big indicator she was home. They all knew that Sonia would never have walked anywhere, so she definitely had not left. The third time Richie rang the bell, she opened the door no more than three inches.

“Eddie isn’t coming out tonight,” She said, voice monotonous, “Eddie may not be coming out the rest of this summer. Go on now boys, run along.”

“What the fuck?” Richie scoffed. Sonia began to press the door shut, but she was too slow, and Richie shoved his foot in the crack. She began to shut it anyway, which resulted in Bill and Stan also pushing up against the door, forcing it to remain open. She was a large woman, but her fat did not equate to strength, and somehow they managed to overpower her. “Mrs Kaspbrak, please-“

“Eddie isn’t coming out-“

“Eds!” It was Richie that started shouting, yelling out his boyfriends name like his life depended on it. “Eddie! We’re here!”

“No!” Naturally, Sonia was growing more and more enraged by the acts of rebellion. If it had been anyone else, maybe they would have felt a little more guilty about being so casually and openly disrespectful, but all of the losers knew how abusive Eddie’s mother had been, and felt nothing but hatred for her. “You boys get off of my property, right now-“

“Please, Mrs Kaspbrak,” Stanley begged, and that was what caught her attention. Of all Eddie’s friends, Stanley, naturally, was the one she approved of - him being neat and deemed sensible enough. Sonia Kaspbrak sighed, and gave up on attempting to shut the door in their faces to exchange conversation with Stan. “Could you just tell us why?”

Her face switched back, colder than before. Her gaze snapped from Stan back to Richie. “You know why. And I don’t want my son being around dirty boys like you.”

“Huh?” Bill and Stan were baffled, somehow clueless. Richie bit his lip, knowing all too well what she was referring to, but confused as to how Sonia would have stumbled upon information so well hidden from her. They were so careful, so fucking careful.

“He won’t be out this summer,” Sonia continued, “Not with you.” That time, she successfully slammed the door. Richie kicked it as soon as it shut, cussing loudly.

“What the fuck was that about?” Stan spat at Richie, automatically assuming, despite his better knowledge, that Richie was the one at fault. “What did you do?”


“Sh-she’s crazy,” Bill contributed, bewildered. “What now?”

“We get him out,” Richie said, as if it was obvious. Stan and Bill weren’t so sure, and this showed on their faces. “We have to, can’t leave Eds locked in that house with a fuckin’ witch, idiots. He’ll go insane!” The worry seeped into his voice in a way that would’ve revealed it all to anyone more observant.

“We can’t,” Stan scoffed, backing away from the door.
"We can," Richie said, "And we fuckin' will. I know a way." And he did, from experience above anything.

This, sadly, was not the first time Eddie Kaspbrak had been housebound. It had happened once before, a few summers ago after an incident with Bowers resulted in a broken arm for Eddie. Bowers and co. had fled the scene, and the losers had to return Eddie home, where they span a story to Mrs Kaspbrak about how he had fallen off of his bike. She didn’t believe them, and insisted that one of his disgusting friends had caused the injury. They did consider telling her the truth, but that would never have ended well. Firstly because Eddie forever said that if his mother knew of the things Henry Bowers did to him, he would never leave the house again, but mostly because Sonia Kaspbrak, being the sick fuck she was, actually liked Oscar Bowers. She respected him, forever going on about how charming and intelligent he was. It made Eddie feel sick every time his mother gushed about him in such a way. Bad always attracted bad though, he realised.

His father had been a good man, from what he remembered, and he often dreamed that if he were still alive, things would have been different - maybe he would have been happy. In his younger years, he imagined that Frank Kaspbrak would have been brave enough to stand up to Butch, to take control and put him in his place. He also wondered if his father would have been kinder upon finding what his mother had. He hoped his father would have been happy for him if he had been to stumble upon the love letters. He hoped his father would never have gone rooting through his things in the first place. Older now, he knew that was a pathetically childish fantasy, but it was a nice thought all the same.

And it was a fantasy he was having right then, locked in his room yet again. He knew that his friends were outside, could hear Richie’s obnoxiously loud yells from all the way upstairs, but did nothing. Eddie thought about yelling back, breaking down the door or smashing and jumping the window. Eddie wasn’t sure why he couldn’t bring himself to do that.

Safety, he supposed. There was no Bowers in the four walls of his bedroom. There was no risk of death. Plus, he was kind of busy.

For the past twenty four hours, Eddie had conspired, finally documenting all of his thoughts on Henry Bowers and his friends inhumane antics. The papers, newspaper clippings, photos and memoirs littered his bedroom floor - leaving it messier than it had ever been before. If his mother were to pay him a visit, Eddie knew he’d hear her coming and have enough time to pile it up before she saw enough to make sense of it. He knew, after yesterday, that his mother would become even more overbearing.

He had returned home from Bill’s to find her rooting through his letters, ones that he had written to Richie and never sent. He had never needed to, and therefore they lay untouched in his drawer until that day. Eddie had supposed he could gift them to Rich one day, but now that idea was tainted, as now he would only ever associate the letters with the trauma they had caused. Sonia had yelled at him, oh how she had yelled, before locking his window and the bedroom door. She had returned to his room hours after, acting almost normal, offering him food and a beverage and asking him if he would like to attend church with her that coming Sunday - an offer Eddie angrily refused.

She had returned only once since, to give him breakfast. He was happy about that, enjoying the time alone far more than he could ever enjoy the company of such a ghastly woman.

He thought that he heard his friends leave, yells calming and footsteps going down the creaky stairs that lead up to the porch. It was times like those Eddie wished his window faced the front of the house, but his bedroom was situated at the back, an issue for two reasons: one being that he
couldn’t see where his friends were, and the other being that he couldn’t wave at them or give them any indication he was safe. Not that he was entirely safe, but there were definitely just as many dangers for him being out in the open.

Eddie sighed, certain his friends would leave without him, and continued with his notes, which was why the knock on his window only two minutes later shocked him so much. He launched back, practically leaping the length of the room before looking up. He expected to see Richie stood there, face pressed against the window like he always did, so Eddie was baffled to see Bill stood there, face somehow joyous as he waved enthusiastically.

Bill was saying something, but the glass muffled the words and Eddie knew it would have the same effect if he spoke back. He was also aware that his mother might hear if he were to speak at a higher volume. Instead, Eddie decided to pick up one of the blank pieces of paper strewn across his floor, and scribbled the words “window locked” punctuated with a mass of exclamation marks and a sad face.

Upon seeing this message, Bill looked back down at the ground, as if he was preparing to climb back down. Eddie wouldn’t have blamed him. He didn’t though, instead he breathed up against the glass, something Eddie would have usually scowled at. The condensation meant Bill had a way to communicate without yelling, and scribbled across the quickly fading patch. Eddie made out the words with ease, Bill had written ‘pick lock?’.

Lucky for Bill, Eddie knew just how to do that. He was almost embarrassed that the idea hadn’t occurred to him before, as he recalled learning about it a couple of years previous, and had successfully attempted with the very same window a few times before. It was old, and Eddie assumed the lock would be weak. He scurried over to his desk to retrieve a paper clip, which he opened out into a straight line. Bill watched eagerly as Eddie stuck it into the lock and set to work with a process that was much more complex and time consuming than it was made to look. His tongue stuck out in concentration as he fiddled with it, jimmying it up and down and twisting in every direction possible before it finally clicked a solid two minutes later.

Eddie pushed the window up, leaning out and pulling Bill into a hug. “Come on in, one second!”

In his eagerness, Eddie pulled Bill inside. Bill stumbled, launching forward and landing face first. There was an unusually loud clatter as he hit the floor, and Eddie tensed as Bill groaned and mumbled an incoherent curse word.

“Be quiet,” Eddie mumbled, before asking, “You okay?”

“Hurts,” Bill gasped, holding his side. Eddie noticed a strange lump in his waistband, where Bill’s hand was tactfully clutching. He frowned. “I’m fine, fine, don’t worry.”

“Where are the others?” Eddie asked, not quite believing him but deciding not to inquire further.

“Stan is trying to sweet talk your mom,” Bill explained, “Richie is sat in the truck feeling suh-sorry for himself. What the fuck did he do? Why are you grounded?”

“Long story,” Eddie said, because that was easier than explaining even a fraction of the truth. Bill didn’t press for it. “My mom will freak the fuck out if she finds out you’re here-“

“She won’t,” Bill insisted, “Come on, pah-pack up, we gotta get goh-going quick or else Mike’s gonna-“ Bill stopped in his tracks, noticing for the first time since his entry the mass of paper around him. “What’s all this?”
Eddie flushed red. “Nothing-“

Bill was already picking it up, wincing as he reached for the article about Georgie’s disappearance. Eddie noticed first, that his hand was still clutching his hip, and second that he did not look happy about seeing the clipping - the second being understandable.

“Eddie?” Bill’s voice was barely there, “What the fuh-fuck is all of this?”

“I’ll explain later,” Eddie said, but Bill didn’t seem to acknowledge the comment. He threw the paper to the side and reached for another, wincing again as he picked up one of Eddie’s written pieces. Eddie knew it was his recollection of what Bowers did to Stanley last time he got him alone. He had written about all of those, knowing it might not be something the losers would be on board with. But he felt he needed to, and that outweighed anything else. “Bill-“

“Why?” Bill perplexed, “Wh-why are you duh-doing this? What’s it fuh-“

“What’s in your pants?” Eddie cut in, staring at the lump Bill had been shielding with his hands. The comment, if said in any other context, would’ve got any of the losers chuckling at him, but this wasn’t the time. Bill knew exactly what he was referring to, and his face dropped again. “You have something.”

Bill considered lying. But this was Eddie, and they didn’t do lying. “I’ll tell you, i-if you tell me.”

“It’s a murder board,” Eddie confessed, “Well, kind of. I’ve written every notable thing Bowers has done to us down. I’ve also written about all the missing kids, mostly talking about his links to them, recalling any interactions between them and Bowers. I uh…I guess it’s essentially a collection of evidence that proves he’s capable, and most likely responsible, for how fucked up Derry is.”

Bill was silent for a minute. “Bowers didn’t kill Georgie.”

“Right, of course,” Eddie mumbled, though he felt otherwise, he did not protest. “I also made it in case something happens to us. I wrote, somewhere, that if we all disappear, it’s Henry Bowers. And I wrote about what Vic said to Mike so-“

“That won’t hold uh-up in a court,” Bill said, but his voice was softer than before. “It’s a good idea though. Save it.” They both set to work collecting up the papers, shoving them into the folder Eddie was keeping it all in.

“What is it then?” Eddie asked, placing the folder into his backpack, “Your thing?”

Bill gulped, looking at Eddie with eyes that he could not decipher. “Promise me you won’t freak out?”

“Promise.”

When Bill pulled out the handgun ten seconds later, Eddie Kaspbrak broke that promise, screaming with everything his lungs could handle.

“Eddie, fuck-“ Bill threw the gun on the bed, holding his arms up. Eddie seemed to panic more then, and launched for the weapon. By then, the footsteps up the stairs had finished, and the sound of the door being unlocked while Bill continued to shout and swear overpowered everything.

Eddie was holding the gun when Sonia Kaspbrak walked in. He dropped it, but not before she dropped to the floor, fainting at the sight of her innocent boy holding something so violent. And
because she thought, for a split second, that *Eddie was about to shoot her*. The thought had crossed his mind.

Without even looking back, Eddie and Bill leaped to the window, gun and backpack in hand. Eddie knew he was going to return home to hell, but he figured he could take the heat.

He’d taken worse.
im back w 7k lol enjoy

“*You fucking idiot, *” Stanley spat, staring at the gun that now lay on the ground in the middle of the bunched circle the losers were sat in. Bill looked ashamed, more so than Stanley could ever recall seeing him before, and it almost made him feel guilty for being so harsh, but he didn’t feel that bad at all. Bill had acted like nothing happened since their ‘attempt’ to sleep together the other day, and Stanley was hurt. Now, Bill was not just being a dick, he was being dumb, so no, he didn’t feel out of line mouthing off about it.

“Cool it,” Mike said, “Not that you’re wrong.”

“Of course I’m not wrong,” Stan sneered, “Who the fuck brings a gun out with them in Derry? What were you thinking?” He was staring at Bill accusingly, hurt in his eyes that Bill knew didn’t stem from just the sight of the weapon. There was more to it, there always was with Stanley.

“I-I-I-” Bill couldn’t even string a sentence together, overwhelmed and anxious to a degree he knew was obvious. “I-I-I wah-was s-s- Fuck! I-I was ah-afraid.”

“I’m afraid too,” Stan rasped, “But I didn’t come out here waving a fucking pistol around like it’s some sort of-“

“I said cool it,” Mike snapped, louder. The authority in his voice was heard, and respected, by all the losers. Bill felt himself cowering in as he stared across at Mike, who even he knew was better cut out to lead than himself. It hurt him, no doubt, but he wasn’t in the right place to fight for his title. Even if he didn’t know where else he fit into the club.

“Stan’s right though,” Beverly said, “What were you thinking, Bill?” Her voice was softer, but there was still something that resembled judgement there.

“Gonna’ pop a cap in Bowers ass, huh Big Bill?” Richie taunted, laughing at himself. “Gonna go for some target practice on those shitbags, ey?”

“Fuh-fuck off-“

“Not the accents, Rich,” Eddie grumbled. He had been unusually quiet for the duration of the discussion, as well as the car ride there, in which he had simply sobbed into Richie’s shoulder. Nobody had really asked him about his mother’s explosion, and he was partially grateful for that, but equally as annoyed. It would have been too awkward to in the car, where his behaviour suggested that he didn’t really want to talk about it. And as soon as the group had met up with the other three losers, Richie had gone off about the gun. Since then, that had been the centre of conversation.

“Fancy offing Mrs K. while you’re at it?” Richie got a kick in the shin for that comment, but Eddie really couldn’t bring himself to be mad about it in that moment.
“If Bill is going on a murder spree can I make a few suggestions?” Bev enquired, smirking. There were a few chuckles, but the overarching anger did not fade, and Bill looked far from amused.

“I’m noh-noh-not kuh-killing anyone!” Bill yelled, his voice cracking as if tears were about to follow. They didn’t, thankfully, and Bill’s single shred of pride remained in tact. “I juh-just thought it might scare them.”

“Nothing could scare them,” Ben sighed, “This would only backfire, Bill. They know you wouldn’t use it.” He was, once again, being the voice of reason. Ben was always the quiet one, but that wasn’t because he didn’t have opinions on things, he did, and strong ones at that. He wasn’t outspoken, either, because when Ben did contribute in conversations so serious, his opinion was always taken seriously, always respected and valued. He hoped that was the case now, because if there was ever a time for Ben’s logic and wisdom, it was in that moment.

Bill was silent, unable to reply. Half of him wanted to protest, tell them that if he had to use the gun, he would, but he doubted that his friends would believe this, and only half believed it himself. Plus, if he were ever to do such a thing, he would prefer his friends to think of it as an impulsive act, an act stemming from fear and panic and his natural survival instinct. He didn’t want them to think he had thought about it, that shooting someone - Bowers - was something he had put actual thought into. But he had, oh he had, and he wasn’t the only one.

“They’d use it on you,” Stanley said, his voice wavering at the mere thought. He didn’t doubt it though, not one bit, knew that Bowers wouldn’t even hesitate given half the chance to fire a loaded gun at one of them, or at anyone, really.

Against his better judgement, Bill replied, “No. They won’t kill us.”

Silence.

As much as they wanted to, nobody else truly believed that. Bill didn’t either, really, he just really wished that he could, because if Bowers was a killer, it opened up an entire new set of possibilities that Bill really didn’t want to think about. And it would mean that he was wrong, and Bill despised being wrong.

“If you really are naive enough to believe that at this point,” Eddie said, “You’re even more a fucking tool for bringing a gun out.”

More silence, a few hums from the losers that agreed. Bill’s head was bowed low, but he wasn’t as ashamed as he probably should have been, half of him was confused as to why his friends were so offended at his action. It had saved Eddie, and if the time were to come, it would save them again as far as he was concerned. Obviously, he hoped he would never have to use it, but he figured that if the Bowers Gang came close, pulling it out wouldn’t do any major damage, he only thought it would keep them away. His optimism was idiocy.

“Won’t happen again,” Bill muttered, though it wasn’t a promise. He couldn’t commit to that.

“Put the fucking thing away,” Bev huffed, finally looking away. The object intimidated her. She knew her Father owned more than a few, and had feared them for as long as she could remember. In all her life, Beverly had never been so close to one. It made her beyond uncomfortable.

“Where?” Stan asked. It was Richie that picked it up from the ground, holding it at arms length. Despite it’s small size, it was heavier than he had expected, and intimidated him more than he would have openly admitted. It wasn’t the first time he had been close to one, but he still didn’t like how it felt in his grip, like a sensitive explosive ready to go off. He knew that was silly, it
couldn’t just fire like that, but the thought still made him shake.

“I can-“ Bill never got to finish his sentence, Stanley was quick to cut in.

“And before you suggest it, you don’t keep these things in your fucking waistband, Bill, not without a proper holster, and-“

“You can put it in my backpack,” Eddie offered, cutting off the rant before Bill caved any deeper in on himself.

“Don’t take it home, Eds,” Richie said, knowing that Mrs K would probably chain his window and door shut if she ever saw that again. In all fairness though, she was probably psychotic enough to do that when he eventually did return home, and that idea worried Richie a terribly large amount. “If you go.”

“I won’t,” Eddie shrugged, though nobody was quite sure what he meant by that. They assumed he was confirming that he wouldn’t take the gun with him, but every loser knew that there was a possibility Eddie was insisting he wouldn’t be going home - at least not any time soon.

“Your mom’s gonna be looking for you,” Stan said, changing the topic, “You should at least let her know you’re safe.”

“Before the patrol cars start circling,” Ben added.

“Like they’ll fuckin’ care about another missing kid in Derry,” Richie scoffed, shaking his head. “Staying with me, aren’t ya’ hot stuff?” Eddie rolled his eyes at the nickname.

“Not if you call me that again,” He shot back, half-joking. But he figured that was the best option, Eddie didn’t really want to consider everything that going home would include, didn’t want to think about how maybe he needed to fear his mother as much as Bowers this time.

“What the fuck even happened?” Beverly asked, “Why is she so angry at you?”

“Caught me uh, throwing my… my pills down the sink,” Eddie lied. Maybe it was the waver in his voice, or maybe it was the way he turned to the side and avoided eye contact. Maybe his friends just knew him too well, but either way, everyone present knew that Eddie Kaspbrak was lying through his teeth.

Sonia Kaspbrak still made Eddie take his pills, the placebos and other. She did not know that her son was even aware they did nothing, because Eddie never called her out on it. He still hurt when he thought back to the day in which Greta Bowie informed him that all of his medication was a lie, but could never bring himself to talk about this with her. Instead, he pretended that everything was normal, and instead of taking the pills, forever threw them down the sink. He still needed the inhaler, for comfort above anything.

“And then with a gun in your hand,” Richie added, smirking, “Double trouble, thanks to Big Bill-“

“Drop it,” Mike cut in, “Put the gun in the bag, and let’s forget this happened. Are you definitely going to Richie’s tonight?”

“Sure,” Eddie said, opening the bag up. Richie dropped it in, and then peered into the bag, as if making sure it was in safely. “I can’t go home after-“

“What’s this?” Richie asked, cutting Eddie off. He reached into the bag as Eddie began to verbally protest, and then Bill.
“Don’t,” Bill warned, “Richie that’s not-“

“Don’t fucking touch that!” Eddie gasped, clearly mortified. He didn’t want them reading it, hadn’t wanted Bill reading it, and wasn’t ready to deal with what he assumed would be a terrible reaction. They had never liked his theory, and he reckoned they would like it even less now, it rang truer than ever.

“No secrets here, Eds,” Richie countered, pulling the wad of paper out. “Not now.”

“Richie-“ Eddie cried out, practically launching at him. The bag fell to the floor with a loud clunk, and went unnoticed as Mike shot after Eddie, whilst Bill went for Richie, grabbing for the file, and failing as Richie shoved him back.

“Get off of him-“

“For fucks sake Rich-“

“Assholes! What are you fucking hiding, huh?“

“Ever heard of privacy you-“

“Me and Eds don’t have secrets!” Richie sounded genuinely angry, something that was rare for him when the losers were involved. He barely ever got mad at them, not for reasons as petty as this. He didn’t understand why he was so stressed by it, either, which was maybe making it all the more frustrating. Richie had a bad feeling about it. They never, never, kept things from one another, and he had never expected taking the paper out to be a big deal. At first, he had only had casual curiosity, but now? It was burning him up.

“Grow up!” It was Bev that spoke up, being the one able to silence Richie yet again. “Give him the folder back.”

“No fuckin’ way,” Richie scoffed, hugging it to his chest. Bill was still on the floor, glaring up at him with maddened eyes. Beside him, Stanley was crouched, worry overtaking everything else. Of course, his anger from three minutes ago completely forgotten now that he thought Bill could be hurt. He wasn’t, fortunately, because Richie knew better than to push him that hard.

“Don’t be like that, Richie,” Ben sighed, which was surprising coming from him. It was enough to catch Richie’s attention, even though he was known for refusing to listen to his friends. Ben was different though, Ben never spoke up all that much when the losers were fighting, hated getting involved or having to raise his voice at his beloved friends.

“I’m not being like anything,” Richie protested, “I just wanna know what Kaspbrak and Denbrough can’t tell us.” Worded like that, his argument seemed much more rightful to the other losers.

“Is it bad?” Ben asked, looking at them both with a furrowed forehead and folded arms.

“Has to be,” Richie replied, despite the fact that Ben had directed the question towards Eddie.

“You don’t wah-want to know,” Bill said, expecting his friends would have a similar reaction to him. He assumed they’d be on the same page, knowing better than to genuinely believe Bowers could kill his dear little brother. The mere idea made his skin prickle with rage that he knew was beyond his control. If that were the case, though Bill was certain it was not, Henry Bowers would be a dead man. “Trust me. Juh-just leave it.”
“I can’t!” Richie wasn’t lying, or exaggerating. He knew that it was going to eat away at him, leaving it was not an option. Leaving it, as much as he wished he could, would be borderline impossible.

“Then don’t,” Eddie contrasted. The other six losers frowned at the comment, confused above anything. “Read it, Richie. Go on, fucking read it. And- And then ask me why I’m keeping things from you.”

The silence was sharp enough to slit a throat. Things had been tense in the losers club for a fair while, but the tension in that moment was different, or at least different to the tension Richie and Eddie were used to having with one another. It was the kind of energy that should never exist between seven friends, certainly not those as close as the losers were.

Richie was still clutching the folder, knuckles white as he gripped tightly, eyes fixated on Eddie’s as he evaluated his options. And then, to the surprise of his friends, Richie threw the folder to the ground. It landed next to the backpack.

Now, there were two weapons on the ground.

“So you are keeping things from us?” Stanley asked, voice wavering. Eddie hadn’t aimed the comment at any loser but Richie, but he didn’t need to, and the panicked looks that Eddie and Bill exchanged only further confirmed this. Stan was directing his frown at Bill, because that was much easier for him. He always had some reason or another to be mad at Bill, but rarely ever acknowledged those. Now, the case was building too high for him to look past.

“It isn’t like that,” Eddie insisted, though he wasn’t sure how true that would ring to be for his friends.

“So what’s it like?” Bev was quick in, her stance beginning to change.

“I…” Eddie didn’t know what to say. He decided to go with the truth, “I documented everything. Everything we’ve been through I-I wrote it all down, all the Bowers shit, all the crazy fuckin- all the disappearances and all the random bodies and- everything! It’s all in there.”

Six sets of eyes were staring at him, all with different thoughts behind them. Richie was simply confused about why Eddie couldn’t just say that, annoyed even, that Eddie would assume there was going to be an issue with something so…tame. Ben was relieved, after assuming there was going to be something of a much darker nature in the folder. He didn’t mind so much if Eddie wanted to note everything down, whatever helped, he supposed. Bev had a similar mind set, but a less relaxed version of it, instead also wondering if that was actually a good idea, if documenting was opening them up to different risks. Stan and Mike were on the same page too, watching Eddie ramble with curiosity and a slight bit of caution. Bill, knowing everything he did, had a different train of thought. Bill was simply wondering if Eddie, being Eddie, was going to tell them the truth.

He did, but that hadn’t been the intention. After Eddie stopped talking, he had expected an instant response, from Richie at the very least. When he was met with silence, Eddie simply couldn’t stop himself. Talking more, and talking honestly, sincerity and fear in his tone. “It’s…all in there. Everything. And it’s not just about us, or about the missing kids, it’s…it’s about Henry. And it’s about Patrick, and Vic, and Belch. It’s about how they did it all, how they’re responsible…for everything.”

Eddie was met with more silence.

“Everything?” Mike questioned, after a few painful seconds. Eddie nodded, as if that confirmed
anything. Mike sighed and reached out for the discarded folder, picking it up and stroking down the cover lightly with his fingers. “Can I?”

“Yes,” Eddie mumbled, defeated. He could feel five pairs of eyes on him, Mike’s alternatively focused on his little project. He hoped that if anybody, Mike would believe him. Mike was sensible, a realist, and he was never one to accept sugar-coating or misplaced optimism. Eddie trusted him to see it, maybe more so than anybody else. He had known Bill would hate it, and knew that everyone else would want to hate it, but maybe not Mike.

“I…” Richie began to speak up, and then for once, shut himself up to put thought into his words. “I don’t get it.”

“It’s not that complex,” Eddie shrugged, “I documented everything that happened. I explained how it was all Bowers. And now, I’m absolutely certain he’s trying to kill us - like he killed the rest of them.”

“Not Georgie.” Bill’s voice was quiet, barely even there, but firm. He believed it, he really did. Nobody else shared his certainty.

“Eddie,” Bev scoffed, letting Bill’s comment slip by, “He didn’t kill the missing kids. And if he did, he’s done one hell of a job clearing it up, because there’s not a single fucking bit of evidence to prove that. I’m not saying he doesn’t want us dead, I’m not saying that he isn’t going to take a shot at one of us this summer, because honestly, I don’t have a fucking clue, but the missing kids? The adults? You think Bowers killed them all? That’s insane, Eddie. He didn’t kill those kids. No. No fucking way.”

“You think he isn’t capable?” It was Stan, surprisingly enough, asking this. Eddie felt himself perk up as he realised that someone else did have his back, and really, considering everything, he should have expected Stanley to vibe with his theory. At one time he hadn’t, in fact Stanley had always softly insisted that if Bowers was responsible for the missing kids, they’d be long gone, and Eddie always accepted that, or at least tried to. Still, that had been years ago, and things had only ever gotten worse. Stan’s mindset changed after his own incident with Bowers, the one that left him sobbing, shaking and screaming out in the streets. “Everything he’s done to us, and you think he wouldn’t take a life?”

“He’s capable,” Ben sighed, slipping his arm slowly around her waist. Bev didn’t break eye contact with Stan, but stepped back into the touch. “Most monsters would be.”

“He isn’t,” Bill protested, because he needed somebody to. The idea that Henry was behind it all was much more painful for him, for obvious reasons. Bill couldn’t stomach it, didn’t want to. “He duh-didn’t take Georgie.”

“Maybe not,” Eddie agreed, “Maybe Bowers didn’t lay a finger on him, God knows I fucking hope so, but that doesn’t mean to say he isn’t fucking lethal, or that he didn’t hurt any of the other missing kids! Get real, Bill!”

It was heating up yet again. Mike could sense it, but felt powerless to stop it. He wasn’t entirely sure what to say, still undecided about his own stance on the matter. The logical, realist side of him wanted to believe Bill, wanted to scoff at the idea there was a serial killer among and after them. The side of him that knew Bowers understood that idea was probably too good to be true, and that the bully was entirely capable of doing such a thing, if anyone were.

“How about we read it before we make any snap judgements?” Mike suggested, “He might have a point.” He was still holding the folder, and opened it up as he spoke. Ignorant to the rest of the
conversation, he began to read, happy to form his own opinion on the topic.

“It’s a fucking conspiracy theory,” Bev scoffed, “The kids that think Cops are eating people also have a point, but that doesn’t make any of it factual.”

“Read it,” Eddie said, displeased by her lack of belief in his credibility. Eddie had done his research, and to him, this had turned into more than a conspiracy. This was an investigation, and an unfinished one, at that. “Then you can call me crazy.”

“Nobody’s calling you crazy,” Bev huffed, though she was close. It wasn’t that she thought it was all bullshit, more that she hoped and prayed it was bullshit. If the rest of the losers indulged in the theory, Bev knew that she would have to too, and that was the last thing she wanted. Beverly didn’t often run from her fears, but the truth seemed to have her making miles.

“I am,” Richie countered, though he was lying, and he knew as much. “This is bullshit.” He was referencing the situation more so than Eddie's theory, but that wasn’t very clear. Eddie stung.

“I don’t think it is,” Mike said, though he had only scanned through the first two pages. Eyes fell upon him, then, and tension seemed to grow thicker as the ones so against the idea realised there could be more logic to it. They trusted Mike, in some ways more so than Eddie. “But either way, what difference does it make? Bowers is still out to get us.”

“And if he finds something like that he’ll have our heads on a fuckin’ stick by the end of summer!” Richie was on the fence, but cautious and afraid to admit his belief of the theory.

“Like he won’t either way,” Stan muttered, catching the attention of only Bill.

“He won’t.” Bill insisted, with too much confidence for anyone’s liking. “Can we juh-just druh-drop this?”

“I’m not finished-“

“I am,” Eddie snapped, “I don’t care if you believe me or not. He killed those kids, and I’m not gonna sit here and prove that. I shouldn’t fuckin' need to.” And he was right, because after all the torture they had collectively endured, prove should have been unnecessary. It was obvious what Bowers was capable of, and ignorance to that was simply stupidity. Eddie pitied them.

There was no debate about whether Bowers was capable of murder. He had proved that already, long ago, but the scepticism came from the fear that the losers weren’t the only people Bowers wanted gone from Derry. It came from many fears, really.

The conversation ended on a negative note, and the rest of the afternoon and early evening was spent in forced, uncomfortable conversation, all seven losers ignoring the elephant in the room, the unfinished controversial conversation.

Richie took personal offence to this, and it was clear - even more so when the two finally got alone time. It was rare that he and Eddie were allowed sleepovers in the same bed, or sleepovers at all (not that it stopped them), but Richie explained to his dear mother Maggie that a terrible argument had occurred, and Maggie didn’t allow Wentworth to request Eddie get the airbed. That night though, there was no late night messing around. Richie went to sleep without even holding Eddie, simply pressing a weak kiss to his head and mumbling goodnight. He turned the other way and was out within minutes, deeply sleeping as Eddie silently wept beside him. Maybe if he had heard, the necessary conversation would have finally started, but it didn’t. Neither of them knew, nor wanted, to really have that talk.
Stan and Bill were different. Ben, Mike and Stanley were all staying at Bill’s that night, but Ben and Mike had long since fallen into slumber in their sleeping bags when Stanley piped up with his burning question. “Why did you try to keep the file a secret?”

“I don’t know,” Bill replied in a whisper, “I guess I-I just didn’t want any of you tuh-to freak out. Eddie was ah-afraid you’d think he was crazy.” It was close enough for the truth for Bill to feel like it wasn’t a lie, and for Stanley to entirely believe him.

“I don’t think he’s crazy,” Stan said, “I think he’s right. Even if that does mean Georgie-“

“No,” Bill’s voice was certain enough to shut Stan up. “He didn’t touch Georgie.” The certainty was almost enough to convince Stan it was true. Almost. Stanley knew better than to hold optimism like that in a place like Derry, around people like Bowers.

“Alright,” Stan agreed, falsely, “He didn’t. But I think maybe the others. And I think we could be next.”

“Me too,” Bill confessed, and suddenly held Stan a tiny bit tighter. It wasn’t much to Bill, but to Stan, that small gesture was everything. He pushed into it, as close as he could get. Bill didn’t seem to mind, despite the presence of their friends only two metres away. “But we won’t be.”

“I don’t want to underestimate him anymore,” Stan sighed. He had made that mistake before, on more than one occasion, they all had. By now, the losers should have probably learnt their lesson, but they still found themselves surprised every time things got a little bit darker than before. “I think he’s gonna kill us. I think he could, and I think he really, really wants to.”

“But he won’t.”

“If you’re so sure, why’d you bring the gun?” The question threw Bill off entirely, and Stanley was met with silence, a response he considered inadequate - so he continued, “You’re so good at lying to yourself, I almost envy the delusion.”

The arms around Stanley went almost limp, and Bill pulled his arm from around Stan’s waist. Sometimes, Stanley could have a vicious bark, but whenever it was used Stan was left with only regret. Bill didn’t appreciate the snarky comment, not one bit, and he was going to make sure Stan knew that.

“I don’t lie to myself,” Bill mumbled, but it was painfully clear that he didn’t believe that. Maybe he did know better, but that wasn’t something he was willing to admit, not to Stan of all people. See, Stanley was right. Bill was very good at lying to himself, so much so, that half the time he didn’t even realise he was doing it - like right then, for instance.

There were some truths that Bill couldn’t hide from himself, but he tried his best.

“You lie to me,” Stanley said, continuing with a conversation he knew would not end well. It was a necessary conversation, though the time and place were about as far from ideal as they could get. Bill found himself annoyed that Stan was evening trying to bring this up. All he wanted was a quiet night after the fucking day they’d had. "I know you lie to me-”

“Sh-Shut up,” Bill hissed, his voice a little less hushed. Maybe there was truth to what Stanley was saying, but he didn’t want to hear it, and not right then, when Mike and Ben were at risk of hearing it too. Stanley wasn’t the only loser Bill had lied to, but Bill didn’t consider it lying when they had never really asked. Not telling did not equate to lying as far as he was concerned. "When hah-have I ever?"
“You said you wouldn’t regret it-“ Stan began, feeling no need to directly reference what ‘it’ was. They both knew. It didn’t really relate to the main issue at hand - Bowers, the murders - but it was the thing bothering Stanley most where Bill was concerned. He saw a chance to bring it up and took it. “You said-“

“I don’t regret it!” Bill protested, no longer whispering at all. Mike stirred and they fell back into silence for a few seconds, before Bill, tightening his grip around Stan again, continued in a whisper, “I don't regret it, Stan. Why are you b-b-bringing this up?”

“Because you…” Stan let his voice trail off. He had been about to tell Bill that he had hurt him. Something, in the last second, told him that was a bad idea. “I don’t know, Bill, you just haven’t been normal since we- well, since we did it. “

“Nothing has been nuh-normal since we did it,” Bill pointed out, and that was something Stan couldn’t dispute. That had been the day that everything changed, so maybe it did make sense that Bill was distant, maybe it was just another way the fear was getting to him. This thought didn’t comfort Stan at all, but it was enough to shut him up for the time being. He knew it wasn't a finished conversation though. Bill was acting like it had never happened, badly, of course, but the fact he had even attempted made Stanley hurt like hell.

“I guess,” He mumbled. “I just miss it.” He had good reason to, too. Experimenting in that way had become a common thing for them, even if Bill did act like it was nothing, like it was purely messing around. Stan had considered the possibility that to him, that was all it was, but that hurt, and he liked to pretend that wasn’t the case, for his own peace of mind above anything. It felt like it was more when it was just the two of them, but maybe that was the lust induced delusion. “And I’m scared. And I feel like I need you, more than ever. And you’re not there how you used to be.”

It sounded like something someone in love would say to their lover. Bill didn’t like that so much, for reasons too complex to really process in that moment.

“Sorry,” Bill said, flatly. He didn’t mean it. Stan could tell, and pretended like it didn’t send another wave of hurt through his heart. Needless to say, no other words were exchanged that night in Bill Denbroughs bedroom.

-

Peter Gordon had yet to go home.

He did not like home, not one bit. His home was where his depressed and angry mother resided, always ready to go off at him when he returned at such a late hour. Peter had hoped, optimistically, that Josie would let him stay the night, but once again the girl had requested he leave as soon as they were done fucking around.

At first, walking home had seemed like a good idea, but it was such a nice night out, and Peter figured he was going to be yelled at no matter how late he returned home, if at all.

He was five minutes into the stroll back, smoking his fourth cigarette, when he heard a car motor in the distance - speeding, by the sounds of it. The noise shocked him, mostly because it was rare for anybody to be out so loud on a weeknight in Derry. It had been peaceful, for a short while, but peace was a rarity in Derry, and Peter was not surprised that this had been cut short by what he assumed were stupid kids.

Once upon a time, he had been one of those stupid kids. Those days were long gone though, four years gone, to be precise.
Peter Gordon, once upon a time, had been a name that would’ve sent shivers down the spines of kids like Stan Uris and Eddie Kaspbrak. Now, it was a name that only reminded people of grief and tragedy.

Once upon a time, Peter Gordon had belonged to the Bowers Gang. He kicked kids into roads, hurled abuse in place of conversation, used violence as a fun pass time. There were two reasons that Peter had given all of that up, both of which started and ended with Henry Bowers.

It began with George Denbrough, on that fateful rainy afternoon all those years ago. Or, more accurately, the murder of George Denbrough - committed by none other than Henry Bowers. Witnessed, and helped, by his trusty accomplices Patrick Hockstetter, Victor Criss, Reginald Huggins and of course, Peter Gordon. Peter tried not to think about it, hurting every time he did. It was hard to forget though, bless his poor, tortured soul. Those screams still haunted his nightmares, every one of them, and that little yellow coat still flashed across his mind every time he saw a drop of rain fall over Derry. The murder of George Denbrough had been the start.

The murder of his own sibling had been the end. But it was the in-between that lead to that, and Peter wondered every day how he could have handled any of it differently.

You see, Peter wasn’t quite as psychotic as his old chums were. He had a conscience, human emotion, a heart. After what happened to the Denbrough boy, Peter felt like he had fallen into a nightmare - one that he still hadn’t awoken from (one that he would never deserve to awaken from) - and he did the only thing he could think to do, he left.

Peter went to stay with his Father for eight months. When he returned, his old friends were waiting for him, and eight more children were dead. Peter knew some of those, but more importantly, he knew their killers. A fresh wave of guilt hit him, but he did nothing.

Upon returning, Peter did not reconnect with The Bowers Gang. He smiled at them when they passed him in the hallway, he made polite conversation if Vic sat next to him in class, but he did not sit at their lunch table, he did not laugh when they forced Richie Tozier to climb into the trashcan, and he said a prayer every time another kid vanished in Derry. Peter kept to himself.

Bowers did not like this, not one bit.

They made the first move, asking Peter if he would like to hang out. He made the mistake of declining this offer, and quickly realised it had not been an offer at all, more an order. Henry ordered that Peter hang out a lot, after that. Ordered that Peter join in when they threw the younger kids across the school yard and slashed the tyres of their bicycles. For a short while, Peter complied.

Another kid went missing, a disappearance with shocking similarities to that of the Denbrough case. Peter was then reminded of who he was fucking with. He made a second attempt to get away, and this time, was met with the same treatment he had been giving to children much weaker than him. Bowers turned on him in an instant, and Peter did not know why he had ever expected different.

His old friends beat the shit out of him on a daily basis after that. Spat abuse that rang in his ears for hours after. Laughed in his face as he begged for mercy. He deserved it, but they deserved worse. And they were not getting that, karma was having some intense issues.

Peter decided to take things into his own hands, an action he would come to regret for the rest of his sad, sad life. Peter Gordon threatened Henry. He did this with a note, one that he daringly slid through the bullies locker after school one day. This letter informed Henry of Peter’s plan to
inform the police of what had happened to sweet little George Denbrough if they didn’t stop with
the…bullying (and all the things ten times worse).

There was no immediate response from Bowers, something that surprised Peter - pleasantly, of
course. Things were almost okay, for a short time after. He was left alone.

Peter always was. It had been his baby sister that Bowers went for instead. She had been fifteen,
one year his junior, when it happened. He should have seen it coming, and had he found out the
situation sooner, maybe he would have.

A date, Stacey Gordon had told Peter, a date with a nice young boy who he need not worry about.
Peter, naturally, was worried. Even more so when he heard through the grapevine that the nice
young boy taking Stacey on said date was Victor Criss. Victor was not a nice boy, far from it, and
he had far from nice intentions with Stacey Gordon.

She never came home that night.

Peter knew that it was Bowers, a feeling in his gut so strong that it needed no doubt. Peter, with
nothing left to lose, had tried to tell people this. Nobody believed him, at least, not openly.
Especially not when they found her body tangled and mangled in the woods three weeks later.

Stacey Gordon had been stripped down and beaten to death. A violent end, yet a lucky one coming
from someone like Bowers. Stacy had gotten off lightly, dying quickly and being left somewhere
she would soon be found. The Others did not get that privilege, instead rotting in a well hidden
basement, or at the bottom of a well.

Stacey was different. Butch Bowers knew that she had fallen victim to his son, he pitied her, but
understood why Henry felt he had to do it - and helped with the clean up once again. This time, it
was much neater. It had to be, given the circumstances. All eyes were on Victor, and Butch didn’t
want that, not when Victor was so tight with his own child. Luckily, Butch had trouble with some
of his own prominent enemies at that time in his life - lawyers, snitches, the mayor, some angry
parents, and a journalist who just kept putting his fucking-foot-in-it.

The journalist, Randal Mars, was caught speeding down the highway three weeks after the murder.
When Butch searched his vehicle, he found the bloodied clothes of Stacey Gordon folded neatly in
the trunk, along with strands of her hair. It just so happened that Mr Mars had no alibi. The jury
found him guilty after three days in court. He was given the death penalty - Butch made sure of it.

Peter’s judgement was never swayed. He knew Bowers was responsible for the murder of his
sister, could tell just from the smug look Henry passed him every time they caught eyes with each
other. He also knew that there was nothing he could do to prove this. He took the warning with
grace, and did not speak another word of Henry Bowers, nor to Henry Bowers.

Not until that night, at least.

Peter dropped his cigarette, and continued walking towards the source of the noise. It got to him
first though, and he found himself freezing as the truck seemed to slow. What struck him as so
strange, was who the truck belonged to. Peter was a quiet guy around town, he kept to himself, but
that didn’t mean he didn’t know things. He knew that truck belonged to a loser.

Richie Tozier was that loser. Richie Tozier was, however, not the person driving that truck. Peter
guessed as much. He was not surprised when the truck pulled up next to him and Patrick
Hockstetter was grinning through the front window, Henry by his side.
Vic and Belch clambered out first, nodding at Peter with what he could only hope was a look of respect. Then Patrick, smiling mischievously, until finally, Henry got out too. No words were exchanged, at first. Peter stared at the four men in shock, curious and wary - but not afraid.

Belch pulled out a packet of cigarettes and handed one to Vic, who lit them both fluidly. Henry slowly circled the truck, acting almost oblivious to his old friend and foe stood observing.

Peter did contemplate running, but figured that would be futile since they had a vehicle and he was on foot. And it wasn't like he had reason to run. If his brain was wired up right, maybe he would have, but Peter Gordon didn't think like a person with correct wiring, still with the brain of a bully and an emotionally traumatised child. He wasn't afraid of much. They could sense his lack of fear, Henry took it as a compliment.

The reason he was not afraid, aside from general insanity, was because there was nothing Henry could do that would hurt more than what he had already done. Peter Gordon was okay with dying that night in Derry, it wasn’t like he was going to get out of town any other way, but something told him that Henry wasn’t out for blood. If Bowers wanted him dead, he would’ve been axed a long time ago.

No, Henry did not want to kill Peter. Henry liked Peter, in a funny sort of way. He found amusement in watching his old friend, got some satisfaction from the miserable existence Peter had lived since leaving them. He hoped that he regretted it, that he would maybe return, but respected him for as long as he didn’t. Henry didn’t mind if Peter wanted to play at being a good person. It was all fun and games to him.

“Tozier’s gonna be pissed when he sees this,” Peter said, flatly. The Bowers Gang chuckled in low unison.

“Haven’t even started yet, Gordon,” Vic replied, smirking. He had always liked Peter, always liked his sister more. Especially liked his sister that night four years ago. Peter had always detested him - even when they were friends he considered him to be an arrogant slime-ball with the mind of sheep.

“What’s the plan?” Peter asked, more out of concern than curiosity, but it was a very blurred line for him. Somehow, there was no shake in his voice, no anger or venom or hurt at all. It was as if he were talking to old friends. Old friends that hadn’t murdered his sister in a vicious, extreme act of revenge.

“Taking this baby out,” Belch explained, “Parking it up where Tozier’ gonna’ find it, all nice and fucked for him.”

“How twisted,” Peter said, sarcasm laced in his voice. Vandalism was tame for Bowers, as was Grand Theft Auto. Childs play, really. “You guys pullin’ up for a reason? In the mood for a lengthy catch up and a beer?”

“Something like that,” Henry spoke with a strong tone, a voice that overpowered any others around him, one that demanded authority and respect. He did not have Peter’s, though. “You headin’ anywhere nice?”

“Home,” Peter told them, and regretted it instantly. They knew where he lived, but then Henry knew where half of Derry lived. “I got work in the morn.” He was a janitor in a small office block on the outskirts. Work was not of high importance to him, which was probably why he stayed out til the early hours and drank himself unconscious every night.
“Work?” Henry scoffed. He had never worked a day in his life, hoped he would never need to. Patrick sold a couple of class A’s when he was real short on cash, and Vic was a full time weed dealer. Belch still lived off of his parents, but considered the errands he did for Henry work enough. All four of them were known to do the occasional ‘hitman’ style job, too - nothing too extreme, but it wasn’t uncommon for a couple of the richer men in town to pay the boys decent sums to instil a little fear in their foes. “The fuck you working for, Gordon?”

“J. Goodmans-“ Peter thought it was a genuine question. He was incorrect.

“Nah, Petes,” Henry cut in, smirking, “I don’t think you do. I don’t think you workin’ for anybody anymore.”

“Huh?” Peter was confused, to say the least. All four members of the Bowers Gang were smiling down at him, and suddenly, for the first time, a slither of fear crept up his spine. Something wasn’t right, he could feel it in his bones. He wanted the conversation to end - the sooner, the better.

“Do you want to work, Petes?” Patrick asked. Peter had always disliked Patrick, less so than Vic, yet much more actively. It was easier to explain his distaste to Patrick, mostly because anyone in Derry with half a brain knew he had several screws loose. Vic didn’t seem to have screws loose, but Peter could see them hanging out, he knew they were all just as fucked. He knew better than anybody, maybe even better than the Losers Club. Patrick made him uncomfortable though, incredibly so. Had done even when they were friends, but that felt like a lifetime ago.

Peter didn’t know he was about to be thrown back into that life.

“I guess I do,” He replied, innocently.

"Fan-fuckin-tastic Peter Gordon, 'cos I got just the job for you," Henry cackled. Vic and Belch were laughing hysterically. Peter didn't catch the joke, and stared at his old friends blankly. It was then he knew for certain something very, very bad was about to happen.

“Get in the truck, Gordon.”

Peter thought about resisting, thought about standing up to them. He didn't. Last time, it had cost him a life, and Peter didn't have another to lose.

Chapter End Notes

feed my ego and motivate me by leaving feedback of any kind below. I can't say im gonna be able to update sooner because life is hectic and I have a lot of things to work on, both writing and art wise, both IT and alternative. thank you if you're still sticking around for this though, Ill try to make it worth it :)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter Notes

its a long and messy one. very richie centric, though I consider myself worst at writing him, so apologies for any ooc content, sometimes I gotta bend 'em a little. its also dark n violent, but you signed up for that one. enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Derry Fire Department were called at 5.03am exactly, by an anonymous caller who claimed to have seen the blaze whilst walking his dog. Nobody in the Firehouse gave a second thought to the fact someone was out doing such an activity at such a young hour, more fascinated by the fact there was an actual fire in Derry. The first in two months.

And boy, it was a big one.

The fire could be seen from a mile in every direction, smoke even further. There was a lot of that, thick black clouds of it floating off into the morning sky, polluting the view. It had been roaring for an hour before anybody bothered to call it in, understandable, really - considering the time and the place of the fire. The location of the blaze was yet another factor that drew curiosity. It was in a field. Just a field, a couple of miles off of the Hanlon Family Farm. And it was a stack of tyres, a very large stack, at that, but that was all.

By the time the Fire Brigade got there, it was still burning high and bright. The smell was almost unbearable. Police were already at the scene, Oscar Bowers, actually. And another car was parked outside, an empty truck with a bust tyre and a smashed up back window.

It took the Firefighters twenty minutes to exterminate the fire and determine it arson. They left the scene only an hour later, after in depth discussion with the Sheriff, who insisted he would deal with it without further interference. They left without questioning him, always did.

Wentworth Tozier received a phone call from his wife at 8.07am exactly. She was yelling down the phone at him about Richie’s truck being gone. Gone meaning stolen, obviously. And Went was yelling back, telling her he couldn’t deal with that at work, telling her he had too much on his-god-fucking-damn-plate-and-Richie-could-handle-this-himself.

Richie, being Richie, could not handle it. He was screaming his vulgar mouth off, and continued to do so for a full forty minutes.

It was 8.47am when the Derry Police Deputy turned up at the Tozier’s front door. It was 8.47am when Richie Tozier fell silent for the first time that morning, curses and snarls turning into fear and panic as the young man walked Richie into the back of a Police car and refused to say a word the entire drive.

He was afraid, rightfully so with so many reasons to be. There was the obvious irrational panic about being-too-fucking-pretty-for-prison, followed by the irrational panic he was definitely going to be sent there for life, followed by the entirely rational curiosity about why the cops were even taking him away in the first place. They hadn’t been very clear, or he hadn’t been listening all that closely. He knew it must be truck-related, knew it must be Bowers related.
And maybe that was what scared him the most. Not so much that he could in be trouble with the law, nor that his folks would be mad, or that his truck was missing. Richie was so petrified, shaken into fucking silence, because for the first time that summer, he was alone.

- 

It was dark when Peter Gordon woke up, pitch black, actually.

The first thing that hit him was the stench, it was overpowering and entirely sickening. Peter had never smelt a dead body before, but if he had to imagine the odour, he imagined this would be it, or at least something close. Rot. Decay. Death. Peter imagined that only things that incredibly evil could harbour scents so repulsive.

The second thing that he noticed, almost immediately after, was the pain. Excruciating amounts. The one in his head, distorting everything that passed through his mind with it’s pure overwhelming mass. Then, the one in his leg, a familiar dull ache in his calf. A similar, more intense one in his foot. And his mouth, which was maybe the worst of all.

The pain in his mouth was beyond average agony. Peter could feel it in every single sense: the taste of blood, as if it was completely filling his mouth, as if it was what he’d used for fuckin’ mouthwash that morning. The smell, which was a mere undertone to the one overpowering the room - wherever the fuck he was. The feel of it, like vomit just sitting in his mouth. He wished he could see, then again, maybe he didn’t. Peter imagined it to be how hell looked. An earthly version, at least.


Oh.

Oh.

Peter remembered. He wished he hadn’t, as it all fell into place a mere ten seconds after waking up. He didn’t know where he was, but he knew he was somewhere nobody else would find him, which made his next action pointless - and all the more tragic.

Peter Gordon screamed.

Well, Peter Gordon tried to scream.

The noise that came out was possibly more disturbing, a high pitched squawk at best. Blood fell from his mouth. And oh, he remembered, which was easily the most scarring part. The memories - never pleasant with Henry Bowers in them.

He should have known better than anyone.

Maybe it was the pain, maybe it was the trauma, but either way, Peter found himself grateful as he passed out again on the cold, hard floor of the hell in which he resided, and assumed, realistically, would soon die. He half-hoped it would come sooner.

- 

“You think Richie’s still mad about last night?” Benjamin Hanscom asked Mike Hanlon on their leisurely walk over to Beverly’s that morning.
“I hope not,” Mike replied. He had been trying not to think about it, hoping that the new day would blow the troubles of yesterday away. Mike knew better than to really believe that would happen but the optimism helped him sleep better, and either way, the less he thought about it the better. Obviously Ben, being Ben, did not share the same laid-back attitude. He had worried about it until the early hours, he had tossed and turned contemplating every possibility and countless scenarios.

It wasn’t that Mike didn’t worry, quite the opposite, it was just that Mike worried differently to Ben. Mike pushed it back, let the small corners of his mind fight out that battle as opposed to the forefront, who had much bigger concerns than Eddie’s controversial project and Richie’s hurt feelings.

“Would you be hurt?” Mike asked, “If it were you and Bev? If she had kept something like that from you?”

“I don’t think me and Bev have secrets,” Ben said - a lie, little did he know it. “But I think if we did, and it was something like that, I would be hurt. I’d hurt, maybe bad, because it sucks knowing people don’t trust you like you do them, and I get that’s where Rich is coming from, but I’d understand. You have to. People need secrets.”

Mike agreed. “Do you got secrets, Ben?”

“I don’t think I do,” Ben told him, after a moment of contemplation. It was probably a true statement, too. Ben was an open book for the most part, trusted his friends too much not to be. “But that doesn’t mean I don’t need ‘em, Mike.”

There was a moment of silence as Mike thought upon that for a moment.

“I got secrets,” He said, eventually, “I got lots of ‘em. Not the kind you’re thinking though, nothing dark, nothing scary. Just secrets. Those stupid secrets, the embarrassing bullshit you do as a kid that you swear you’ll take to the grave. Things nobody would ever benefit from knowing. Things that are only secret because nobody ever asked for them to not be secrets. And that’s okay. But I don’t know if Eddie keeping a secret like that is so okay.”

“Maybe not,” Ben sighed.

“But I’m glad he did it,” Mike added. Ben was, too. Beverly, not so much, but she would come round. She always did. Mike did not need to express that he thought Eddie was right, that he saw sense and logic and a terrifying truth in the theory. Ben understood, and Ben felt it too, although something stemming from a deep fear prevented him from admitting this.

They dropped and changed the topic before arriving at Beverly’s, so that when she came down from the apartment, bouncing down the metal staircase with the energy and enthusiasm of a caffeinated toddler, she was met with joyful conversation and an immediate distraction.

The good mood, present in all three of them, did not last very long. Life would never allow such a thing, would it?

The pleasantries ended when they arrived at Richie’s house, in fact, the joy had began to fade before they’d even stepped on the driveway to collect their two friends. It had been Ben who pointed out what Bev and Mike had been too caught up in conversation to notice, “Hey guys, Richie isn’t home.”

“What do you-“ Bev didn’t need to finish her question. She didn’t need to ask it all, actually. “Assholes!”
“Did he drive to Bill’s?” Mike wondered out loud, “I swear we agreed on walking round for them-“

“They could have fuckin’ waited for us,” Bev sighed, but began walking up the driveway anyway. When Ben and Mike stared at her, still put at the edge of the yard, Bev turned back and beckoned them. “Might as well ask while we’re here.”

She had a point, somewhere in there, so Mike and Ben followed her up the drive.

It was a surprise to all three of them when the door opened straight away. It was beyond a surprise when they saw Eddie stood there, clearly distressed and still in sleep clothes. “Get inside. Now.”

They did as they were told, curiosity and concern fuelling the obedience. Those emotions only grew when the front door shut behind them and the three of them were able to take in the surroundings.

Usually, the Tozier house felt like a pleasant place to be. It was always a mess, always a little bit out of order and bordering on unclean - but their was something homely about that - the kind of mess created by chaotic kids and overworked, laid back parents. There was always sound too, music being blasted too loud from the TV, the radio or the record player in the corner. The sound of voices, bickering and laughing and calling. Suburban sounds, like the telephone ringing and ringing, the distant hum of the hoover, the ding of the oven and the slamming of doors.

For the first time anybody present could remember, the Tozier household was silent and uneasy. Suddenly, the mess didn’t seem so friendly. As for silence, well, that had never been their friend.

Maggie Tozier was sat on the couch, staring at the turned off TV as she fiddled carelessly with some sewing in her hand.

“Everything alright?” Beverly asked, her voice out of place in the heavy silence. She knew, natural instinct, that everything was far from alright. They all knew, but the question was begging to be asked. “Mags?” They were passed last-name-basis. Maggie was beyond kind to Beverly, loved her like the daughter she’d never had. It was a small relationship that Beverly herself treasured.

Maggie looked up, smiled at Bev softly, then shook her head. “Richie got…taken.”

“He what?” Beverly didn’t even know where to start with that. Mike found himself sinking into the couch, eyes wide as his mind tried to process everything that meant. Ben was frozen in one spot, heart beating so hard it was threatening to hurt. Naturally, their minds had jumped to the worst case scenario, the conclusion they all feared the most. They thought Richie had been snatched, that Bowers had got him. Alone. In some ways, he had, but not like that.

Not yet.

It was a simply miscommunication, enough to stun them all for a minute, until Eddie caught on and cleared it up.


“What the heck?” Ben gasped, but he was relieved to say the least. It was bad, but not like the alternative. Police were a different ballgame entirely. “Why? What did he do?”

“Jeez, Rich,” Mike mumbled under his breath. He was still worried, but slightly less so.

“We don’t know,” Eddie said, his voice was flat, bordering on emotionless. The hint of worry was there though, clear to the losers, who knew what every edge and curve in his tone meant. “Bowers
related, no doubt. But he’s been gone almost an hour, more even.”

“More,” Maggie confirmed. “That Bowers boy, has he been giving you trouble again? Is that what this is?”

Maggie knew enough. Enough to place a venomous hatred for Henry Bowers within her and her husband. They had felt that same repulsion for Oscar Bowers for as long as the couple could remember. Maggie knew that his son was just as scummy as him - the apple never fell far from the tree. She pitied the kid, at first, but that pity drained when she saw the state that monster left her son in on countless occasions.

The first few times, Maggie and Went had contacted the school. Nothing changed, it never did, and when they realised this on the fifth or sixth attempt, Went skipped a step and went straight to Butch himself. He wasn’t afraid, and didn’t leave afraid, either. He left the Bowers property helpless and shaking with rage. The bullying hadn’t stopped, wouldn’t stop, and there was nothing they could do about it. Butch had made that crystal clear, and nobody was stupid enough to challenge him on it.

The bullying had continued, though Richie always tried to make sure his parents knew the bare minimum. He didn’t want his parents to start a battle they couldn’t finish on his behalf. He didn’t want to anger Bowers more, either. The less they knew, the better for everyone.

“Most likely,” Mike said, “But we don’t know for sure. Have you reported the truck missing?”

“I called the Police Department this morning,” Maggie said, “They called me back about half hour ago, said the truck had been found but it was part of some...investigation. I’m assuming that’s what they took him in for but- I just- He’s behaving, isn’t he? You would know, if he had done something so...stupid, right? And you’d tell me?”

“Of course Mrs T,” Ben insisted, though he wasn’t entirely sure about that. All of their parents had to be shielded from certain truths, it was for their own good. He was sure that Richie had nothing to do with this though. They were idiots at times, but they weren’t criminals. “I don’t think this is him. I think he’s been set up.”

Mrs Tozier did not respond to this verbally, instead she screwed her eyes shut and pressed her lips tightly together. She nodded, then, as if accepting this to be the truth. Maggie trusted her son’s friends, as chaotic and annoying as they could be.

“So what now?” Ben asked, as if anybody there had a helpful answer. There was only one answer, there was only one thing they could do.

“We wait,” Eddie sighed. It felt wrong, as if he were admitting they were helpless. They were, and it was maybe one of the worst feelings ever. Other options were useless though, and they knew as much, so they did exactly as Eddie said.

They waited.

-

Richie was at the Police Station for what felt like an eternity. He sat in an empty waiting room, not handcuffed, but locked in. After a while, they took him into an interview room, and he waited some more.

During this time, an officer had insisted he was not being arrested, and that he did not need a lawyer, and that they would not provide him with one because he was not being arrested. Richie
wondered if that was against some sort of law, but he didn’t know enough to make a judgement. During this time, rage within him grew. The fear was still present, but completely overshadowed by the anger.

When Sheriff Bowers walked into the interview room, Richie was almost frothing at the mouth. He remained seated, and nodded at the man, who he had only ever met briefly before. Despite this, Richie knew Butch was well aware of who he was. Butch did not like the Tozier family, not one bit.

“Richard,” The Sheriff said, flatly, “I assume you know why you’re here.”

“You know I don’t,” Richie replied, boldly, “Enlighten me, Sheriff.”

Butch smirked. He’d heard about the mouth on this kid. All bark and no bite, he figured. That was something he could handle - not that the bite would be a problem either. Butch threw a picture on the table, remaining stood to reassert his authority.

“My truck,” Richie acknowledged, staring the picture. It was a polaroid, small but informative. His truck wasn’t the only thing in the image - Richie also noted the strange vacant looking location, and the smashed up back window.

“Your truck,” Butch confirmed, smiling coldly. “Found on Vernon Hill, next to a raging fire, it’s a miracle that truck didn’t catch alight. Arson, we suspect.”

A threat, Richie suspected, as it sunk in.

“What else’ you suspect?” Richie asked, knowing all too well he ‘suspected’ nothing. There was nothing suspect about it, because he already knew the truth. Richie did too, no deeper consideration required. “You suspect I set the fire? ‘Cause I didn’t. I got an alibi. I got witnesses.”

Silence.

“But you already know that, don’t you Sheriff?”

Butch sniffed, then slowly sat. He leaned across the table to speak, his voice low and threatening. “I know everything I fuckin’ need to.”

His breath made Richie want to gip. “Then why am I here?”

“Thought you might want your truck back,” Butch said, leaning back in his chair. Richie breathed out a sigh of relief, though that sounded much too good to be true. Butch started laughing then, and it sounded just as evil as his son’s. The sound match Richie dreadfully unsettled. “What did you think, kid?”

Silence. Richie was biting his tongue, for once.

“You think I’m gonna waste my time filling in a crime report for some stupid fuckin’ tyre fire?” Butch scoffed, “I got better things to do with my time.”

“But-But-But-“ The arson wasn’t the only crime that had been committed, they both knew that.

“I can make sure my Officers drive the truck back to your place right now,” Butch said, “You might want to get that back window fixed up, though. And one of those tyres was a little fucked up. Nothing a half-decent mechanic can’t fix. You’re Father, he any good at that stuff?”
“He-I-You-“ Richie was struck dumb. He couldn’t get his words out, which was a rarity for him. There was so much he wanted to say, so much he needed to ask. “Can’t I press charges for vandalism, Sheriff? I mean, someone stole my fuckin’ truck- he-they-they- smashed it to shit! Can’t I press charges?”

“I don’t think there’s any need for that,” Butch insisted, smiling. His smile was awful, but it somehow fit his face, and the mood of the conversation. The smile was a threat.

“With all due respect, sir,” Richie countered, “I beg to fuckin’ differ.”

Silence. Butch sat back, slowly. Then, to the shock of Richie, began to laugh. The sound was as twisted as the smile that was still plastered on his face. Richie hadn’t felt quite so uneasy in a long time, but he feigned a brave face as the older man continued to howl to himself.

“You do, huh?” The Sheriff sneered, then he laughed some more, “Christ, ain’t you just the double of your Dad? Smart mouth n’ what not.”

Richie was silent. He didn’t think himself to be much like either of his parents, and they were nothing like him either. Then, Wentworth could have a big bark when he wanted - little did Richie know that his Father had used that bark on Butch Bowers before. Butch had not expected the same from Richie, he was taken aback, but mostly he was amused.

“You really think you can pull that on me?” Butch continued, when Richie did not respond, “You really that fuckin’ dense? ‘Cause I been told you’re a bright young boy. I been a told a lot of good things about you, Richard. And I think you know better than to try and get me and my boys to investigate this. I think you know better than to open that can of worms, don’t you?”

He did, but it was taking everything in the boy to not voice this. Caving was inevitable, but Richie knew he couldn’t give up just yet.

“I don’t know, Sheriff,” Richie said, “Maybe I don’t know any better.”

Butch laughed again, shorter this time. “Huh, your Father knew better. I don’t like that man, Richard. But he knew better.”

“Well I don’t think I do.”

“I think you’ll regret that, Richard,” Butch huffed, leaning back in his chair. He was still smiling, but the grin was thinning out, as if he was trying not to get angry, or maybe trying to mask his already present anger.

“Am I being threatened?” It was maybe the stupidest thing Richie had said yet. He knew he was. Butch knew he was. A verbal confirmation of this was never going to happen, not in the Police Station of all places.

Silence.

“Very bright young boy,” Butch whispered, only just on the right side of audible. The recording device sat on the table was not turned on. This was not a formal interview, therefore there really was no need, but just the presence of it alone made them both all the more wary of the words they used. Butch was a very off-the-record kind of guy. “Bright young boys don’t go round opening cans of worms. They ignore those cans. They forget them. Those worms are in there for a reason, kid.”

“And if I open it?” Richie questioned, going along with the frankly childish metaphor. It was
fitting though. Richie knew that pressing charges would make his life hell, and he knew this because he knew who he’d be pressing those charges against. They both did.

“That tyre fire gonna’ take a lot of paperwork,” Butch sighed, “And I don’t think it would look too pretty on your record, what with college and everything. Where are you going again? UCLA?”

Silence. On Richie’s behalf, that time. Strange how much a man whom he hadn’t encountered for years knew so much about him. Almost like he’d been keeping tabs. Richie physically shivered.

“That can of worms, for the both of us, Richard.”

“I didn’t do it,” Richie mumbled, defeated, “I didn’t start the fire.”

“Do you think that matters to me?” Butch asked, smirking again. Richie shook his head. Somehow, he was more pissed off than he had been during the entire experience. He was doing a remarkable job of hiding this. “I think you understand that it’s better for all of us if we just forget this little incident. I’ll tell my boys I let you off with a slap on the wrist and this never gets brought up again. How does that sound?”

Like shit. Richie found his mouth didn’t open though. He simply nodded, and didn’t need to say more.

“I’ll have someone deliver your truck home,” Butch concluded, standing back up and readjusting his hat, “I can give you a couple of numbers for that smashed window.” He held the door open for Richie, who remained sat for a minute before he found the nerve to stand. It was taking everything within him to not fly off the handle, but if there was ever a time Richie needed to bite his tongue, it was right then. He knew that.

He was a bright boy, after all.

Bill and Stan had been sat in near silence. The hum of Bill’s radio on low volume was the only thing keeping the atmosphere tolerable.

It hadn’t been like the whole morning, of course. When Ben and Mike had first left to collect the other three, Stan had been in an excellent mood. It didn’t take more than half an hour alone with Bill for that to fall through. He was hardly surprised, but it was still frustrating, especially since Bill was being so ignorant to it, as if things were normal, as if he didn’t know. As if the silence was comfortable - it was far, far from.

It was Bill’s fault, but he didn’t plan to address that. It was the same argument they’d had fifteen times over, and accepting the blame this time wasn’t going to change or help the situation any. They both knew it was him, and they both knew it would be him the next time, and the time after that, and the time after that and-

So it went on.

Bill was sat on the edge of his bed, flicking through a three year old comic book. Stanley had his back to him, was sat in the desk chair, hunched up, and reading through some of Bill’s old stories. They were mostly unfinished, mostly all about a gang of seven friends (sometimes superheroes), mostly all things that Stanley had read and reviewed six times over. This time though, he wasn’t concentrating on the words Bill had spilled out, his brain was fixating on the things Bill had failed to.
The silence was killing him. Not his own silence, he felt that was necessary, and entirely deserved. Bill’s silence though, that was driving him up the fucking wall. His mind was pondering different ways to trigger a reaction from him, get a word out, then maybe prod him for a few more. Would standing do the trick? Walking out of the room with his coat and bag? An empty threat? Or maybe simply reaching out for one of Bill’s favourite books, the ones he never let anybody touch-

“Two hours,” Bill said, interrupting Stanley’s thoughts in the best way possible. Stan dropped the notepad and span around in the chair, making sure he kept a straight, emotionless expression as he faced his friend. Bill looked just as deadpan. “They’ve been gone two hours.”

“Probably waiting on Richie waking up,” Stan shrugged. He had lost track of time. They both had, in the heat of the argument, which Stan guessed started about twenty minutes after Ben and Mike had left. The silence had begun about thirty minutes ago, which meant over an hour had been spent in angry, heated debate. It ended in tears, before the silence. Stanley’s tears, of course, and then Bill’s, but he held them back until Stan’s back was turned, then buried them in the pages of a comic he’d read at least fifty times.

“Shouldn’t they have buh-been in tuh-tuh-touch?”

“I don’t know.” Stan hadn’t put much thought into it, and he didn’t want to, knowing it would only cause more stress. “But nobody was alone, so worst case scenario - they’ve had a bad run in with Bowers, what can we do? We don’t know where they are.”

“I-I-I guess,” Bill mumbled, but that didn’t put his mind at ease. “We should go look, if they’re not back suh-soon.”

“What if they come back while we’re gone?” Stan asked. He turned back around, mumbling under his breath. Bill sighed heavily and stood, triggering Stan to whip back around, “What?”

“Nuh-Nothing,” Bill shrugged, “I’m getting ah-a duh-druh-drink. Do you wah-want anything?”

“I’m fine.” Once again, he turned his back to Bill, picking up the notebook he had been trying to read only two minutes ago.

“Clearly.”

“Fuck off-“ Stan slammed the notebook back down and turned.

“Stop buh-being like that!” Bill groaned. Stan had to stop himself from throwing the fucking book across the room. “Every tuh-time.”

“You started it,” Stan huffed, which was true, albeit childish.

“I didn’t mean to,” Bill said, which was true enough. He hadn’t meant to start anything negative, quite the opposite, actually, but he knew the risk of his advance before he’d even made it. Stan lashing out at him was no surprise, and part of him thought he really deserved it - that was something very debatable.

It started how many great arguments do: with a kiss. Bill had started acting differently as soon as Mike and Ben left, so Stan had seen it coming from the off. He had time to tell his ‘friend’ not to bother, but he didn’t, which made him a little bit more responsible than he was willing to admit. Bill had gone in for it after twenty minutes, starting how he hoped it would go on: hot and heavy.

It took Stan a couple of minutes to come to his senses and say no. The hurt was immediate, as was the conflict. Stan was insisting that he wasn’t their for Bill to use whenever he felt like it, and Bill
was trying to convince him that wasn’t what was happening. It was deja vu for them both. Stan broke down about feeling used, Bill broke down about his internal sexual conflict.

“I know you didn’t,” Stan mumbled, but he figured that was half the problem.

“Duh-Does that mean we’re alright?” Bill asked, daring to move a little closer. Stan sighed.

“We’re always alright.” He wished he had the guts to not be alright with Bill, but he didn’t know how. He could feign anger all he liked, the only things Stan felt when it came to Bill were hurt and love. Mostly the latter, that always outweighed everything else. “We have to be.”

“Right,” Bill mumbled, “But you know-“

“Bill!” Sharon Denbrough’s call from downstairs cut him off. Stan briefly wondered if he needed to hear whatever Bill was going to say, and hoped to God not. “Your friends are here!”

Both boys visibly relaxed, and Stan even found himself smiling.

“Casually late,” Bill said. Stan chuckled, then stood and found himself straightening out his clothes. They could hear the losers from all the way upstairs, a crowd of voices and the squeak of sneakers against the wooden floor.

“I’ll bet you that old comic book it was Richie’s fault,” Stan offered, smirking. Bill held it up.

“I’m placing my money on Bowers,” Bill shrugged. Neither of them were far wrong, quite the opposite.

It was Mike that came bounding upstairs to inform them of this. He barged into Bill’s bedroom with urgency that created instant panic in Bill and Stan. “You two need to come with us. Right now.”

“What the fuck’s going on?” Stan asked, realising for a second that Bill could be entirely right. He didn’t care so much about that comic book, only the safety of his friends. He knew from Mike’s state alone that something was off, and instinctively knew it would be one of the losers in danger.

“It’s Richie,” Mike said, “Bowers set him up. He’s flying off the handle right now and-“

“How the fuck-“ Stan didn’t really know where to begin with that one. The back of his mind acknowledged that at least he and Bill had tied on that bet.

“It’s a long story,” Mike sighed, “I don’t even know half of it myself. Just come with us, we’ll explain on the way.”

That was what they did.

Mike was right about not knowing all that much, nobody did. And the same applied when they eventually arrived back at Richie’s, where he and Eddie were sat in the living room, huddled under a blanket as Richie sat shaking.

“Are you gonna tell us what happened this morning, Rich?” Eddie asked him, voice unusually gentle, as if he knew Richie was feeling more than fragile. Maggie was stood in the living room door, a mug of hot coffee in one hand and a distant look on her face.

She had never understood Richie, she had always known he was a complex boy, always knew he had secrets - dark ones, most likely. Somehow, that had never scared her before. Now? She was
shaken to her fucking core. Whatever was going on, whether she would ever find out or no, was obviously darker than Richie was used to. Maggie didn’t know what that meant. She didn’t know anything at all, and it was almost alien for her - to be the adult in a situation and still be so useless, powerless.

Not that Richie minded at all. He didn’t want his dear parents knowing, which was half the reason for his silence, which had been almost unbroken ever since the Police Car dropped him back half an hour ago. The losers had been beyond relieved, but then, upon seeing his state, nothing but afraid - more so than during his absence.

It wasn’t unknown that Richie could have a temper, because he could - nothing quite close to Eddie’s rage - but a temper all the same. He had the typical teenage boy temper, but it was usually only brought out by Bowers, his parents on bad days, and occasionally hormone related frustration. He had a wall for punching a pillow for crying. Nobody thought too much of it, all the losers had a hell of a lot to be angry about.

And Richie had been in this state before, too riled up to even get his words out. The losers had seen it before, however his dear Mother had not. She wasn’t so sure how to deal with it. Nobody was - certainly not Richie, who knew that throwing his fist into a wall wasn’t going to release anything this time. Ten fists in his fucking wall wouldn’t have done the trick. Richie had tried that one last time.

This time, he had waited until he was in the safety of his own home to meltdown. As soon as the front door slammed shut behind him, Richie had fallen into a heap. He had punched the floor, yelled into it - mostly incoherent profanities. Nobody dared ask him what he meant, nor what had happened. Beverly had suggested they all leave Richie and Maggie to talk it out, but his Mother, despite her appreciation of it, rejected this idea. Instead, she sent four of them across town to collect Stand Bill.

If they ever needed to be together that Summer, it was then. There was something unsettling about the whole thing, and not just due to the lack of knowledge. Somewhat, this made it all more real. Watching Richie howl into the carpet had cemented the fragility of their safety.

And sanity.

Nobody had really tried to force Richie to speak. He probably would have done so, because there was nothing Richie hated more than biting his own tongue, but Eddie didn’t have the guts, and Maggie didn’t want to say the wrong thing. Plus, silence was sometimes good. It helped Richie calm down, allowed him to process the events of the morning in his own head before he would have to recite them and put them into someone else’s.

“Say something, Rich,” Eddie whispered. The silence made him uncomfortable, but only because it was Richie’s silence - the worst sound in the world. Eddie would have taken any and every one of his offensive voices over that. “You’re scaring me.”

They were all met with more silence. Richie’s eyes were fixed on the blank TV screen. They were still blurred from how he had began to sob after coming home, but the tears had stopped.

“I’m fine,” Richie whispered, breaking the silence with a lie. He was far from fine, but he did not want his Mother to worry. His friends, on the other hand, needed to worry. He was calming, slightly, now that all the losers were in one place.

“What happened?” Ben asked, a caution in his voice. Richie shook his head violently. Maggie sighed and put her mug down on the coffee table.
“I’m going to call your Father,” Maggie said, and then disappeared back into the kitchen. Richie was relieved, if anything, as were the rest of the losers. In Derry, adult presence rarely brought safety or comfort. In Derry, the kids never expected that.

“Bowers,” Richie confirmed, as soon as his Mother was out of earshot. “Let’s go somewhere my Mom can’t hear us.” By that, he meant his bedroom, where the losers gathered only thirty seconds later.

His room was everything anyone would have expected of him. Stan shivered when he saw the state, but he had attempted to mentally prepare himself for the sight, so there was no shock there, only discomfort and disappointment. Nothing was coordinated, for one, which meant that even when Richie did bother to clean up there was still a sense of chaos about the room. But Richie hadn’t bothered to clean, and the carpet was barely visible due to the masses of clothes covering it, and there were enough empty dishes to last a week scattered around. And his bin was overflowing. And there were screwed up tissues all over his bed, and random socks and-

Stan gasped, then averted his eyes. Nobody else seemed to notice, or if they did, they hid their reactions very well. “Do we have to sit in here?”

“Feel free to clean it up for me Staniel,” Richie said, but there wasn’t the usual life to his voice. He was saying things that Richie would say through a strangers mouth. Obviously, Richie had felt like that before, but it had been a while. He had forgotten how much Bowers could get to him. He had forgotten how powerless he truly was.

And now, he felt defeated.

“I’d be here until the end of summer,” Stan shot back, noting the flat tone Richie had used. Everyone else seemed to pick up on it too, and when Richie slumped down on the end of his bed, Eddie and Bill were quick to comfort him. Bill first, putting an arm around his shoulder and patting awkwardly. Then Eddie, resting his head on his shoulder and sliding his arm around Richie’s thin waist. “So uh, what went down this morning?”

“Bowers stole my truck.” It seemed obvious, but it still unsettled them all. This was the first time that Bowers had stolen anything physical like that from them. It would be unfair to say it was the only thing he had stolen though, because as far as the losers were concerned he had stolen their fucking youth. And their love of life. Their safety. Their innocence.

In Bill’s case, his baby brother.

Bowers had stolen worse than just a truck. But they made a choice to ignore that fact. It wasn’t something they could ever get back.

“Then he set a fuckin’ fire,” Richie continued, “But I don’t think he was setting me up. I don’t think they were trying to make it look like I don’t. They were trying to threaten us, probably. And the fire got too big. Someone called it in. So Butch fuckin’ Bowers took me in and gave me shit.”

“Gave you shit?” Beverly questioned.

“What do you muh-muh-muh-mean?” Bill sat up straighter, slowly pulling his arm from around Richie. Eddie seemed to be doing more. Bill caught Stanley staring at the contact.

“I mean that he gave me shit,” Richie shrugged.

“Be specific,” Stanley huffed. Mike leaned back against the door and found himself sliding further down and down. He wasn’t sure that he wanted specifics, wasn’t sure that he wanted to know
anything else at all. Not that he had a choice, and not that he would’ve made that one anyway. Mike knew that this was important, hard to hear or not.

Hard to hear, and hard to say. Richie didn’t even know where to begin with it. Threat? Blackmail? Mockery?

“He was being a motherfucker,” Richie said, which was as true as it was vague, “He just… I don’t know.”

“How do you know this wasn’t a set up?” Ben asked, mostly out of curiosity. “How do you know he wasn’t trying to get you locked up, because that is definitely something he’d do.”

“No it’s not,” Beverly countered, her voice soft, “He can’t torture us if we’re locked up.” And to be fair, she was right.

“And if he wanted Richie in a cell, he’d be rotting in one right now,” Stan said, ever the pessimist, but also probably right. It wasn’t like Henry Bowers didn’t have the power to do that. This was Derry, and Henry Bowers had a terrifying amount of power for someone that hadn’t even made it through High School.

“He beat the shit out of my truck,” Richie explained, “So they basically know it wasn’t me, ‘cause why would I vandalise my own fuckin’ truck? And why would I- Fuckin’ they know I didn’t do it. Butch knew. He pretty much said it - and he knew it was his bastard son and that bastard gang that fucked the truck. And he said I-“ Richie felt his voice breaking and shut himself up. The arm around him grew tighter.

“It’s alright, Rich,” Eddie whispered, knowing the lie all too well. It was far from alright, but that was hardly the right thing to say in that moment.

“Calm down,” Bill said, softly.

“He said if I try and press charges-“ Richie paused again, tried to collect himself. Somehow, he managed, because when he spoke again two seconds later, his tone seemed to ease. “He’ll put the tyre thing on me. Said I wouldn’t make it to College with that on my record - bastard even knew which fuckin’ College I’m going to.”

The last fact sent shivers through them all. Interesting that he would have such information, interesting that he had gone to the effort of acquiring it. The losers doubted that even Henry bothered to learn where they were going - he didn’t give enough fucks. Butch did, and though his motivations were different, they were just as twisted.

Butch always found it easier to cover up if he knew a little about the murder victims. Advanced preparation would likely be taking place. Henry was too messy, Butch usually benefited from a little.

Something close to that idea passed through Eddie’s mind, and he felt ten times more unsettled as he processed several other twisted possibilities, or at least attempted to. His grip around Richie tightened. “What about your truck?”

The truck seemed like an easier conversation to have right then.

“They’re dropping it back here,” Richie informed them, monotonous, “Fucking fixin’ it myself.”

“Is it bad damage?” Mike asked, “I’ll help you out, got a few tools for that sort of thing back home.” He offered a small smile, and Richie found himself returning it, though it wasn’t his usual
bright grin. Seeing Richie, of all people, in such a way, was disturbing for them all.

“I couldn’t tell,” Richie said, “They smashed the shit out’ the back window though. Fucking assholes. I’m gonna kill them, guys, I fuckin’ swear it.” He was coming back to himself, finally, as the shock began to wear off.

“We can replace that,” Ben reassured him, though he wasn’t entirely sure how easy that would be.

“You insured?” Stan asked. The conversation became lighter, then, and Richie slowly came back around. Within an hour he was almost back to his usual self, laughing loudly and making inappropriate comments, vulgar and crude, but also violent as he expressed his still present rage. Everyone felt more at ease, after that, like they didn’t need to be so afraid again.

Everyone but Eddie.

Eddie Kaspbrak knew Richie better than anyone. He could see past it, knew that Richie was feigning the smiles and forcing the jokes. He had seen Richie do this before, but not for a long time, and the last time had been far more understandable - or so Eddie assumed. Richie never really told them the full story.

Eddie knew it was bad - those stories all were, and Richie’s was no exception. It had shaken him to the fucking bone. Richie hadn’t spoken for three hours after, simply turned up at Bill’s with his cut on show and broken glasses in hand. Eddie and Stan had showed in twenty minutes, then Mike, then Ben and Bev. Nobody’s presence had been comforting. Eddie figured it was the same this time.

That night had scared him, but now how it scared Richie. The Night Henry Bowers Got Him Alone had been the worst of his life.

It had started with a bad feeling. Richie got those sometimes, little bursts of anxiety that he couldn’t quite shake. If he put thought into it, Richie figured they just stemmed from stupid insecurity, but Richie did not like putting thought into it. Richie dealt with these episodes by chain smoking and walking alone - something he had felt nothing but safe doing in the past.

Richie was the third to get attacked. If somebody else had been cornered before, maybe he would have been more cautious, but that would never have made a difference. Henry had been out for blood. Blood was what he had gotten, along with vomit and the tiniest bit of piss (but Richie planned on taking that one to his grave).

“Got a cigarette going, fuck face?” The voice had surprised Richie, who had been too engrossed in his thoughts to really notice Patrick Hockstetter had stood only two metres away, leaning back against a stop sign with a lighter in his hand. Richie did think about giving them up, he did only have about six left in his packet, and that might have been enough to appease them.
But he didn’t. Richie let his mouth lead again, and that time, his mouth didn’t go with words. He spat. Right in Victor’s twisted face.

There was a pause.

Richie tried to process what he had done. He didn’t make it that far. Before his brain had caught up with the situation, he was being slammed back to the pavement - hard - so hard, in fact, that Richie went dizzy for a few minutes, his ear buzzing as he felt the vibrations of it rack back through. So much so, that the insults and abuse thrown at him in the minutes following kind of went over his head. He was too out of it to respond, too out of it to fight back, even when he felt Victor slip his cigarettes out of his front pocket.

By the time he was coming to, he was being dragged down the path - which should have been absurd considering it was only just hitting sundown, but this was Derry, and this would have been far from an unusual sight. They took him into the alley anyway though, because witnesses were never a good thing, as much as Henry loved to have an audience from time to time.

“Get the fuck off of me,” Richie had yelled, as Belch dragged him to his feet. The four bullies laughed. “Get the fuck-“

“Keep talking, freak,” Bowers hissed, “I dare you.”

“You think I’m fuckin' scared?” Richie had shot back, despite being incredibly terrified. He had begun to realise that this was his turn. That the attacks on Beverly and Ben had not been random, unfortunate events. This seemed planned. “I ain’t scared of you, Bowers, you’re a fuckin’ pussy-“

He was silenced, temporarily, by Bowers’ right hook.

“I said shut it, four eyes,” Bowers snapped, grabbing Richie’s jaw with a threateningly tight grip. Richie felt his heart rate increase, felt his legs begin to tremble. He was afraid, and the facade was slipping minute by minute.

“I’ll shut my mouth when you think of some original fuckin’ nicknames.”

A second right hook. Blood was dripping from his nose now. Richie could taste it. Then the hand was back on his jaw, and Henry was inches away from him.

“I like my nicknames,” Bowers whispered, something sickeningly sinister in his voice - more so than usual. “I love ‘em, in fact. Loser. There’ll never be a name more fitting for you and your vermin friends, don’t you get it? No need for new, Four Eyes.”

“Ground-breaking speech, fuck rag,” Richie spat, and was not surprised when he was met with another kiss from a fist. It hurt like hell though, and Richie wasn’t sure how much more he was willing to take. Usually, there were more losers. He didn’t feel this afraid with them around.

“I think we need to shut that trash-mouth of yours,” Bowers said, then looked to his friends, who seemed confused until Henry motioned to the trashcan sat at the end of the alley - no more than a metre away. Richie noticed the nod towards it, then panicked as he saw Patrick dash to it.

He knew what was about to happen before it did, and was powerless to stop it as Henry pulled his mouth open. Richie had tried to scream, tried to cry out, but as soon as the sound left his mouth it was muffled by the shit and litter Patrick had pulled from the bin. Tears stung his eyes as Patricks fist tried to push it further down. He wondered, for just a second, if he was going to choke. But then he gipped.
The taste hit. Richie still shivered if he ever remembered it, because it was genuinely scarring. He had put some disgusting things in his mouth during his childhood - toys upon toys, the occasional bug, boogers and plenty of his own scabs. He knew bad taste. Having literal trash in his mouth surpassed everything and anything in terms of disgust. It tasted like cigarette stubs and beer, piss and rot, sour and mouldy.

Then there was the texture, all of them. Something close to cardboard, food like substances, an actual cigarette end, then something slimy. And that was the worst part, the alien moisture of it.

The vomit came somewhere between the realisation and the disgust. He gipped once, then again, after Patrick decided to push his hand further in. Henry had backed away, not far, as the alley was narrow enough to never put them more than an arms length apart, but enough away so that the sick running from the crevices of Richie’s mouth didn’t go near him. Patrick hadn’t anticipated it to get through the rubbish, had half hoped the boy would choke a little. Not to death, of course, they hadn’t wanted that quite yet.

Tears were spilling from his eyes though, and he felt himself stumble forward as Patrick snatched his hand away. The vomit fell out with the rubbish, and it continued for a strangely long time, during which Vic, Belch and Bowers snorted with laughter. Not Patrick though, he was fascinated. As soon as the flow stop and Richie caught his breath, he was pushed down into it - head first. He felt his glasses snap against the pressure and cried out, instinctively, but felt a foot collide with his ribs. It was enough to shut him up, for once.

Richie didn’t try to speak again during the incident. Just sobbed. More bile came up too, as he felt what they were doing. He felt it all. The cold hand holding his own, then the knife slipping into the skin. Heard it all too, the laughter, the jibes. But Richie didn’t see a thing, choosing to keep his eyes screwed shut. He was too afraid to see.

The Bowers Gang left him there, laid in his own vomit, and Richie had somehow managed to make his way to Bill’s - broken glasses in his bloody hand.

Nobody had seen Richie like that before: silent. And so obviously afraid.

Eddie had hoped he would never see it again. Now, after everything that had happened, he knew this was inevitable.

Chapter End Notes

comments make my week if ya feel like leaving me something :)

Butch Bowers was a man of his word.

Richie Tozier got his truck back only one day after it had been vandalised and attacked. It was dropped off by a man doing a favour, and not a word was said as it was dropped off outside the house.

The truck was in a worse state than Richie had thought. The back window was smashed to shit, leaving splinters of glass decorating the seats, and then there was that tyre, which had been viciously slashed with what much have been a very thick blade, or at least some very intense force - making it one hell of a bitch to get back into that garage. Then, scratches across the paintwork, most on the hood, and on one door a large dent, as if it had been punched or head butted. Strange, but nothing too out there for Bowers.

Richie was shaking with rage when he saw it. His Father even more so, but he seemed to understand when Richie requested they didn’t file a police report - leaving out the part where the Sheriff had threatened him. He didn’t need to, nobody was going to question his lack of belief in the police force. Nobody in Derry, at least.

There was only so much Wentworth could do, himself. He got in touch with the insurance company, hoping something would come of that, but physically he knew the damage done was nothing he could fix himself, besides changing the tyre, but Mike had already offered to do that, and he figured he’d rather leave it to them.

Mike came round the next day with tyre, and Stan, of course, because there was no way he was going to go alone. Ben and Beverly were staying at Ben’s (much to his Mother’s excitement) and Bill was forced to see his Aunt with his Mother.

Eddie was the only one truly alone. He was forced home after only two days at Richie’s. Sonia knew where he would be, and called the Tozier house until she got a response. Down the phone to Maggie, she had cried about her great concern, and how he had left all of his meds at home. Maggie, oblivious to the reality of the situation, had driven him back to her. It had been inevitable but terrifying none the less.

Richie was mad about that, but he knew if he thought about it too much it would become unbearable. Mike and Stan were trying to distract him, hoping that fixing up the truck a little would help to do the job. It was working, to an extent. They were playing around the in the garage as if it were a normal day. It was far from the weirdest day, but still, even Stanley seemed chirpy and relaxed.

They had all hoped, deeply, that it would stay that way. And it did, for a while.

The truck was a 1970 Chevrolet that his parents bought for him second hand as his birthday present. It had still cost a fair amount, but Wentworth had been saving up, which was considerably easy for a dentist as good as him. It was Richie’s pride and joy, so Mike and Stan were eager to try and help.

“Screwdriver,” Mike called out, holding his hand in the air. Stanley looked across the tools on the bench before spotting one and placing it in Mike’s grip. He had, unsurprisingly, taken the reigns. It was definitely for the best, considering Stan didn’t know the first thing about cars and Richie was one bad incident away from smacking himself with the hammer laid out on the work bench.
“Why’s it taking so long?” Richie asked, giving one of the other wheels a light kick.

“Because I don’t wanna fuck it up,” Mike said, “And I’m not exactly an expert. This is my third time. Do you wanna give it a try Trashmouth?”

“I’ll pass on that one,” Richie huffed, walking back around to see what he was doing. Richie liked to pretend he knew more than he did. Whatever Mike was unscrewing did not interest him in the slightest, he just wanted to get it driving again.

“I’ll do all the work then,” Mike mumbled, a complaint more than a sarcastic jibe. He had hoped for a little more engagement. “If you feel like being useful, or you know, just cleaning your truck up a little, you could always try and scrape that glass off the seats.”

“I’d probably fuck it up more;” Richie groaned. He took the advice though, opening the door on the other side and assessing the damage more thoroughly. The glass was spread out across the front, small chunks almost everywhere, even scattered across the dashboard. Richie had been to angry to focus on the fine details before, not even stopping to consider if there was anything more than the smashed glass inside the truck. “Fuck me up.”

“What is it?” Stan asked. He peered through the window at the back, but saw nothing aside from the expected.

“The fuckin’ mess,” Richie said, and the bad mood began to creep back. “Is there like, I don’t know, a brush or somethin-“

“Behind you,” Stan pointed out. Richie whipped round and smiled to himself at the sight of the tools. There was a large dustpan and a brush to go with hanging on the wall. He should’ve probably known where this was kept in his own house, but he had never payed attention when his Mother did chores, and rarely did his own unless he needed the pocket money. “I’d wear gloves if I was you.”

“I’m not a pussy,” Richie scoffed, leaning in with the brush.

He cut himself within the first three minutes, a tiny shard slicing his thumb. Stan rolled his eyes and held back the smug “I told you so”, instead opting to take over and do it himself. The mass amount meant it took a while, a lot longer than it took Mike, actually, but only because he insisted on being so thorough.

“I can’t see any more, it’s fuckin’ fine,” Richie insisted, opening the other door. Stan sighed and put the brush down, giving it one last look over before agreeing there couldn’t be much left. “I’ll get my Mom to vacuum it or somethin’. You reckon I can drive it again?”

“I wouldn’t,” Mike said, “There’s still glass in the window, it’ll probably fall out if this thing goes fast.” It was commonly known fact that Richie always went fast.

“Plus, you should be wary of what else Bowers has done to it,” Stan pointed out. It was something Richie had tried to brush off - that he had gotten off lucky. That for some reason, the truck wasn’t completely destroyed. He didn’t understand why that was, didn’t want to question it. “You never know if he’s fucked with the hood or…”

“Right, yeah,” Richie mumbled. He knew it was unlikely, Bowers probably didn’t know enough to do anything explosive with a car engine, but it was a big risk to take. He was done underestimating them.

He climbed inside the truck anyway, sitting behind the wheel. Mike grabbed the brush and began
running it across the empty back area, just to be sure none had fallen out that way. Stanley climbed in on the passenger side, scooting up so that there would be enough room for Mike on the Houndstooth Bench. He didn’t bother joining them though, instead inspecting the exterior to see if there was any more damage that he would be capable of fixing.

Mike liked to be helpful, and he figured it was a nice, time consuming distraction.

“Asshole better not have touched my cassettes,” Richie said, running his finger along the cassette player. It looked as if the cassette was still in, but Richie didn’t remember which he had played last. “I’ll kill him, Stanley, I swear to Christ.”

“Don’t say the Lord’s name in vain,” Mike called out, a perfect imitation of Maggie Tozier. Richie and Stan both snorted.

“It’s called for,” Richie countered, “But if you prefer, I’ll swear to Satan.”

“Swear it to me,” Stanley said, smirking playfully. “Then take one for the fuckin’ team.”

They were laughing, then, and it felt damn fucking good, but the truck wasn’t forgotten. Nothing was. Richie reached over and began feeling in the pockets of the truck doors, checking the cassette boxes lying around. Most of them had the wrong tape in, and there were several untitled mixtapes in blank boxes.

“Check the glovebox, Staniel,” Richie said, feeling under his seat for any more. All he found was a spec of glass, which somehow did not cut.

Stan reached forward without giving it a second thought. He put his hand on the front, then noticed the mark, unsure of how he hadn’t before.

It was red. A deep red, bordering on a brown. Kind of like dried blood. Very alike blood, in fact. His breath hitched, but then he looked to Richie’s thumb, and forced himself to relax. It was Richie, it had to be. His truck was always filthy anyway, this shouldn’t have unsettled him so.

Stanley brushed his finger over it, looked back to Richie’s thumb, then up at his face. Richie was looking at him expectantly, brow furrowed in borderline confusion. There was a mark on his glasses very close to that on the compartment door. An almost identical one on his forehead, from where he had pushed his ginger curls out of his face. It was nothing, Stan told himself.

He pulled the glovebox open.

“Jesus fucking Christ-“

“What the fuck is that-“

Stanley slammed it back shut, feeling bile pool in his stomach. He stared at the space it had been, eyes fixed and frozen as his mind reimagined what they had just seen.

“What the fuck?” Mike practically shot back to the front of the truck, standing beside the open passenger door. “What is it? What? Are you okay?”

Both of the other losers were unresponsive to that question. Richie looked horrified, face scrunched up somewhere between disgust and confusion. Stanley just looked completely disconnected, frozen with an expression that was void of any emotion beside pure terror. Mike was worried, to say the least.
“The-The-The fuckin- The fuckin’ glovebox-“ Richie gasped, pulling it back open for Mike to see. Stan reacted then, letting out a horrified wail as the sight was forced back upon him.

“Is that a…” Mike looked at it, forcing down the urge to vomit.

It was fat, long and pink, but drenched in a dark red at one end. The red, which was most certainly blood, covered most of the cassettes in the glove box. It look shrivelled, dry and beyond disgusting.

“It’s a tongue,” Stanley whispered, and before anything other words could leave his mouth, a surge of vomit shot from his stomach. As if the truck wasn’t fucked up enough.

“Whose tongue?”

Eddie had known that going home was inevitable, but that didn’t mean he was okay with it. His Mother hadn’t bothered yelling, instead using her favourite method of control on her son: guilt tripping. And it was working, as it always tended to.

The tears, fake or no, always made Eddie fill with regret. The child within him still desperately wanted to make his dear Mother proud, even if the teenager alongside was brimming with rage over the undeniable abuse. Guilt tripping wasn’t his least favourite of her antics though, he supposed the psychotic screaming was worse, and usually resulted in Sonia giving herself a migraine, which she always blamed on the stress Eddie gave her. Screaming came hand in hand with the guilt trips.

This time, she was sobbing, holding his hands in her own and balling into them. Eddie remained silent, had been since he tried to explain everything going on. She hadn’t brought Richie up yet, just Bill and the gun and the run. It was very likely that Sonia was going to try and block out what her son was doing with Richie. The AIDs warnings that she’d given him his entire life clearly had not gotten through, but Sonia was in too much despair to try and give another.

“Why are you doing this to me, Eddie?” Sonia Kaspbrak cried out, “Who’s corrupted you like this?”

“Nobody,” He whispered, though he feared that if he put thought into that question, he could find a few names. And he feared, deep down, that Richie Tozier could be one of those names.

Maybe if he had always been the obedient boy his Mother had dreamed of, and attempted to mould, then things wouldn’t be so bad for him now. Maybe home would be bearable, maybe he’d have a normal, functioning friendship group, maybe he wouldn’t be playing a game of chicken with a vicious, psychotic bully. Maybe.

It really wasn’t worth the test. Or the thought, because regardless, it was a little too late.

Maybe Eddie had been corrupted, and maybe that was the fault of his chaotic, no-good friends - though Eddie was almost certain it had more to do with the vicious gang that had terrorised him throughout the duration of his youth. Either way, Eddie figured being corrupted wasn’t all that bad if it meant he wasn’t living under his Mother’s thumb for the rest of his life.

“Nobody,” Eddie insisted, louder, as if trying to convince himself. He hadn’t been corrupted. Corrupted would suggest there was something wrong with the way he was, and there wasn’t…was there?
Sonia could see the cogs turning in his mind, and decided to let it brew in his own head. As far as she was concerned, Richie Tozier and the rest of those no-good friends were to blame. Eddie would realise in his own time, she hoped.

“Oh, Eddie-bear,” She huffed, letting her voice trail off. “You’ll see it one day. I only want what’s best for you, darling, you know that, don’t you? You understand? I do know what’s best for you. Mothers always know best.”

“Of course.” It was spoken through gritted teeth.

“Now,” Sonia changed her tone. “You’re going to have to promise me there won’t be any more incidents with the window. Don’t make me board it up, Eddie-bear. I’ll hurt my back again! You can’t do that to me.”

She wasn’t yelling, it was rare she did. There didn’t need to be volume for Eddie to understand loud and clear - the bite was always in the undertone of her voice. He knew what to listen for by now.

“I promise, Ma,” Eddie whispered, hesitantly. She smiled, then kissed his cheek - wet and forceful. Eddie knew he’d gotten off lightly in the grand scheme of things, but only because Sonia was so afraid. Afraid enough to take the first promise he had made.

He wasn’t sure that was a promise he could keep, but part of him wanted to try. Somehow, being home felt safer than out there, but there were monsters either way.

At least the monster at home didn’t want him dead.

- 

Patrick woke up from his nap at around the same time that Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris and Mike Hanlon discovered the severed tongue, and at the exact same time that Sonia Kaspbrak had manipulated her child into promising he wouldn’t leave again.

There were many other notable things occurring in Derry at this precise time: Benjamin Hanscom and Beverly Marsh necking in his bedroom after the six course meal his mother had practically force fed them; Bill Denbrough listening to his Aunt complain about “Those-Darn-Homos-Down-The-Road” and swallowing his own vomit back down; Peter Gordon feeling around in the dark for something to fucking kill himself with; Henry Bowers mutilating a mouse he stumbled across on his kitchen floor; And last but not least, Butch Bowers sliding a threatening anonymous note into the locker of a colleague to ensure that the investigation of the tyre fire and surrounding events would be brought to a holt.

Somehow, Patrick Hockstetter was doing something that was more interesting than any of the above. He was sat in Neibolt with two friends, pacing around the empty living room with a cigarette in one hand and a bottle of Budweiser in the other. There was a pen knife in his front pocket, of course.

“We’re going to the cellar,” Patrick announced, slotting into Henry’s place as leader with grace and ease. “Right now.”

“What you thinking, Pat?” Vic asked, rising obediently. Belch followed, keeping his beer in hand of course.

“We’re taking something else off Gordon,” Patrick said, practically vibrating on the spot in a sick imitation of excitement. “We’re taking something better.”
“Like what?” Belch inquired, feeling a familiar anxiety grow. “His teeth?” Belch figured he could live with that. He’d knocked a fair few teeth out in his time. Henry and Patrick seemed to enjoy collecting those, had a big box full somewhere. Belch tried not to think about how they got so many, but he knew. He knew too fucking well.

Teeth were tolerable. Teeth were nothing he hadn’t done before. But teeth were too easy for Patrick. Teeth were too fucking tame for a nut job like him.

“Close.”

“Finger?” Vic suggested, almost hopeful. A finger was easy. He’d seen a severed finger before, actually.

He’d seen a severed arm, too.

“Colder,” Patrick chimed, voice sinister as ever. “Come on boys, get creative!” He laughed then, howling at the inside joke he had with himself, as if he knew something that they didn’t. He did, to be fair.

“Hand?” Belch didn’t like the sound of that so much.

“Arm?” Vic hated the sound of that - it would be a very messy clean up.

“Wrong and wrong,” Patrick said, still smiling.

“Jus’ tell us Pat,” Belch groaned. Patrick laughed then, and nodded slowly.

“I’m thinking an eye, my friends,” Patrick confessed, “I’m thinking his eyes. I’m thinking we scoop ‘em out and show him what the darkness really is. And I’m thinking we ship’ em off to our precious little losers. Richie’s got his tongue. Can’t treat him and not the rest, right?”

He didn’t miss the way Vic gulped, nor the way Belch’s eyes widened with shock or how he shuffled on his feet uncomfortably. And he didn’t miss how that silence screamed fear. You see, unlike Henry, Patrick had a dangerous amount of intelligence, and was particularly skilled at reading people, reading emotion and language.

He knew, had always known, that Vic and Belch did not like dealing with torture, nor the deaths that came from this. They avoided it and for reasons Patrick couldn’t understand, Henry seemed to just let them. He didn’t care. Patrick did. Patrick found it quite pathetic. Patrick found it, more than anything, amusing. Fear was always the thing he thrived off of creating, and the fact he created it in his own friends made him a little bit too happy. That was where he and Henry differed, because Henry didn’t even see it that way. Henry didn’t even give much passing thought to Vic and Belch having a disinterest in the murders. As far as he was concerned, they were still responsible for them, they were still connected, and therefore still played a significant role. So long as they were letting it happen, he would not give a flying fuck how much or how little they wanted to participate in taking their peers lives.

After all, it meant all the more fun for him, didn’t it?

Patrick sensed it was deeper than that. Patrick sensed they were afraid. That meant they were weak, and weak links were a bad sign, especially in a gang so small. The point of this little ploy was less about fucking with the Losers, a little bit about getting his kicks, and little more about toughening up his dear friends. Because they were dear to him, in his own fucked up way.

Patrick didn’t do love, had never felt such a thing in his life, but he had something that mimicked
that for his three friends, and maybe one or two others. It was a feeling he didn’t quite understand, bubbly and peaceful and positive. Something inside of Patrick didn’t really want to understand it.

At one time, Patrick had felt the same for Peter Gordon, but as proven by the severed tongue, such a feeling was long gone. Peter had abandoned them, and that had deeply hurt Patrick (not that he would ever confess this out loud, he would sooner cut his own fucking tongue out). That was, he supposed, why he had reacted so badly to seeing Peter again, to having him in such close proximity. He reacted the only way he knew how - violently.

For the first half of the event, Patrick had done a good job of holding it in. They had all exchanged pleasant and peculiar conversation with the boy, almost forgetting about his sister, whom they had brutally murdered, and Patrick had dared hope that Peter would get back on board with their antics. Of course, as soon as they began building up the heap of tyres, Peter had stopped being so much fun. He began begging to go home, began getting cold, began showing fear.

And then, he tried to leave.

Patrick didn’t want to let him do that again. He enjoyed his company all too much, he supposed. So he reacted the only way he knew how: brutally.

The two fought viciously, Patrick with an indisputable advantage, and the rest of the gang had watched in a daunting silence - Henry fixated on the sight, enthused. Eventually, Peter took control of the fight. Patrick let him. He liked it, a little, found a sick amusement in it - even when Peter threw his shoulder against the truck with a force so hard it dented the metal and dislocated the shoulder. That was when Vic stepped in, taking hint from Henry’s nod.

Vic managed to overpower Peter with ease, but ended up injured too, as Peter threw his knee into the bottom of his spine.

From there they had thrown him into the back of the truck. Locked him in it, actually. They set the fire and vandalised the truck some more. Then, sent Belch to get his own. It didn’t take him too long, and by the time he returned, Peter was out of the truck and on the floor, sobbing.

“I know what I wanna do you,” Patrick had whispered, knife at the ready. “I wanna fuckin’ rip you open. Like I did your fuckin’ sister. I’m gonna’ slice you up. Cut you open slow. Let you bleed out and watch-“

“Patrick,” Henry’s voice had been a warning. Patrick licked his lips, then moved ever so slightly back from the boy, who was quivering with a combination of fear and rage. “We’re not killing him.”

(Peter wished he had, in hind sight).

That had flooded Vic and Belch with relief, but also sparked more curiosity. What else was there to do? He knew too much, but maybe he always had, and that had never made a difference before. It probably never would.

“But he’ll tell,” Vic rationalised, a sentence that surprised himself and his friends.

“Damn fucking right-“ Peter tried to yell. He was shut up by Henry, who kicked his jaw.

“He won’t,” Henry said, voice flat as he pressed down on Peter’s jaw with his foot. He didn’t do this quite hard enough to break it, but just enough so that Peter could not force it open. “He ain’t saying a word.”
Patrick caught on.

“Ain’t ever,” Patrick mused, in a sickening state of awe after realising. Peter realised then, and attempted to scream, only successfully doing so for a split second, because as soon as the foot was off of his jaw, a fist was in his mouth. Vic and Belch, obedient as ever, dragged him up, pinning him against the car as Patrick pushed his boney hand further into the mans biting mouth. The teeth didn’t bother him.

Henry watched, smiling at the show. Patrick had the tongue sliced out in a matter of seconds.

And now, he wanted to slice something else. Peter was the most satisfying option for him. It had been a long time coming, he figured.

This summer was about unfinished business, after all. Peter was only the start.

-“It has to be real,” Mike insisted. He’d finished cleaning the blood up. Stanley had handled his own puke, and Richie had gone into the garden to kick the wall and scream in private.

He had just returned, and the truck was clean again, however the tongue sat on a blank cassette box on the dashboard. Mike had bravely picked it up, balancing it on that surface to avoid touching it too much, and to avoid getting it on anything else. The less it touched the better.

“No fucking way.” It was probably the denial fuelling Richie, but he was happy to live in that state if it meant he didn’t have to acknowledge that someone had left a severed tongue in his fucking glovebox. “No. No. They wouldn’t. They- They-”

“They did, Richie,” Mike cut in, his voice soft yet certain. The ‘they’ that the boys were referring to was more than obvious, and mutually understood. “And we probably shouldn’t be this surprised. They’re getting more creative.”

“Do you think it’s some sort of threat?” Stan asked, eyes glued to it from outside the vehicle. He refused to get back in after cleaning up the vomit, and had refused to get back into the truck unlike Mike and Richie, who were sat in the front attempting some sort of visual examination - though there wasn’t all that much to examine. It was a tongue. It was real. Didn’t that tell them enough?

“Well it’s a tongue,” Mike said, “And it was left for Richie, who can’t fucking hold his tongue.”

“Jesus Fucking Christ,” Richie spat, as the realisation dawned on him. Then, the panic. “They’re out to fuckin’ get me. It’s gonna be me! I’m gonna’ be the first- Fuck! They’re gonna fuckin’- I’m gonna be fuckin’ killed! He’s gonna’ fuckin’ shut me up- That’s what he’s saying! It’s a threat, it’s a fuckin’ threat! *Shit-Bitch-Bastard-Cunt-Fuckin-Bastard-Ass-Bitch-

He was sobbing and yelling, smacking the wheel with every curse, and hysterical in a way neither of his friends had seen him before. It was fear, but it was fear in a much more intense volume. This was fear combined with panic and anxiety and dread. Fear in its most vicious form.

In reality, the tongue had been placed there out of spontaneous choice, something closer to a joke than a warning, but there was no doubt that Bowers would have been very accepting of that interpretation too, and the losers didn’t have reason to think otherwise. Anything action from Bowers had to be considered a threat, given the circumstances. The fear in Richie Tozier was not misplaced.

“Calm down,” Mike pleaded, “Richie please- Richie- Lord help me- Stop yelling-“ He didn’t,
instead repeating the same curse words louder and louder. It was a small blessing that his parents weren’t home, because if they had heard the scene they would have been there in seconds, and there was no hiding the large severed body part sat on their sons’ dashboard. “

“Come here.” Stan, for once, inexplicably, was the calmest of all three. He ran to Richie’s side of the truck and pulled open the door. Richie staggered out and threw himself to the ground, crying and instead mumbling the same expletives. “Hey, hey- Richie, look at me.”

He knelt down, eye to eye with Richie, who was staring at him through fogged up glasses and tearful eyes. Stan didn’t quite know what to say. In all the years he had known Richie, through all the torture they had endured together, he had never seen him quite like this.

Yet, then again, nobody had ever left Richie a severed tongue in his semi-destroyed truck, so maybe the extreme reaction shouldn’t have taken Stan by surprise.

“Calm down,” Stan whispered it, and reached out to cup Richie’s face. He flinched at the touch, but let it happen. They knew that Richie wasn’t one for intimacy, he wasn’t much of a hugger, nor emotionally open in many ways at all - except maybe with Eddie. But that was different. Stan was relieved to see Richie accept the contact. He only did so at his most broken or serious, or in his playful and brash antics. “Calm. Down.”

“He’s gonna kill me,” Richie whispered. It was then that Stan noticed how much he was shaking. It was erratic, uncontrollable. “Eddie was right. Eddie’s been right this entire time.”

Stan nodded. Mike nodded. And suddenly, they felt kind of bad for brushing off his insistence of this.

There was a tongue in the truck. A human tongue. And anyone capable of doing that was most definitely capable of murder. Anyone leaving a threat like that most definitely had the intention to murder. This was Bowers, how did they ever doubt such a thing?

“This is fucked,” Richie spat, and leaned into Stan, who decided against simply holding his face and instead reached to hold Richie properly. Richie sobbed into his neck, and Stan wondered if this was the last time he would hear his friend sob like this. He sure fucking hoped so, because despite how annoying and cruel and outright stupid he could be, Stan loved Richie in a way he found quite indescribable.

Richie had been Stan’s first ever friend. They had stuck together the first dreadful weeks of school, and always balanced each other out. Where Richie was loud and brash, Stanley was quiet and sensible. Richie defended him to the end of the earth, and Stanley They both recalled the early days of the bullying, when Victor Criss and Henry Bowers had chased them round the playground with sticks and stolen their lunch money. When calling Stanley anti-Semitic names and breaking Richie’s glasses was the worst they ever did.

Even when they befriended Bill and Eddie, and later Ben and Bev, and then Mike Hanlon, Stan had always considered Richie to be his best friend. He didn’t remember that ever changing, he only really remembered the growing frustration and the constant pointless bickering and digs they’d make to one another. But it never changed.

And he knew, from the gut-wrenching sorrow he felt seeing Richie cry, that it would never change.

“He’s trying to fuck with you,” Stan said, “He’s trying to get into your head.”

Like he’s in mine, Stan thought, privately.
“You can’t let him.” Easier said than done, but they all knew that. It went without saying. “You can’t let him, Rich. You never have before.”

“This is…” Richie wanted to say different, but he wasn’t all that sure if it was so different. Maybe it was just worse. More violent, more personal or direct. Richie wasn’t sure if any of those things were true. Was it the most violent thing? There was too much to compare it to. Was it the most personal thing? And most things Bowers did were direct in one way or another. Richie didn’t know what word to use. “This…it feels different, Stan. It feels…it feels fuckin’ bad, like-like real fuckin’ bad.”

“It is real bad, Rich,” Stan said, because he could never lie about such a thing. There was no sugarcoating this. ‘But we’ve been dealing with real bad ever since Henry Bowers laid eyes on us in first grade. It’s harder now, I know, real bad is getting worse, but it’s almost over. And it’s a little less bad when we’re with each other.’

It was that train of thought that kept Stanley sane through all of his worry and stress, but it was an easy train to lose.

“It’s more than that,” Richie mumbled, his voice quiet as he slowly pulled away from Stanley, eyes now almost vacant. “Stan I…I can’t- I-“

“Forget it,” Mike called out, softly. He was making his way around the truck to his friends, and knelt with them. “Deep breaths.”

“I want to kill him,” Richie whispered, voice serious and cold in a way neither Stan nor Mike had ever heard before. “I want to fuckin’ kill him.”

“Don’t we all,” Stan said, chuckling awkwardly after. It wasn’t that he didn’t want Bowers to die, he secretly hoped for that every fucking day. Stanley, like most people in Derry, wished a painful death upon both Bowers men, and their accomplices too, but Stanley just didn’t ever dream of doing such a thing himself. He didn’t have it in him, couldn’t even stomach the thought.

Richie was different. Richie had enough rage and fear and grief inside of him to fuel such an action.

And maybe that was why he was so afraid. Because for the first time in his life, he felt strongly enough to truly want to do it. Richie had fantasised about Henry Bowers death many times, and casually contemplated vigilante justice just as many, but he had never truly wanted to kill him. Not like this.

Because this, he realised, was more than just a strong hope or desire to react violently. This was more pure. Richie had never felt such a thing before. All he could feel was the intensity of the overwhelming need to fucking hurt the Bowers Gang. Only, he didn’t want to just hurt them. He wanted to rip their tongues out and force them back down their fucking throats. He wanted to carve words into their skin and whisper sick words in their ears. He wanted to plunge a knife into their gut and hear them cry out. He wanted to take Bill’s gun and pull the trigger against Bowers head.

And suddenly, he understood how they felt about the losers. Because he felt the fucking same. And it made him sick. Because he wasn’t like them. He wasn’t evil and twisted or psychotic and deranged. He was just a damaged teenager tired of being traumatised and attacked by vicious abusers. And he was so broken by the violence, so fucked up after so many incidents, that he wanted to bring justice.
Justice for them all. Not just the losers, because Lord knew they weren’t the only ones.

Richie hoped they would be the last. And something, maybe that God-awful feeling in his gut, told him that they probably fucking would be.

“So why don’t we?”
The cellar was dark. Peter hadn’t adjusted after his time down there, though he wasn’t sure how much time that was anyway. Maybe it had been a day, maybe it had been a week. The constant passing out wasn’t helpful to his time-keeping, but it was definitely better than being awake in that hell-hole.

Nobody had entered, though he’d heard footsteps and voices above. And he assumed it had been a fair amount of time because he was absolutely desperate for something to eat or drink.

His throat was burning with how dry it was, and he felt sick from starvation. He hadn’t moved in a while either, in too much agony to bother attempting.

Peter had just woken up from yet another unconscious episode when he heard the voices above. They were muffled, too much so for him to really take a shot at who they belonged to. He considered calling out, but automatically assumed they were not there to help him, and something told him they were probably more interested in the opposite.

*If they were even real.*

Peter wasn’t so sure anymore. He couldn’t differentiate between reality and the warped nightmares, and knew hallucinations would be on the cards given his mental state. The previous day, he could have sworn that he heard someone else in the cellar, a voice no louder than a whisper, almost childlike. There was nothing. He was certain that nobody else was down there with him.

But sometimes, it felt like there was.

The voices were getting louder, this time. And there were footsteps. They got louder and louder, slower and slower, until they came to sudden holt. Peter held his breath, anticipating the worse.

And suddenly, a door opened.

Peter wondered, for just a second, if that was the worst thing that could happen. It was a valid question, for obvious reasons.

The light made his eyes burn - Peter hadn’t even realised they were open - but he squeezed them shut before daring to look who was there.

He could make out three silhouettes at the top of a staircase. He had felt the staircase, contemplated crawling up, but he didn’t have the energy, nor the will. It was too scary not knowing what could be at the top, and Peter knew that if Bowers was involved it could not be good news.

Now, he waited at the bottom as the three men approached. Peter knew who they were. It was
Patrick, Vic and Belch. Where Henry was, he did not know. Nor did he really care. He just hoped this would be quick and painless - a lot to ask from three people so vicious.

“Well, well, well,” Patrick called out. He was at the front, practically skipping down the stair case whilst Vic and Belch stood at the top, obviously hesitant. They had never stepped foot in the cellar before, but it was just as horrific as they imagined it to be. And the smell was sickening, worse than they recalled. “He’s still breathing, boys.”

If Peter could have spoken, he would have begged to stop. Instead, he let out a strange, sadistic wail.

Victor hit the light switch, curious to see the state of not only Peter, but the cellar in general. He regretted that choice instantly. Peter didn’t want to thank him for it either, deciding as soon as his vision came into focus that the darkness was better.

There were blood stains on the vast majority of surfaces, covering almost all of the floor, and even splattered across the walls; Shit and piss; Rats, dead and alive; Remnants of clothes, odd child-size shoes; And in the centre: a fucking well. It was covered over with a large wooden surface. But there it sat. Peter had wondered what the strange circular thing had been. Now that he knew, he feared it more than ever.

Vic wasn’t so disturbed by the setting though, he had expected that. For him, the horror was all in the man laid out in the middle of the room. Belch’s expression was on the cusp of fascination and disgust.

“Oh my god.”

Peter Gordon was barely recognisable as a human, looking more similar to a vampire or a fresh turned zombie. His mouth was brown, and his chin was block red and crusty from blood. His eyes were red and bloodshot, wide with fear. He looked drenched, but Vic knew it was nothing but sweat covering him - forcing his hair to stick to his bloodied forehead and his clothes to clamp down onto his burning and bruised skin. There was a vomit stain down his shirt, unpleasantly red from the blood that had come up with it, and the look in his eyes told them exactly how tortured he was.

Smaller details went unnoticed, like the way his jeans were fraying above the knees from crawling, or how his palms were raw and bloodied from feeling around the floor.

But it wasn’t enough, it couldn’t be. Not for Patrick.

“Help me,” Peter cried out, though it sounded more like a random assortment of vowels than an actual sentence. He didn’t bother trying again, knowing the effort was more traumatic than it was worth. And it wasn’t like they were there to help him, he knew better than that. They were there, most likely, to kill him. To be honest, Peter was hoping for death, he had accepted that it was coming - well overdue, really. There was no surprise that it would be at the hands of the Bowers Gang, either. Hell, he’d been expecting that for years.

It was just a matter of miserable time - and not just for Peter Gordon.

“Would ya’ look at that boys?” Patrick chuckled, “He’s a fucking work of art.”

Nobody begged to differ, not openly. Instead, they began to follow Patrick down the staircase. Defiance wasn’t an option, and their own sick and twisted curiosity was taking over. Vic and Belch had never ventured this far down before. They had never wanted to see what lurked below. Victor
was too afraid that he wouldn’t hate it all that much, and he didn’t. Not so far.

Vic didn’t hate it at all, actually. As disgusting and vile as it was, somehow, he felt almost comfortable. Sane and safe. Like he was where he belonged. Maybe that was how Patrick felt down here, maybe that was why he liked it so much. Vic didn’t understand, and decided in that brief moment of contemplation that he did not want to, that he should just enjoy it and worry later.

The closer the three got, the further Peter backed away - survival instinct despite already knowing there was no chance of survival now he was there.

“Who’s gonna’ do the honours?” Patrick asked, producing the knife from his pocket and holding it up. The blade was no bigger than three inches, covered in dried blood and jagged on one side. Vic knew from mere observation that it was one of his favourites.

Belch stared at Vic with pleading eyes. He loved violence, but he did not love blood. They all knew this was going to be bloody. Belch thought this could be more than that: deadly. Vic returned the stare, his stomach churning as he realised Belch would never volunteer for such a thing.

“I’ll go,” Vic found himself saying, robotically. Maybe he was doing it to be a good friend. Maybe he was doing it because he was in the mood to inflict some serious fucking pain. Either way, he found himself stepping forward and taking the knife from Patrick, who was grinning from ear to ear. Pride, Vic assumed.

Peter screamed out again. Somehow, this sound did not emotionally effect Vic. He liked it, if anything, it was like a soundtrack to the violence. Vic closed in, slowly. With every step, Peter would cry out louder, his mouth open wide as if to show off what it was missing. He didn’t stand though, and Vic figured that was because he couldn’t. The fight had been violent enough to cause that kind of damage.


Victor crouched, eye level with his victim, who was staring at him with a look that was almost entirely unreadable. Rage was in their somewhere, probably due to his intense loathing of Victor Criss. There was fear, naturally, because Peter had no idea where that knife was going to go, yet hope, as if he allowed himself to think Vic was going to go against his orders. Optimism like that didn’t belong in Derry.

Neither did Peter, as far as anyone down there was concerned.

Peter’s screaming stopped, and desperate, panicked pants took their place. This didn’t deter Vic though, he knew what he had to do. Peter didn’t miss that gulp though, or the sweat beading on his forehead.

It occurred to him that Victor Criss’s face, one he detested so fucking deeply, could be the last thing he ever saw. The thought made him want to puke, but his stomach was empty and his throat was too shattered. The thought made his gut suddenly ache to live. Little did Peter know, the thought was right. Victor’s face might have been the last thing he would ever see.

But not in the way that he thought. And he came to realise this when the knife was raised to his exact eye level.

“Slowly,” Patrick repeated, voice thick with something Vic didn’t recognise.

“How do I...” Vic realised that he wasn’t entirely sure how to go about it, which was understandable considering his lack of experiencing in plucking eyeballs out. He turned, looking to
his friends curiously, but holding the knife in position.

What he saw when he did turn, was a shock to his system. Belch was stood further back, as if he had backed away intentionally. Vic supposed he had, but spent less than a second making this observation because the real sight to see back there was Patrick. It should have been unsurprising, but Vic still felt his gut twist with discomfort and his jaw drop with shock when he clocked it.

Patrick had his hand shoved down the front of his jeans. It was moving, slowly.

Patrick was touching himself.

He was staring at the scene before him wide-eyed with a chesire-cat like smile, and didn’t seem deterred by Vic’s shocked expression, not even slightly. He continued, as if it was the most normal thing in the World. To him, it kind of was. To Vic and Belch, this was insanity personified - not that they were picturesque examples of sanity by any standard.

Vic gulped, then spoke up again. “How do I do it?”

“What?” Patrick scoffed, continuing, “You want a fucking tutorial?”

“I…” Vic wasn’t sure how to respond to that. His eyes were still glued to Patrick’s fumbling, clothed hand, and he tore his eyes away at this realisation, instead glancing back to Belch, who seemed to be looking everywhere but there. He had clearly noticed too. Then, Vic looked back to Peter, who was fixated on the blade still centimetres from his eye, shaking. Obviously, he was not aware of the man getting off to his torture.

Patrick got his kicks from this in more ways than one, Vic suddenly understood why he had never been forced to help out in the cellar before.

The thing was, they knew that Patrick got things out of the violence, but Vic had never thought it was the violence that did it for him. He assumed it was the victims, the screams or the physical contact or… Well, Vic didn’t really know. It was something he avoided thinking about, despite noticing Patrick’s ‘excitement’ in the past. He always just figured he was a queer or something (‘or something’ was more fitting).

“I guess,” Vic mumbled, holding the knife out. Patrick sighed, removed his hand and marched over like he hadn’t just been jacking it in front of his friends. Thing was, he didn’t give a fuck if they noticed. Henry knew, Henry had never cared. As far as Patrick was concerned, they weren’t allowed to give a shit, and if they did - if it made them feel violated or uncomfortable or whatever the fuck - all the more fun for him. It wasn’t like they were going to stop him, was it?

This was hardly the most fucked up thing he had done, after all.

“Good thing he’s got two fuckin’ eyes then,” Patrick snarled, snatching the knife. Vic gulped and took a large step back from Peter, who had just learned about his fate. He brought one shaking hand up to touch his right eye, and before he could even process the idea of losing it, the blade plunged into his left.

In that moment, it wasn’t clear whose scream was loudest. The agony, the most intense and unbearable mass Peter could have imagined shot through his entire body, eliciting a high-pitched howl from the pit of his stomach. The blood that shot out triggered a shout from Belch, paired with the shock from the speed of Patrick’s movement. Then Vic, who was sickened from the sight close up.

If he thought Peter had looked scary before, he hadn’t prepared himself at all for what was to
come, because now, he looked like something from a fucking nightmare. A halloween costume contest winner, that was for sure. Blood was squirting and dripping from his eye, which remained wide open in the socket as Peter clawed at Patrick, who was slowly pulling it back out, causing all the more to squirt.

“FuckFuckFuckFuck-“ Vic gasped under the sound of screams. Belch had fallen silent again, but had shuffled even further back up the stairs. He knew better than to try and leave, though.

“Didn’t work,” Patrick said, dropping the knife. If Peter hadn’t been in a state of shock, or disoriented from blood loss, maybe he’d have tried to grab for it. The effort would have been redundant, but it was a nice fantasy for him through the agony. He screamed, which made his throat hurt all the more, which encouraged further screaming. “Guess we don’t need the knife for this one, Victor.”

Everyone understood what that meant. Patrick demonstrated anyway, plunging his fingers into the socket and pulling.

Somewhere between the entering and the exit, Peter passed out - head falling back against the brick as his screaming came to an end. It was the closest thing he could get to a blessing.

“Look at that baby,” Patrick held the eye up, “Perfect.”

Vic and Belch were fixated on the boy slumped against the wall. The human part of them filled with sorrow, fear and disgust. The not-so-human part of them was considerably fascinated, and Vic couldn’t ignore the elation he felt deep down. Sometimes, he enjoyed being a sick fuck too, even if he wasn’t quite on Patrick’s level.

“He’s gonna bleed out,” Belch pointed out, “He-He’s gonna die.”

“Mmph,” Patrick mumbled, “Tragic.”

“But Henry won’t want us to…to finish without him,” Belch said, mostly just dreading the inevitable clean-up.

“Little too late for that,” Vic mumbled, and he wondered if he was watching the life drain out from Peter Gordon. He was not, the life in Peter had died with the kid they killed all those years ago. They were simply watching his body bleed out.

Vic decided to speed up the process, for everyone’s sake, and his own satisfaction. Because sometimes, he really did enjoy being a sick fuck. So he did as Patrick had suggested, and plunged his fingers into Peters’ other eye socket. It was harder than he had expected to rip the eye out, but with a bit of force, thirty seconds later, Victor found himself with an eyeball in his hand.

And the exhilaration hit.

He didn’t even mind all that much that Patrick was getting off on it again, didn’t even mind that Belch seemed to be curling in on himself with disgust. Didn’t at all mind when the lifeless body of Peter Gordon fell forward and hit the ground with a large slap. He knew the adrenaline would soon be replaced with crippling guilt, but that was a problem for later. Vic was going to enjoy his mania while it lasted - it was the only way to deal with such an overwhelming emotion.

“Which loser gets this gift then?”
“Are you joking?” Stanley asked, forcing himself to laugh. Richie was silent, teary eyes staring back with a certainty that filled his friends with fear.

He wasn’t joking, they realised.

“Richie, we- we can’t.” Mike didn’t even know where to begin with that one. He wanted Bowers dead too, of course he did, but not like that. That blood didn’t belong on their hands…did it?

“Why not?” Richie inquired, genuinely confused. He’d reached breaking point. Suddenly, Bill’s stunt with the gun didn’t seem so outlandish. Bill had broken too. And that was better. They needed to break, he realised. “It’s us or it’s them?”

“It doesn’t have to be,” Stan said, though he didn’t truly believe that. It was easier to pretend, he didn’t want to cave into the anxieties - not again. “We’re fine if we just stick together, Rich.”

“And how long do you think we can do that for?” Richie scoffed, “You think we can keep that up forever? We’ve already fucked it, Stan. Bill’s off alone. Eddie’s trapped alone-“

“But they’re safe-“

“There is no safe,” Richie snapped, maybe a little too harshly, “Bev has to be alone. You think her Dad’s gonna let this out-every-day-business keep flying? You think our parents are gonna tolerate this sleep-over-every-night bullshit? You’re fuckin’ delusional. We have to be alone eventually. And then he’ll fuckin’ get us, and we’ll end up dead too. Like every other fuckin’ kid here. Nobody gets out alive, not so long as he is.”

Stanley and Mike knew, in that moment of silence, there was no changing Richie’s mind. So they did not even try.

“Maybe they ain’t dead,” Mike suggested, quietly.

“Then they’re worse off,” Stan mumbled. He hated that he agreed with Richie - hated more that he couldn’t really admit he agreed. It wasn’t like Stanley was willing to do anything anyway. But if his friends did…

Maybe he didn’t have to stop them…

Except he did. Because reason and rationality came into play again and Stan knew they would never win in that sort of fight. And not winning would mean dying. And that wasn’t a war he could just let his friends fight, not without him. Or not at all, according to rationality.

“Don’t you get it?” Richie asked them, “Bowers has to die.”

“You’re right,” Mike said, “I just don’t think it’s our place to decide when, or how. We’re better than that, Richie. We don’t…I mean, Christ- We aren’t murderers. Karma will come for him eventually, just wait this out-“

“I’m tired of waiting,” Richie cut in, maybe a little too aggressively, “What’s the point? How far are we willing to let them take this?”

“As far as we have to,” Mike replied, certain. He was a mostly ethical guy, it was going to take more than a severed tongue to push Mike Hanlon to break his moral code. He’d sooner die than be anything like Bowers, and he hoped Richie would come to see the value in that.

Trouble was, Richie Tozier was one hell of stubborn shit. And he had his mind all set and ready.
Crazy what a smashed up truck and a severed tongue could do, right?

“Fuck that.”

“Do you even realise how psychotic you sound right now?” Stan asked him, genuinely curious.

“You think this is psychotic?” Richie sneered, standing and wiping his eyes quickly. “Someone out there is missing a fucking tongue, Stanley.”

“And parents out there are missing kids, Richie,” Mike reminded him, “But that doesn’t mean you can just…you can’t just go round killing people, Richie! You really think you can get away with that?”

Maybe the craziest part of his entire plan was thinking that Butch Bowers wouldn’t put his head on a stick for the murder of his son. Obviously, Richie hadn’t thought that far ahead.

“Cops in Derry aren’t so great at finding the missing,” Richie shrugged, which would have been a fair point had anyone but the Bowers Gang been behind those that were indeed missing. There was a reason every decent detective hit a brick wall - Butch Bowers had built one six foot tall and six miles deep.

“I think Oscar Bowers might be a little more determined if it’s his child he’s looking for,” Stan said, though it was debatable really. Maybe life would be a tiny bit easier for him if he didn’t have to constantly clean up Henry’s piss and shit. And maybe it would draw any suspicion at all away from him. It wasn’t like he would miss his child - he’d have to be loved to be missed.

Then again, who else would Butch take out his irrational fury on?

“Well I’d be leaving anyway, so it’s not like he could…” Richie began, but the way his voice wavered told his friends of his sudden uncertainty, “I don’t fuckin’ know, alright? But I’m not fuckin’ leaving without doing something about that bastard. I’m not. I can’t- I-“

“There are other things we can do,” Mike cut in, “We don’t have to blow anybody’s brains out to survive. We just have to stick together.”

“Fuckin’ stupid.” Richie mumbled it, but he knew they could hear him. Louder, he said, “We’re doing something about this. We’re not letting this…this bullshit fly. I don’t give a fuck what we have to do anymore. No more blood. Not unless it’s theirs.”

Stanley didn’t want to dispute, but he didn’t want to agree either. Staying silent seemed like the only option. Mike, on the other hand, was far too concerned about Richie’s outburst to stay quiet.

“Let’s try talking, first,” Mike suggested, softly, “A few of us can go, throw a few light threats, make sure they know we’re not playing their fucking games, and then leave. If it continues, maybe we go above Oscar Bowers - out of Derry entirely - and talk about the missing kids and…I don’t know. We’ll figure it out, yeah? But we’re not killing anyone. We go talk, first.”

“Who do we talk to?” Richie asked, seemingly on board with the idea. Stan was too, because it was a much easier option for a fucking world of reasons. “Who do we threaten?”

“We go for the weakest link,” Mike said, as if he’d thought this through before. He didn’t really want them knowing that he had, but it was rather apparent to his friends, who knew him like the back of their hands. “We go for Vic.”
Eddie was unable to sleep. It had been expected, but was unpleasant none the less simply because of how overloaded his mind was. He had too much to think about, too many worries and not enough solutions. Sleeping was supposed to be his way to avoid those thoughts, but as luck would have it, that felt impossible.

Even in the dead of night.

He was staring longingly at his window, curled up in his bed where it should have felt safe. It didn’t. It never did when he was alone. But he was trying not to think about that. The loneliness was maybe the worst part, and that probably had something to do with the fact his eyes were glued to that fucking window. Despite everything, he was praying to everything out there that Richie would appear there in that moment.

Eddie was surprised that he hadn’t already. It was almost out of character for Richie to actually listen to him, and the one time Eddie didn’t really want him to. Trust his luck.

The alarm clock read 1:03AM, and Eddie knew it was highly unlikely that he would turn up then. He wondered if Richie was laid in bed thinking of him so longingly too. He was, of course, but for entirely different reasons, mostly worried about how he was going to tell Eddie of the traumatic day. Eddie was dreaming about being held and safe - ever the romantic.

Defeated, Eddie sat up. He knew that he had to do something, that if he stayed laid there, drowning in thoughts and emotions, that he would work himself into a deep state of despair, and that he didn’t have the mental capacity to do that right then. So he had to do something - anything - to distract himself.

Options for fun were limited within his home. Eddie contemplated jacking it, but knew he was much too stressed for that. He considered trying to call one of the losers, but knew it was probably too late for them to be up or responsive. He had a few unread books, but no desire to start them. Eddie knew he needed something important to focus on. Something that mattered.

The folder sat only two metres from him. Eddie was drawn to it instantly. He was going to think about Bowers no matter what, so he figured he might as well make those thoughts productive.

He got up and grabbed the file, then went into his drawer and pulled out some more of his resources, pens, scissors and a pritt stick. As far as Eddie was concerned, the file would never be complete, there was far too much he didn’t even know about that he could never write about. There was plenty he did know about that he had yet to begin looking into.

Eddie decided to start on that right then. He pulled out a newspaper clipping from one of the plastic wallets filled with things he had yet to put into the actual file. There was a lot of content in that wallet, it scared Eddie as much as it excited him.

He had gathered it all from the library over time, mostly asking Ben and Mike (they spent an exceptional amount of time there) to collect him old newspapers and things on the recent history of Derry. Somewhere in his drawer, there was a clipping of an article that someone had written about Oscar Bowers, praising him for his hard work within the town. Mike had stumbled across it one day, and read it to the losers, disgusted yet amused. Eddie had never told them why he had wanted those things. In fairness, they had never asked.

It had been a while in the making, but the file was mostly just notes of his own experiences, along with the other losers and information on the missing children.

This article was different. A lot of them were, really. Because Mike and Ben didn’t really know
what they were looking for, they’d give him any old article that was based around tragedy or history. Some proved helpful, but most were unrelated and useless. At first glance, this article seemed to fit into the latter category. Eddie almost didn’t bother reading into it. But he remembered this one, Mike had given it to him.

And this story mattered to Mike. It mattered to Eddie, too. Because this article was about The Black Spot, and although that didn’t feel relevant to his own project, or the file at all, Eddie was interested for different reasons.

The Black Spot was the bar for Derry’s people of colour, and was incredibly popular among the locals as well as tourists. It had burned down many years ago - thirteen? Ten? Eddie didn’t really remember, but he knew it wasn’t all that long ago. He was old enough to remember, and not just because it had been so traumatic. It was a very vivid memory, mostly because of Mike.

Mike Hanlon’s parents had died in The Black Spot all those years ago. Their young son had been at home with his Grandpa at the time. Mike remembered it more vividly than any of them. That wasn’t something he talked about though, not at all. Eddie couldn’t really remember it coming up in conversation, Mike was not afraid of his emotions, but this seemed different.

Eddie’s own Father had died when Eddie was still a baby. In some ways, he could relate, and always hoped it was a conversation they could have together, but Mike didn’t seem comfortable with that. Eddie wondered if he had read this article before handing it over. The idea made his heart break a little bit.

His parents had been wonderful people. Mike had adored his Father more than anyone on Earth, and still did. It was a loss that he never really came to terms with, which was more than understandable given the circumstances.

The fire had been a huge tragedy, and even made state-wide news due to the amount of deaths. It was ruled as an accident, apparently starting as a result of faulty wiring, though some people quietly believed otherwise. Eddie kept that in mind, though he had never announced this to his friends, mostly out of respect for Mike, and mostly because there was nothing to really back that up. This was not why it made news though, tragedies in Derry never did, the exception to the rule was The Black Spot because of who died.

The Black Spot was mostly only visited by the people of colour in Derry, but that night, for some unknown reason, a journalist from out of town had paid the place a visit. A white journalist, of course. The woman had perished, along with everyone else in that place that night, bar one man who had managed to escape through a broken window in the back.

That one man had died of a heart attack one week later.

But not before he could insist that the fire had been no accident. Somehow, the comment went ignored by most. Eddie supposed it was easier that way. It wasn’t the only thing that got ignored in Derry, and he was certain it wouldn’t be the last. Unnatural disasters were the norm, and somehow they were accustomed to the lifestyle that came with such a fact.

Eddie skimmed the article, but it was pretty brief, only really talking about the number of deaths, and the dead journalist who had been visiting on private ‘business’, then going on to compliment the beautiful memorial service. As expected though, the focus was on the dead journalist, whose name was Julia Shumway. She was supposedly up and coming - incredibly skilled at her craft and incredibly interested in crime, justice and law, but nobody really knew why she was in Derry at the time. Anyone that had met their death in The Black Spot with her. Eddie wrote the name down.
He contemplated what her private business was about, but no great depth was needed for that thought. She was obviously trying to research or report about the missing children - she wasn’t the first to go there and attempt. Eddie didn’t need to convince himself that he was right, in fact he was certain, with or without proof.

He took out the rest of the newspaper clippings, scrambling through them for anything else on The Black Spot, or Julia Shumway at all. Of course, nothing turned up. Eddie sighed, disappointed but not surprised. It wasn’t like he had ever put much thought into that incident before, wasn’t like he had ever needed to. Would it even fit into the file? How? It didn’t have relevance to anything if it was an accident, and how could he prove that it wasn’t?

He couldn’t. If anybody could have, they would’ve done so all those years ago.

Defeated, Eddie began to put his things away. He was shutting the drawer when he heard footsteps and voices coming from outside. Initially, this filled Eddie with hope. Were the losers already trying to rescue him? They were dumb and hopeful enough to attempt, Eddie knew that much. If anything, he was surprised Richie hadn’t already made the trip over.

But they were strangely loud. The losers weren’t that careless, and rarely loud at all - even when all seven of them were together, with the exception of Richie, they weren’t exactly screamers.

As quietly as possible, Eddie crept out of his bedroom. The noise was coming from the front, Eddie was sure of it - yet another reason there was no way this could be the losers. Front doors were too obvious for rescue missions. They’d go to his window, for sure if Richie had anything to do with it. He made it downstairs when the voices seemed to quieten, as if distant now.

The window seemed like the only rational option, so Eddie peered out of it. He should have been more afraid, but there was something strangely comforting about being in his own home. The one good part of his Mother’s treatment was of course her refusal to let Eddie get hurt. He wondered if that would still stand in the case of a home invasion - not that it was a likely possibility. Every entrance and every exit was tightly bolted shut, Sonia did this with the intention of keeping Eddie in above keeping others out. In that moment, Eddie was almost grateful.

He made it to the window just in time.

Outside of his home, laughing on the streets, were the Bowers Gang. Well, half of them.

It was only Patrick and Belch, and they were chugging from glass bottles as they walked further away from the house, oblivious to their observer. Eddie froze up.

They had to have done something - they wouldn’t drop by for no fucking reason. There was always a reason, as bullshit as those reasons always were. That was when the fear hit him, and home suddenly did not feel so safe. Even as the three boys roamed out of sight, the panic did not lessen.

If he could have, Eddie would have unlocked the door to check the perimeter of his home - see if any nasty messages or surprises had been left. But he was trapped inside whilst the Bowers Gang were out there causing all kinds of God-awful trouble. It made him feel more powerless than he ever had before. It wasn’t like he felt he had to protect his friends, he just despised knowing that he couldn’t safe them even if he wanted to, despised not knowing what was going on out there.

The four walls around him were not protecting him. Bowers could hurt him without even coming near, he realised. And then, the panic got worse.

Eddie couldn’t see much outside, but he went to the closest window anyway and tried to see if
anything was on the porch. It seemed like the obvious choice, and of course it was, but it was the right choice.

On his porch, only meters away yet completely out of reach, sat a small cardboard box. It was too dark to make out any other details, but Eddie didn’t need anything else. He didn’t want anything else. The box was enough - the box was too much.

Eddie did not have any idea what could be inside, he just prayed his Mother wouldn’t get to it first.

Chapter End Notes

comments r adored n appreciated I need feedback to fuel my ego but also to grow as a writer its rlly interesting seeing what y’all think
happy new year, consider this your holiday treat because yall got a fat 7k here to enjoy! it was truly a pleasure, I had sooo much fun with this chapter. hope you enjoy it! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eddie Kaspbrak did not sleep that night. His eyes burned and his head ached and his stomach twisted as he tossed and turned until the sun began to burn through his eyelids and his Mother began banging on his door.

He wasn’t one hundred percent awake, because his thoughts were jumbled and he was drifting between a dream-like state and indescribable panic and worry over what would be waiting in that fucking parcel for him. Eddie, as always, was right to be worried.

On the other side of Derry, Richie Tozier was in an equally as awful headspace. He was lucky enough to manage a few hours of sleep, and somehow got through that without any traumatising nightmares. His mind was a little too drained to function at that time, but the minute he awoke he filled with a range of emotional pain.

Most prominent of all: panic. There was a lot to panic about, but mostly it was just the tongue wrapped up in his glovebox. They had put it back to save for the other losers, to save as evidence of some kind. Mike insisted they had to. The panic wasn’t quite outweighed by the ache in his gut, the longing. He missed Eddie already, which was unsurprising yet frustrating. He sobbed into his pillow, and was strangely glad to be alone.

Stanley Uris was quite the opposite. He awoke next to Mike, and was terribly grateful for the company after the series of twisted nightmares he had suffered through that night. It was nice to sleep beside somebody that wasn’t Bill, sleep beside somebody that didn’t make his heart hurt or his gut twist or his head thump with burning unanswered questions. There was peace, safety and comfort in Mike. Different, in many ways, but better. He didn’t feel so alone.

Mike had slept about as bad as Eddie, watching as Stan tossed and turned and drifted between states of slumber. He managed to nod off just as Stan was awaking for good, and was relieved to be taken out of his mind for a couple of hours. He did not dream.

Bill Denbrough did. His imagination never stopped, not even when he was ten hours down and his body was beginning to force him back to reality. His imagination was not always his friend though, as his nightmare that night had reminded him. Bill couldn’t really remember what had happened, but he had woken up shaking and afraid, thinking about Stan and Georgie and Bowers and his parents and every other fucking thing that terrified him. It was almost a relief that he didn’t remember, really.

Only a few blocks away, Beverly Marsh and Ben Hanscom had slept like babies. Beverly woke up in his arms, wondering if it was the best sleep she’d had in years. Ben always slept alright, aside from the occasional bad dream, so it was nothing out of the norm for him. The only thing that made it anything noteworthy was the fact he had slept with Beverly, which was never not a
beautiful arrangement.

Briefly, Beverly found herself wondering if she would have the luxury of sleeping so peacefully again anytime soon. That thought would soon be crushed, and she should have known as well.

The losers met up behind the Post Office at ten am, all bar Eddie. His lack of presence was felt intensely, like a heavy weight over them all.

Stan and Mike walked to Bill’s, then collected Richie, and then met up with Beverly and Ben.

A silence hung over the group. They exchanged basic small talk, all trying to ignore the heavy, awkward air around them. Richie was sat on the edge of the sidewalk, practically shaking with a cigarette in his mouth and a brown bag beside him.

Mike and Stan couldn’t bring themselves to tell the others what was inside it, and Richie had been trying to psych himself up to do so all morning. Bill hadn’t even really acknowledged it, and wrote all of the strange behaviour down to Eddie being housebound. Beverly and Ben had made a similar assumption, but Beverly had the sense there was something more to it than that. It was obvious that something had happened, something bigger than Eddie or the truck being damaged, or even Butch Bowers giving Richie a light threat.

Beverly made this assumption after spending five minutes with the them. It was obvious in the way Mike couldn’t look anyone in the eye, and spoke with a thick, shaking tone as if didn’t quite believe anything he was saying. It was obvious in the way Stan remained so silent, staring at the ground and shuffling from one foot to the other and back in an endless obsessive loop. It was obvious, undeniably so, in the silence of Richie Tozier.

“Brought lunch?” Beverly asked, oblivious as she pointed at the little brown bag that sat beside Richie.

They froze up, completely silent, until absurdly, Stanley broke out into a fit of hysterical laughter. Every single one of them was caught off guard by this, including Stan himself, who couldn’t quite explain why that tickled him so much. He had always had a weird sense of humour, but this was a little dark, even for him.

“What?” Beverly scoffed, rightfully confused as Richie and Mike stared at Stan with uneven mixtures of confusion, annoyance and concern. “What is it?”

Stan only continued to laugh. *Fucking lunch. If only.*

“Stan?” Bill questioned, as Stan sat down, his laughter somehow turning into strange, breathy heaving sounds, then sobs, as if he was in pain, too much so to get his words out.

“What the fuck?” Beverly seemed almost annoyed at his display. Mike knew better than to be, and knelt beside Stan, considering trying to reach for him as pressed his forehead down to the pavement and sobbed. Mike and Richie, somehow, understood: he had snapped. The weight of the previous day had suddenly hit him like a shit ton of bricks, and he didn’t know how to cope with that. There was no accessible guide on dealing with severed tongues and murder propositions.

“What’s in the bag?” Ben thought to ask, coming to the correct conclusion that it was most definitely *not* lunch.

“Stanley?” Bill resorted to grabbing his fisted hand, too disturbed to not step in. The contact silenced Stan immediately, and he froze on spot, eyes that were filled with terror glued on Bill.

“Wh-What is it?”
“Ain’t no fuckin’ PB&J in there,” Stan spat, lifting his head slowly. He gulped and then collapsed into Bill, who awkwardly patted his back in a pathetic attempt at comforting him. There was no comforting him, not for that.

“What the fuck is going on?” Beverly asked, for what felt like the tenth time in that minute. Mike and Richie exchanged knowing looks, and Mike made the decision to speak up, as expected.

“We found something.” He began, voice shaking, “We found something in Richie’s truck. It was...It was a warning.”

“Huh?” Ben seemed to freeze up, paling as he stared at the bag in a less innocent light. “What do you mean?”

“You don’t wanna fuckin’ know,” Richie replied, shoving it to the centre of their circle, where Stan and Bill were crouched. Stan seemed to be calming though, and reached out of Bill’s loose grasp, instead grabbing for the bag.

“A gift,” Stanley said, tossing it over to where Ben and Bev stood, a little out of the circle. “From our favourite psychopath, of course.”

“Jeez,” Beverly muttered, picking it up casually. She opened it quickly, peering inside as Ben looked over her shoulder. The bag fell to the floor and the two of them paled as it skidded across the road. “Is that a-“

“Human tongue,” Mike confirmed, quietly. Bill, in disbelief, reached for the bag. “Not that we know which human.”

“Then how do you know it’s not an animal?” Bill asked, but a second later, after giving it no more than a quick glance, he wanted to retract the question. It was human, no doubt about it. Bill couldn’t think of a single animal that had a tongue like that.

“Found it in the glovebox,” Mike continued, ignoring Bill’s question completely, “I assume it was personalised for Richie, being a tongue and all, but that could mean they’re sending gifts to us all. They can’t get us alone but that doesn’t mean they can’t get us.”

“Fuck-Fuck-Fuck-“

“We need to report that,” Beverly said, her voice firm and certain despite how she was quivering. The rest of them looked at her completely confused, even Ben seemed a little thrown off by the suggestion. “We need to hand it over to...I don’t know, police- officials- someone.”

“What?” Bill spat, “For it tuh-tuh-to get luh-luh-lost in some eh-evidence locker somewhere?”

The case for finding little George Denbrough had come to a grinding holt when the lead detective on the case misplaced their only bit of evidence. It had never been found again, and the case only continued on for a couple of weeks before they insisted there was nothing they could do. It wasn’t like Denbrough’s put up much of a fight though, defeated by grief and drained from the rage. Bill wanted to fight.

The older Bill Denbrough got, the more he realised it was a losing battle. Cops in Derry weren’t there to help, and nobody outside of Derry cared enough to try.

“I was thinking more DNA, asshole,” Beverly countered, harshly, “That’s a fucking tongue! That belonged to someone! What if it’s one of the missing kids?”
Nobody had really considered that. But then, what difference would it make? Nobody would do a fucking thing so long as Butch was in charge - going by Eddie’s theory, at least.

“Highly unlikely,” Ben pointed out, “First of all, I don’t think they can get that kind of confirmation from a tongue. Second, nobody’s gone missing for a while, Bev. I don’t know how long tongues take to decompose but…”

The six of them stared at the bag, until Bill clicked on.

“They’re missing,” Bill mumbled, “Not dead.” The other five of them exchanged knowing looks. Bill pretended like he didn’t notice, for everyone’s sake.

“Ben’s got a point though,” Mike said, “It’s fresh.”

“As a fuckin’ daisy,” Richie spat, finally rising and dropping his cigarette on the way up. He stomped it out as the other losers watched, uncomfortable and unsure of what to say. “We’re gonna handle this on our own, Bev. No cops. No Butch Bowers. No parents.”

The suggestion of parents seemed ridiculous anyway. Nobody ever considered that, but they sure as fuck wished they could.

“You got any bright ideas?” Beverly scoffed at him, despite understanding their lack of desire to drag adults into the situation.

“I fucking do, actually,” Richie replied, sounding much too proud of himself. “It’s a damn fuckin’ good one, too.”

“Blow me away then baby,” Beverly opened her arms, motioning for him to explain his grand plan - not that there really was one, and everyone present knew as much. There was a skeleton of a scheme, but nothing more. And that certainly wasn’t Richie’s idea.

Richie’s idea had been, essentially, murder.

“Vigilante justice,” Richie explained, which was a level of sugarcoating that bordered on rational.

“And what does that entail?” Ben asked. Mike and Stan internally groaned when they clocked on. In reality, they should have known it was going to be harder than just one conversation to talk Richie out of his crazed ploy.

“Bill’s loaded gun, Henry Bowers and a hole in the ground.” Richie need not say any more. They all understood, but that wasn’t to say they all agreed.

“Get a grip, Richie,” Bev snorted, shaking her head at him. She wasn’t taking him even slightly seriously, and she wasn’t the only one.

“He’s joking,” Mike insisted, and although Richie really fucking wasn’t, he did not argue. He wasn’t exactly surprised, or even offended, that they assumed everything was a joke to him. This was not, but they didn’t really need to know that. Richie wasn’t stupid enough to try and fight about this, he knew he couldn’t convince them. “We have a real plan.”

“Oh yeah?” Bev seemed genuinely interested.

“We warn them,” Mike summarised, simply. “Corner Vic, how he did me, tell them to back off before we expose everything.”
“Like that’s going to work,” Bev scoffed, shaking her head. Her disbelief didn’t matter. Nobody had a better idea.

“I guess we’ll see.”

- 

Eddie was very surprised when he managed to retrieve the parcel that morning without his Mother’s input. She had allowed him to go and collect the post for him, assuming he had offered to be helpful before anything else. He had dropped her letters on the side and ran upstairs with the parcel before she had even noticed it. It was unbelievably easy, but he wasn’t about to complain. Sometimes, there were perks to Sonia’s laziness.

He hid it under his bed, then returned downstairs to continue playing at Son of the Year, helping his Mother wash the dishes, vacuum, take out the trash and even make lunch, before he scurried back upstairs to have a look inside.

The parcel was far from formal, a small brown box with no real address aside from Eddie’s name. He stared at it, shaking, before slowly stroking across the taped up centre, pondering the possibilities of the contents. There was no rational answer, Eddie did not know what could be inside, which was probably why it was taking him so long to look inside - part of him didn’t want to know.

He should have listened to that part of him. He should have thrown it in the trash and blocked it out of his memory. He should have fucking burnt the thing before it could ever hurt him. And he would have, but the curiosity was too overpowering.

“What are you?” Eddie whispered to it, shaking the box lightly. There was definitely something loose inside, which only deepened his burning need to know.

Wasting no more time, Eddie grabbed the scissors from his drawer and sliced through the tape. He hesitated, only briefly, before he pulled open the parcel.

Eddie swallowed down his own vomit when he saw the gift the Bowers Gang had left for him, and staggered back without taking his eyes off of the content - despite how much he wanted to. There was no looking away.

Inside the box, there were three things: Two eyeballs, one note.

Eddie hadn’t really noticed the latter, which was blood soaked and beneath the eyes.

Two puffs on his inhaler did not help his breathing calm at all. Eddie threw it to the side helplessly, then crawled slowly back over to the box, willing away the panicked tears. He knew that he needed to inspect them closely, knew he couldn’t let a single detail go unnoticed - it was too important.

Careful not to touch either eye, Eddie lifted the scrap of paper from beneath them, slowly and carefully dragging it with outstretched hands. The blood was dry, and Eddie assumed it must have been when the box was delivered due to the lack of it on his front porch. He opened out the letter, biting his lip to silence the loud sob threatening its way out.

“WATCHING YOU.”

Initially, Eddie wanted to tear the damn thing into shreds, but his logic got the better of him on that one. Ripping it up would destroy the evidence, and he needed all the evidence he could fucking get. Instead, Eddie placed the note down on his desk and rummaged through his drawers until he
found an envelope in which a letter to Richie had once sat. The new note had a very different tone.

Eddie took another two breaths on his inhaler, clenched and unclenched his fists, and then went to face the more frightening contents in his parcel. He was seemingly calm, yet mentally dancing on the edge of a mental break down as he picked the box up and placed it on his desk and began to gently shake it until the eyes rolled over to reveal blue eyes with wide black pupils.

His breath did not speed up, somehow, as he contemplated the possibility that these eyes belonged to somebody he may know. The real victim did not cross his mind as he weighed up possibilities. Every loser with blue eyes, every missing kid with blue eyes, and any relative with blue eyes. There were a fair few, but Eddie was almost certain it wasn’t going to be the former, nor the latter. It had to be a missing kid, and it was, in a way.

Only Peter Gordon was no longer a kid, and he had yet to be reported missing, considering the only three people aware of his absence included his Mother, boss and not-quite-girlfriend, all of whom were unsurprised and mostly unbothered by his lack of communication or presence. If only they had known.

Eddie resealed the box and hid it under his bed, too panicked to think up a better space. He was in a state of shock, and realised this as he calmly went back over to his bed, sitting down and staring up at the ceiling as if contemplating what he wanted for dinner, not the fact he had just received two human eyeballs from his mortal enemies. It didn't feel real, and he didn't want it to.

He knew he needed to tell the losers, but knew this would be impossible until his Mother left him alone for more than ten minutes. It was rare she left the house really, but Eddie knew every reason she’d be willing to take off alone.

Calmly, Eddie walked into his bathroom. The cabinet sat above the sink was already open, as if calling to him, and he stared at it, tilting his head to one side as he observed the contents, all of which were his own and none of which he needed. Remembering this fact only worsened his current mental state, but somehow did not push him to the nearing breakdown, and instead Eddie began to walk towards the cabinet, eyes fixated on the contents. He didn’t even stop when his inhaler fell from his grasp, if anything that urged him to hurry with his uncertain plan.

It didn’t feel real to him as it was happening, it felt as if he was in some fucked up nightmare, which was a poetic way to look at the horrific position he was in right then. Nightmare wasn’t accurate, nightmare suggested there would one day be an end. Eddie knew better than to ever expect that luxury, not unless it was in the form of death.

First, out of repulsion from just touching the box, Eddie scrubbed at his hands. They were red raw by the time he had convinced himself that they were clean again, but by that time, he had also convinced himself that it didn't fucking matter. It wouldn't matter if he caught the deadliest infection on the planet from that fucking box, and it wouldn't matter if he never washed his hands again. Nothing mattered, his health certainly did not - good lungs and a strong immune system were not going to aid him in his battle against Henry Bowers.

And Henry Bowers was planning to kill him sooner than any deadly, contagious disease could.

That was the thought that set Eddie off. One by one, he ripped the pill bottles and boxes from the shelves and poured them out across the bathroom floor, throwing the empty packages down as soon as they were empty of contents. It wasn’t until the cabinet was clear and the floor was littered that Eddie realised he had been screaming the entire time, silencing himself as he slammed the cabinet door shut to see his Mother in the open doorway behind him.
The sight of her was enough to shock him into silence. Sonia Kaspbrak was never easy on the eyes, but now less than ever: face scrunched up in an uncomfortable combination of concern and rage, her teeth bared and ready to bite, eyes wide and ready to pour.

“What on Gods Earth do you think you are doing?” Sonia asked, and it came out in something close to a whisper, as if she was intentionally holding back the ever-expected yell. There was a pregnant pause then, as Eddie evaluated whether he could physically bring himself to speak, and what he would say if that was a safe option. It wasn’t like he had to explain all that much, the mess on the bathroom floor told the story well enough.

“I-I-I-“ Adopting Bill’s signature stutter, Eddie tried to string something coherent together, but without fair chance Sonia continued her rant.

“Are you trying to skip your doses?” She snarled, full volume this time, “Do you want to get sick? Is that what you want? You irresponsible…fuh- fool! You need those! You need them! I can’t afford to keep asking Dr Keene for more medication whenever you decide you know best and decorate my bathroom floor! What is this? Do you expect your poor Mother to clean all of this up now? Is that what you expected to happen, hm? You can’t make a mockery of me and everything I do for you like this. I’m so close to getting another Doctor on the phone, I bet it’s your head, isn’t it? You’re sick. You’re skipping your meds and look what it’s done to you! You’re mind is broken-“

Sonia was not nearly finished, but Eddie, somewhere in the verbal and emotional torment, decided that he did not give a fuck. Enough was enough.

He barged past his Mother, shaking out of her surprisingly strong grip as she tried to prevent his exit, screaming his name in pursuit. Eddie continued to run through the house though, down the stairs and right to the front door. It felt too easy, and it was.

The door was locked, and Eddie should’ve known this would be the case, but he punched it anyway, letting out a large obscene yell. Slowly, he turned back around, and his Mother was stood waiting, smiling down at him from the top of the stairs.

“You can’t run from your Mother, Eddie-bear.”

“I need to see my friends,” He managed, sliding down to sit on the floor. Almost defeated, but never entirely, despite the despair.

“I can’t allow that, can I?”

“I don’t think you have a choice,” Eddie countered, monotonously. He couldn’t even bring himself to look at her, fixated on the empty hallway because he knew if he saw her smug expression it would push him over the edge. He needed to remain composed, now more than ever. Hysteria, as tempting as it sounded, would not be helpful to his case. “I think if you value what’s best for me, you should give me that key.”

“You’re not stable enough,” Sonia scoffed, “You think I’m going to let you outside? Let you run around town spouting lies about me?”

“I don’t need to lie about a thing,” Eddie chuckled to himself at that. Sonia began to walk down the stairs, cautious as she approached her son. “And if you don’t let me out right now, I’ll just break out the window, or I’ll call the police and tell them you’re trying to kill me-“

Maybe it was the monotonous tone of voice he was using, or maybe it was just the mere absurdity
of what Eddie was saying, regardless, Sonia Kaspbrak’s first response what to break out into a hysterical laughter. It was enough to silence her son again, and he watched her howl with an unreadable expression.

“You’re not going to do a thing, my angel,” Sonia said, naively. She walked down the stairs slowly, and he rose as she came to meet him at the bottom. He was taller than her now, something that had never really bothered her until that moment. It bothered her now, though, more so than the woman would have ever dared confess.

There was something threatening in the way he was looking down at her. Something intimidating. Sonia Kaspbrak was not an easy woman to intimidate, and likewise Eddie Kaspbrak was not easily intimidating. He was a small, mouse-like boy, skinny and shy and seemingly harmless most of the time. With the exception of recent rebellion and trouble, Eddie had always been an obedient and passive child.

“Eddie-bear, take your meds.”

“Eddie-bear, eat those greens! Say no to sugar, my sweet.”

“Eddie-bear, don’t upset your dear Mother, do as I say. I know best - Mothers do.”

“Say your prayers, Eddie. Stay inside, Eddie. Stop crossing me, Edward.”

“Don’t go near boys like that, Eddie-bear, they’re bad news. Boys like that make you all wrong, wrong, wrong-“

Eddie had given up on being an obedient, passive child. He wasn’t much of a child at all, in reality, and far from the dream-boy Sonia Kaspbrak liked to pretend she had raised.

“I’m not your fucking angel,” Eddie finally replied, in nothing more than a whisper. “And I’m getting out of this hell-house if it kills me.”

There was no laughter this time, nor wrath or tears. It was fear, raw and repressed fear.

“It just might,” She said. And there was no way that Sonia Kaspbrak could’ve known how hard that would hit. Maybe because she was right, but there was no fucking way on earth that she knew that part either. Eddie knew for a fact his Mother was ignorant to his tragic and traumatic experience outside that house, and he knew this because if she had any idea of the things he had endured, he would have been housebound his entire adolescence. But she was right, and that was why it sent chills down his entire body.

If Eddie stepped foot outside - alone - there was every chance the Bowers Gang would be there waiting. They’d be somewhere, waiting, because they always were. And after receiving a parcel like that from them, Eddie was certain that death was the fate they had in store for him and the Losers.

“Rather that than rot here with you.”

“You don’t have a choice,” Sonia hissed, trying to hide how afraid she truly was. It didn’t work, Eddie could see through the shake in her voice and the sweat on her forehead. “You can’t leave me- You won’t-“

“Give me the key.”

“Go to your room.”
“Give me the key.”

“Go to your room,” Sonia repeated, only this time she was yelling. It didn’t bother Eddie in the slightest, he felt desensitised for the first time in his life. “Go! Now!”

“Mom,” Eddie remained somewhat composed, though he was beginning to shake with the adrenaline and the anxiety, “I need the key.”

“I’m going to get Doctor-“ Before Sonia had even finished speaking, she had set off marching down the hallway. Eddie followed her, and gave her a mighty shove as the word ‘doctor’ left her mouth. The sentence was unfinished, and Sonia stumbled to the floor. Eddie barged past and pulled the phone from the cord, throwing it to the ground as his Mother screamed. “You’re sick! You’re insane! You’ve lost your mind, Edward! You’re sick-“

“I was never sick!” Eddie snapped, finally, screaming it at her as he had dreamed of doing so ever since he made the discovery at thirteen years old. It was a fact he kept close to his chest, always hoping it would serve as a way out someday. It had been worth the wait. “You think I don’t know? You’ve been feeding me motherfuckin’ placebos my entire Goddamn life! You still gonna lay there and call me sick, Ma? No. You’re gonna get off the fuckin’ floor and unlock that door. You get it now? You don’t tell me what to do anymore. You’re a liar, and the only thing making me sick is you and your bullshit.”

Eddie could feel the bridge burning, feel her heart shattering, feel the tables turning. And it was fucking liberating.

He did not expect it to work, but it did. Sonia got up, slowly, and dusted down her dress before taking the key from her breast pocket. She threw it at Eddie, defeated.

“You’ll come back,” She whispered, watching him walk towards the door. Eddie turned back only once, smiled to himself as he noted the single tear running down her cheek, and then unlocked the front door.

He wasn’t all that sure he would be coming back, at least, not alive.

-Vic was shaking when he arrived home, absolutely craving time alone to wallow in self pity and re-evaluate his entire life after the events of the past two days.

To summarise, yesterday, he had gouged an old friends eyeball out. Today, he had spent his time hunting down and plotting the torment of the Losers they were hoping to abduct - with no luck, of course.

He knew now, as an undeniable fact, that he was sick in the head, much like his three dear friends. He also knew that there would never be help available, because he would never be able to talk about the things he had done and seen without harrowing consequences, the kind of consequences that Victor knew he would sooner die than face up to. Help was not an option, he did not deserve such a luxury, and he was probably beyond saving anyway.

Victor Criss was a murderer. And it was all he could fucking think about, along with the indescribable pleasure he had gotten from it, and the conflicting guilt and fear trying to repress the intensity of such a joy.

Henry had not been mad about them killing Peter without him, he had been proud. Slapped Vic on the back and praised him for the act, and Vic had almost felt good about it in that moment, as if it
was an achievement of some kind.

_Congratulations, you're a fucking psychopath! You've made the club!_

The chances of being caught out were slim, after Patrick and Henry had gotten away with so much, but the idea still panicked him to the point of true insanity. Visions of Peter’s bloodied face kept passing through his mind, the sound of his screams were like constant background noise, and he couldn’t bring himself to eat (certain he would vomit), or sleep (certain he would be plagued with nightmares). All day, he had been restless and shaky, unable to explain why to his friends.

The Bowers Gang were not very familiar with paranoia.

“You’re goin’ crazy,” Vic whispered to his reflection, stroking down the mirror slowly. He smiled at himself, but the smile didn’t reach his eyes. It was so obviously forced, and did little to conceal his state of distress. He turned on the tap and splashed his face, then looked back and forced another smile. It was no more convincing, but then, Vic couldn’t really remember what his smile had looked like before. Had it always been so unpleasant? Was it always twisted and unsettling?

The short answer was yes.

“You were already crazy. You’re bat-shit.” He spat at the mirror, then, and proceeded to wash his face as usual. The normal routine felt unfitting, but it was the only sense of normalcy left, and it brought a small bit of comfort if nothing else.

Vic was rubbing his face with the flannel when he started to feel the hairs on the back of his neck stand up, a heaviness behind him – as if he was being watched. He wasn’t, he knew that. His Mother was out, as she always was, probably fucking yet another abusive boyfriend. He was alone, completely, so he thought.

Caving to his instincts, Vic slowly pulled the flannel from in front of his face, and the fabric finally unshielded his eyes, he froze up completely. Maybe not so alone, after all. He felt his skin litter with goose-pimples, his mouth turn to a desert, his heart fall through his stomach. Vic stared at the mirror, completely paralysed with fear, but he was not staring at his own reflection this time, no, he was staring at the reflection of Peter Gordon, who was only a metre behind him, drenched in blood, with a ghastly smile and hollowed out eye sockets.

“Holy shit,” Vic whispered, but the words that came out were nothing more than shaking croaks. The flannel fell from his grip and into the running water, which was now no longer the only sound in the room, as Peter began to scream. The exact sounds the deceased man had made in that basement were now echoing around in his own fucking bathroom.

He was about ten seconds off emptying his bowels or tearing his own fucking eyes out. The sight was beyond nasty.

But it wasn’t real, he reminded himself. It couldn’t be. Vic did, naturally, consider the possibility of it being a ghost. But Peter Gordon didn’t need to appear as a ghost in order to haunt Victor Criss, he didn’t need to a thing at all. Vic was not a believer in the supernatural, and there was no way that shit was going to fly with him.

He punched the mirror, creating a large crack across his own reflection, and the vision vanished. Vic smiled, then. It was still a sorry sight.

But that was a no ghost, Vic told himself. He knew, deep down, that it was nothing more than further proof of his insanity. No further explanation needed. The guilty conscience could have a
profound effect on the human mind. Vic knew that all too fucking well, and felt silly for even contemplating any other possibility. As if Peter Gordon would spend his afterlife haunting Vic, anyway. No, that guy would be burning in hell, probably organising a Henry Bowers Welcome Party for when that day inevitably came.

“Crazy,” Vic repeated, his voice cracking. He gave his face one more wipe over, then turned around to see absolutely nobody. He wondered if his friends had ever experienced such a thing, but highly doubted it.

He left the bathroom feeling worse than he had five minutes ago, and was half tempted to crawl into his bedroom and reside there until the panic faded away, but instead Vic found himself slinking downstairs and grabbing a beer from the fridge. It was his usual routine, home alone or not, and Vic did still feel more at ease in the comfort of his living room, TV on full blast.

Not quite at ease though. Vic still felt…unsafe, on edge, restless. Eyes, somewhere, were still on him, and this thought sent a shiver down his spine as he contemplated the possibility it would once again be Peter. Victor chuckled to himself then though, as he realised Peter did not have eyes to put on him, then cut off his own laughter when the conflicting guilt hit only three seconds later.

It didn’t fade as quickly this time, either. Vic put his beer down and slowly turned round, half expecting to see Peter Gordon stood in the doorway, or leaning on the couch, maybe stood outside the front window-

Vic froze with his eyes over the front window. Someone was there.

It wasn’t Peter Gordon bleeding or screaming against the glass though, it wasn’t that malicious at all. Vic thought that would’ve been a little less creepy, to be fair. He could handle the horror of a hallucination like that, because he knew for certain that it was nothing more than just that: a hallucination. It wasn’t real, it couldn’t really hurt him.

This though, it seemed real. Too tame to be a figment of his warped imagination, too mundane. It was just on the wrong side of unsettling, because all Vic could actually see, was a figure, staring. It was too dark out to decipher who it could be, or even what direction they were staring in, but the silhouette was perfectly still, stood on the pavement but leaning against his garden fence, in the dead centre of the window. Vic rubbed his eyes, hoping it would make the illusion go away.

It did not.

“Crazy,” Vic repeated to himself, suddenly grateful for the background noise that the TV was providing. He stood up from the couch, picking his can back up as he was rising, and taking a swig as soon as he was stood tall and straight. The view higher up was no better, and did nothing to help him work out what or who that was. He found himself looking away, as if afraid they would see him staring, but considered that they likely wouldn’t be able to tell the direction of his eyes due to how low the living room light was, with only the TV and light flooding from the kitchen keeping Vic from complete darkness.

He tried to focus on the TV, hoping that the figure would just vanish and he could forget all about it, hoping that it would be Belch or Patrick playing some bullshit prank, or even another fucking Peter Gordon vision - as terrifying as they were. The other possibilities were scaring him more.

Was this guy watching over him? Did they know what he had done? Were they going to take him, do the same to Vic?

He took another, larger drink, and then grabbed a cigarette out of the packet on the couch, cursing
as he saw there were only three left. He lit it regardless, but did not like the idea of trailing to a
store later that night to stock up. Going outside seemed intimidating, and it was not easy to
intimidate someone like Victor Criss. Half of Derry would shit themselves at the mere sight of him,
knowing what he was he rumoured to do, knowing the type of people he hung around with.

People did not fuck with Victor Criss, and he didn’t like that someone, outside of his own home,
was trying. They weren’t technically on his property, therefore he couldn’t do so much to move
them, but he figured he could scare them off with ease if he put on his brave face. After all, this
idiot was alone. He could take that.

Vic gave the figure one last glance, trying to accurately make out their build. It was someone
skinny, that was for sure, but height was a little tricker to accurately pinpoint, though he thought it
was safe to assume that the stalker was male.

Vic sighed, stood and went into the kitchen, trying to be as fast as possible just in case the freak
decided to move whilst he was out of sight. Vic climbed onto the counter top and grabbed the
small gun he had hidden on top of the cupboards. He grabbed his jacket from over the chair and
threw it on, though skipped out on shoes as he shuffled out of the back door.

Stealth was maybe one of Vic’s strongest skills, and his agility and speed made up for his weaker
physical strength and lacking muscle mass. His feet didn’t fail him that time, either, and he
managed to creep through his own back yard, and out the front, almost completely silent.

It was the slam of the gate shutting that alerted the figure of Vic’s presence, and Vic walked into
view, gun in hand and cigarette in mouth, putting on his bravest face to greet the mystery man,
who remained on the unlit sidewalk, but walked closer to Vic’s side of the house.

The realisation was instant, and sent shock down Vic’s spine. “What the fuck ‘you doing here?”
“I’m not here for trouble,” Mike Hanlon replied, smiling almost innocently, “I just want to talk.”

“Talk?” Vic scoffed, “You start all your conversations by waiting outside folks’ house like that? I
was ready to put a fuckin’ bullet in you, bastard.” Then, added, “Still might.”

“I was trying to figure out if anyone else was around,” Mike explained, “I definitely didn’t mean to
scare you.” He was still smiling, and that was when Vic looked down to see a gun in Mike’s own
hand, subtly aimed towards him.

He’d never seen those kids bare a weapon like that, didn’t know the fuckers had it in them. Vic
didn’t have time to be impressed though, instead deciding panic was a much more fitting emotion.
He knew what this had to be about, should’ve fucking expect as much.

“Shouldn’t play with shit like that,” Vic commented, his voice low and knowing, “Might end up
killing someone.” They shared a strange look, then. It comforted Vic, strangely enough. It only
angered Mike.

“It’s for my safety,” Mike said, “And don’t think for a second I give a shit about yours. That thing
so much as points at me, I fire a shot at the ground. My friends come running. You shoot it at me, I
shoot back at you. Fair?”

“Friends?” Vic didn’t see them, at first glance. It wasn’t like he expected to see the other six chums
sat on the grass or anything, but it wasn’t like them to be subtle or sneaky. Not like this, at least.

“My truck’s parked up across the street,” Mike motioned to it, and Vic looked across to see it sat
there, feeling stupid for not noticing it in the first place. He and the Bowers Gang were very
familiar with that truck, mostly for the nickname it had, a racial slur followed by a classic vehicle name because Henry was a creative and comedic flop. Vic should have recognised it, but his mental state wasn't on top form, he wasn't surprised that it had gone so easily unnoticed at such a late hour. Inside the truck, two figures sat, clearly staring as if on edge. Watching and waiting. Vic flashed them a wave, thinking himself funny, but the gesture was not returned. “I took your advice. Ain’t going nowhere alone, Vic.”

“Smart, kid.” He instinctively backed away, leaning against the wall and taking a much longer drag on his cigarette. “But I don’t want to talk. I got jack-shit to say to you, jack-shit I’m willing to say so long as you got a fucking gun aimed my way, ‘least.”

“Talking to me is your safest bet,” Mike countered, “Because if you don’t, next time your friend Henry catches us round town, I’ll tell him about the last time we talked. I’ll tell him how you came to my house ’n fucked his plan, stabbed him the back. Tell him the whole damn story, might even add in a few details, spice it up some more. You think he'd believe me? I bet he would. I bet he’d shoot you on sight.”

Silence followed. Vic weighed up his options, neither of which were very appealing. “Very smart, kid.”

He looked to truck, squinting as he tried to make out who sat inside, but it was hard to tell. The street lights in Derry weren’t up to the highest of standards, and this was a pretty wide road. It was too dark to accurately guess, especially at the awkward angle.

“You said you’d try to help,” Mike reminded him, “And believe me when I say you’re the last person I want to ask, but if you’re gonna be a rat, be a rat of your word.”

“You’re not giving me much of a choice,” Vic motioned to the gun. Mike smiled again, but it was a sad smile, as he pondered how he had allowed himself to be put in such a position. “You can’t tell Henry what I said. You're right, he'd kill me, straight up.” Mike already knew that, though. Henry would kill him if he knew, no question about it. Henry did not appreciate traitors, and Peter Gordon was proof enough - even if it hadn’t been Henry who actually took his life - he had made sure Peter had a disgustingly hard one before its inevitable end.

“I will if I have to,” Mike said, and he meant it, but even if he hadn’t, Vic wasn’t willing to take that risk.

“Fine, fuck it,” Vic huffed, “But I ain’t talking out here, like this. You get inside before you get a conversation.”

“Alone?” Mike backed away a little, “No way. We're in the truck.”

“Ain’t getting in your…” The nickname Henry always called Mike’s truck by did not fall from his lips. Mike had heard it many times, but never whilst wielding a pistol, and Vic didn’t want to test anyone’s patience in his position. “I’m home alone. You can come in the back.”

“No fuckin’ way,” Mike scoffed. He didn’t trust Vic as far as he could throw him, and going inside his home, alone, seemed like the most obvious of traps. “Not alone, at least.”

“Fine, get your friends and get inside.”

“Is it safe?” Mike had to ask.

“Yes,” Vic insisted, because to him, it was the safest place in the world. Maybe not so much anymore though, after a night like this. He forced his usual devilish grin and stubbed the cigarette
out on the side of the wall. “Don’t you worry Hanlon, I’m a rat of my word.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope this was alright, let me know what you thought because that’s always beyond interesting to hear, even the small lil things are really useful. I want you guys to enjoy this tale as much as I do (when I don’t have crippling writers block) ;)

Eddie had been sat on Richie’s bed, alone, approximately ten hours. He had gone there immediately after leaving, running across town with the speed required from a boy on the hit-list of a deranged murderer. After only two minutes of hysterical knocking, Maggie Tozier had opened the door and informed him that Richie and their friends were hanging out somewhere in town. Eddie had insisted he didn’t want to be around them all, and asked if he could come in and wait there for Richie’s return - thankfully, she said yes.

Maggie had made several attempts to engage him in conversation, or invite him downstairs to eat or watch TV, but her attempts at comforting him were fruitless. She wasn’t judging him for his lack of desire to bond though, as Richie had often mentioned what a “dumb-fuckin-stupid-fuckin-mean-fuckin-bitch” Mrs Kaspbrak was, and Eddie looked too emotionally distraught for small talk.

Maggie had let Eddie into her home and that was all she could do for him. Safety was a strong word, but it was the closest Eddie could get to it.

Richie returned home at half past ten, and ran upstairs before his parents could even inform him of the guest waiting for him. As expected, when he saw his boyfriend sat on his bed, face wide with relief, Richie practically exploded.

“Eds!” He screamed out, simultaneously leaping onto the bed beside him and pulling him into a tight embrace. “Eds, Eds- Holy fuck- I- What are you doing here? Shit, I missed you- I missed you so fuckin’ much- Eds?”

Although Eddie was holding him back, burrowing his face into Richie’s chest as he normally would have, no excitement was present. Eddie was stiff and cold and bordering on unresponsive, mostly due to his silence. Richie knew Eddie like the back of his hand, knew something was really wrong, and probably should have known this from the second he walked in, but he had been too overwhelmed to really acknowledge or think about anything beyond the fact Eddie was in his bedroom.

“What…” Richie pulled back a little, sitting up to get a decent look at Eddie’s face, but the blank expression gave nothing away. “What happened?”

“I walked out,” Eddie explained, his voice wavering as he finally spoke up. Richie opened his mouth to say something, no doubt words of joy or relief, but Eddie continued before he could voice anything too positive. “I had to leave. So I threatened her, and then left. I didn’t have a choice, Rich, I had to get out of there, I had to be with you- I-.”

“Eds…” Richie’s original response had died on his tongue, “Why don’t you have a choice? What the fuck happened?”

“Bowers still came for me there,” Eddie said, and this time the hurt seeped fully into his voice. He could feel tears building again, threatening to fall with every word. “I don’t think anywhere is safe anymore. I just can’t be alone, I couldn’t be with her- I- I need to show you all something.”

“What did he do?” Richie asked, voice shaking with the same anger he had held only hours ago. The day had not been a pleasant one following the conversation about the tongue, and though
Beverly and Ben had done their best to ensure he didn’t completely breakdown, it had been impossible for any of the Losers to maintain an entirely positive mindset.

Eddie couldn’t even bring himself to explain it to Richie. He had brought the parcel with him, and had placed it on Richie’s cluttered desk because he couldn’t bare the thought of it sitting in his rucksack all day. Eddie pointed to that box then, and Richie’s eyes seemed to darken at the sight of it - as if he knew.

Little did Eddie know, Richie knew all too well.

“Fuck,” Richie didn’t really want to look inside, but he stood anyway, and slowly walked towards it as Eddie remained still and silent. He ran a finger across the slit in the cardboard. “How bad is it?”

“It definitely takes the cake in terms of psychological trauma,” Eddie sighed, somehow with his usual sarcastic tone. Richie forced a smile.

“Dethroning your dear Mother?” Richie mock-gasped, and Eddie forced a shaky laughter. “Rough day for Sonia.” Genuine laughter followed, though it didn’t hold quite the same life it usually did. Richie noticed this, because he always did.

“Open the box, Rich,” Eddie mumbled, shaking his head. Riche didn’t.

“You should know something first,” Richie said, “You know, whilst we’re talkin’ psychological trauma.”

“Huh?”

Richie cut straight to the point. “Bowers left a severed tongue in my glove box yesterday.”

Eddie’s breath hitched, frozen in his throat as his mind tried to process that information, and everything that it meant. The thoughts shot through his mind and circled within milliseconds, but the silence seemed to hang there for an unbearably long time as Eddie pondered a stable enough response to such horrific news.

“Open the box.”

Richie complied, but the regret was instant.

“Holy fucking shit-“ He screamed, shooting backwards. “What the fuck- What the fuck- No-No-Fuckin’ way-“

“I was right,” Eddie cut in, growing equally as frantic upon seeing Richie’s reaction, “Look at that! I was fucking right! He’s sick in the head- sick- I can’t even-“

“Do you think it’s the same person?” Richie asked, “Holy fuck- Do you think it’s someone we know?”

“I don’t want to think about it,” Eddie replied, though he knew he’d have to. The conversation was quick and chaotic, both boys speaking at a volume a little too high considering the time and place. Nobody came in to silence them, though, because Wentworth was passed out asleep on the couch and Maggie didn’t want to fucking know. It was bad, the volume said that alone. “But it’s possible. Anything is, now.”

Silence followed as the two pondered this. Richie walked back over to the box, composed, and
closed the flaps again. He had seen enough.

“He’s going to kill us,” Richie concluded, flopping down on the bed beside Eddie.

“No shit,” Eddie mumbled, coldly, but he fell into Richie anyway, resting his head on his shoulder and inhaling the mediocre, masculine scent that he found so much comfort in. It didn’t do all that much, but just being with someone he loved so much was better than any alternative. He didn’t want to move, speak or think in that moment. It was all a little much.

“We need to tell the others,” Richie gasped, remembering where Mike, Bill and Stan had gone. “They need to know about this- Now-”

“We can’t exactly go on a wild goose chase around town right now, Richie,” Eddie countered, “And I don’t want to. I can’t, my head is too…I just want to lay down and…I don’t know. I just need to process this. No bullshit yet.”

“No bullshit yet?” Richie scoffed, sitting back a little, “He sent you fuckin- He- Eddie come on! We’re past no bullshit! He left a motherfuckin’ tongue in my glovebox! He sent you fuckin’ eyeballs! Human fuckin’ eyeballs! And you wanna just sit here and take it in? Is that really what you’re saying right now? Un-fucking-believable.”

“Don’t act like I’m the crazy one,” Eddie said, strangely calm compared to Richie, “I’ve been saying this was coming for fucking years! And I’m not going to apologise for wanting to deal with it properly. It’s dangerous for us to go out there spouting off about everything. We have to play our cards right, Rich, because one bad move and we’re fucking dead. Dead and gone, do you understand that? Fucking dead- And I’m not letting that happen, certainly not to you.”

Richie seemed to soften, then. They were both overwhelmed, which was only rational considering the day they’d both had, but calmer, as if at peace with the intensity of their emotions. Richie collapsed back into Eddie as if it was where he belonged. He privately wondered if that was where he belonged. Safe.

“I’m so glad you’re here,” Richie confessed, as they laid back together. “I thought I was going fuckin’ crazy.”

“We’re all fucking crazy,” Eddie sneered, which was truly an amazing observation. It was the truth though, they were all just clinging onto shreds of sanity at that point, regardless of how put together they often seemed. Eddie reckoned staying normal and mentally healthy would be impossible somewhere like Derry, with or without intense bullying and a variety of parental abuse adding to the psychological damage. “We’re a therapists wet dream.”

“You’re my wet dream,” Richie said, giggling. Eddie found himself laughing too, unsurprised by the comment.

“You’re gross.” When the childish laughter stopped, Richie nuzzled back closer.

“I missed you.”

“I missed you too,” Eddie replied, and he meant it too, even if Richie had a little bit of doubt about that. “I missed you all. Did anything happen? Other than, you know, the tongue. Is everyone okay?”

“Okay?” Richie scoffed, “You’ll have to remind me what the fuck that’s like. Nobody’s dead yet - is that okay enough?”
“You know what I mean,” Eddie sighed, rolling his eyes. The bite really wasn’t necessary, but Eddie supposed he couldn’t really judge him for getting snarky, not after the week they’d had.

“I don’t know what to tell ya’,” Richie shrugged, “Nothing too wild. No contact. Just the tongue and a very heated debate. They wouldn’t let me go with Mike tonight, you know? Bill and Stan are keeping watch for him. Bill and Stan! I can’t be the only one that thinks that’s fuckin’ ridiculous?”

Eddie was also curious about how that conclusion came about. Bill was a nervous wreck, and would probably be a little too trigger happy if there was a sign of threat. Stan was the opposite, still a nervous wreck, but unlikely to ever be violent. He’d probably piss before pulling the trigger.

“What?” Eddie asked, unwilling to completely admit he thought Stan was a poor choice.

“Bev thinks I’m too unstable,” Richie explained, allowing the hurt to seep into his voice. “They all agreed. And Bill and Stan just volunteered before we could really debate any of it. I figured Bev was a better option, nobody was making suggestions. I guess they don’t really think there’s any threat, but they’re wrong. If something goes down, I don’t think Bill and Stan are equipped to fight like that. Does that sound fucked? Am I supposed to trust them to do this? They didn’t trust me!”

Unaware of Richie’s plan, Eddie was utterly confused by this. Richie was always a fighter, always a protector, so not letting him go with Mike seemed plain stupid. Eddie knew there had to be something he didn’t know. His friends were many things and deeply flawed, but they weren’t stupid. Idiocy was something they had grown out of long ago.

“Why didn’t they want you to?” Eddie was asking the right question.

Richie thought about lying; he thought about this simply because he didn’t want Eddie to have the same disgusted reaction as the others had upon realising how serious he was about it.

“Because…”

He couldn’t bring himself to form the words. Eddie deserved the truth, and Richie loved him too much to take that from him - even if it did result in yet another person questioning his mental stability.

“They think I’m unstable.”

“Why?”

“Because I think we should kill them.”

“What?” Eddie didn’t sound shocked, only confused, as if he only required mere elaboration of that.

Richie delivered, “I think we should kill them, Eds. Take a gun, take a knife, hunt those sick fucks down, and kill them: Vic, Belch, Patrick, Bowers and his fuckin’ freak of a Father. Kill ‘em dead. But apparently that makes me crazy, apparently that makes me as bad as them! I don’t think so, though. I think it’s a rational solution. I think, if we want to leave Derry alive, it’s the only solution.”

Eddie didn’t want to agree, but there was no denying how much he truly did.

“I don’t think you’re crazy,” Eddie confessed, quietly. Richie seemed to relax a little. “But…I don’t think we can do that. Not unless we’re all in.”
“I don’t think that’ll take so long,” Richie said, “Bowers’ is cranking it up. I don’t think it’s gonna take much more convincing for Bill and Stan, they’re shitting bricks. Mike and Bev got sticks too far up their ass right now. Ben…I don’t know, he’ll do whatever he has to. But what’s it gonna take? What the fuck are we waiting for? Someone else to die?”

“Maybe the eyes will do it,” Eddie suggested, optimistically. The tongue triggered nothing more than a passive-aggressive conversation with the weakest member of the Bowers Gang. Eyeballs, at best, would probably only cause more panic and worry. Beverly would no doubt once again launch into the “let’s tell the authorities” rant. Maybe Stanley would have another brief nervous breakdown, or Ben might pass some vomit or shit his pants. But no serious action would be taken. It never was.

Richie knew they had to hurry the fuck up if they were going to make it, though. Playing at the waiting game was getting much more dangerous, and after all, time was running out.

- It was midnight when Henry Bowers stormed out of his house and walked across town in the dead of night. He made his way to Neibolt House in less than half an hour, and entered completely undetected by anybody living in the area. Henry wondered if they played ignorance on purpose.

He hadn’t expected any of his friends to be present, because there was no reason for him to suspect such a thing. Henry had only ventured over to see how the clean up of Peter Gordon had gone, and to get some space, clear his head, calm down. He had yet to inform his Father of the incident, and the idea that the place had been left a mess was bothering him deeply. Butch was angry enough about the incident with Tozier, this was the last thing he needed to know.

Ten minutes into his visit he had stumbled across Patrick in the cellar, hacking away at a Fox corpse. He didn’t seem to acknowledge Henry’s entrance, too wrapped up in his own activity. Henry cleared his throat, and Patrick reluctantly turned round, axe still in hand as he wiped his forehead with the other.

“Roadkill,” Patrick lied, flatly. Henry doubted it, but pressed no questions. Patrick had been killing animals for as long as he had known him, it was normal practice at this point. Henry passed no judgement.

“Where’s Peter?” Henry asked, scanning the room. The body was nowhere to be seen, but the stench suggested otherwise. Henry had learnt what dead bodies smelt like a long time ago. He had almost adjusted.

“Down the well,” Patrick said, “Mostly.”

“Mostly?” Henry scoffed, “The fuck does that mean?”

“His head ain’t with the rest of him,” Patrick turned back around, and went to continue on hacking at the Fox.

“Where’s the head?” Henry inquired, angrily. “Where’s the fuckin’ head?” Patrick froze with the axe mid-air, then sighed and turned back around.

“Relax Henry,” Patrick replied, smiling, “It’s still here. Kicked it in the corner, figured it might be a nice surprise for when we throw one of the losers down here.”

Maybe if things had been going a little more to plan, and maybe if his Father hadn’t just had his ass for stealing Tozier’s truck, Henry would have been a little more amused by such an idea. He
always had a flair for the dramatic, and stunts like that were always fun for them. Henry wasn’t feeling all that sadistic that night though, and the idea was nothing more than frustrating.

“Put it in the fuckin’ well,” Henry demanded, kicking at the brick wall. “Stop fuckin’ around! Have you even put the fuckin’ cement in?” He looked around the floor, noting the blood stains that were still fresh and bold. “And clean this shit-hole up! Jeez, one fuckin’ job Patrick. This ain’t no game.”

Patrick dropped his axe, then grabbed the head in the corner. The well didn’t had the wooden top enclosing it on, and this cover was instead propped up against it. The bag of ready-to-mix cement was sat beside it, indicating that Patrick really hadn’t done all that good of a job on the cleanup. It wasn’t even nearly finished. Henry’s anger at this was evident on his face, but Patrick was not phased. He never was, and this showed as he flashed his friend a smile and tossed the head across the cellar. It landed dead in the well, and the room was silence until they heard the thud echo up from below.

If Henry hadn’t been so furious, he would have probably laughed at this display. Patrick certainly did, chuckling to himself despite the expression Henry was shooting in his direction.

“It’s all a game, Henry.”

“We’re gonna fuckin’ lose if you ain’t more careful,” Henry spat, “Clean this bullshit up.”

“We can’t lose,” Patrick said, with all the confidence one would expect from a narcissistic psychopath. Henry had once shared the same delusion and attitude, and for most part still did, but his self-confidence was dropping by the day.

“We are losing,” Henry hissed, “We are losing, you fucktard! They’re all still alive! And you’re fucking around killing foxes. We need to hurry, we’re wasting time.”

“We haven’t got ‘em alone yet,” Patrick shrugged, “Ain’t our fault.” He began to pick up parts of the fox, dropping them down into the well one by one as Henry contemplated this. It wasn’t their fault. The Losers really hadn’t been alone at all that summer, or at least, they were looking in wrong places. It wasn’t their fault. They were just having a wave of bad luck, he supposed.

“Why aren’t the splitting up?” Henry asked, but it was rhetorical. He wanted Patrick to ponder this, he didn’t want Patrick to really answer.

“Smart kids don’t. All those disappearances and what not…” The two exchanged knowing looks, and Patrick let his smile creep back. “Fuck knows, Henry. We’ll get ‘em though. Even if we have to make ‘em split up.”

“You don’t think they could…suspect?” Henry half didn’t want to ask, half didn’t want to know the answer.

“They don’t suspect,” Patrick replied, “They know, Henry.” And he wasn’t far wrong. “That’s why we gotta’ get rid of them. Once we really put the plan in action, we’re good to go.”

“I don’t know,” Henry sighed. “I think we need to make some alterations to this plan.” This was something Henry had been thinking of for a couple of weeks. He was cautious to share it, but if there was anyone left he could trust to share it with, Patrick was the one. His loyalty was unshakable. It had to be, with the things Henry knew about him.

“The plan's fuckin' flawless.”
“No,” Henry countered, “No, no. I got a better idea, you see.”

“Enlighten me.”

“This still ends with Bill Denbrough,” Henry said, “Only, I don’t think we should kill him.”

The opening statement did little to get Patrick on side, but by the time he had finished explaining, that had changed completely. Patrick was almost frothing at the mouth, and Henry was too, the anger from earlier replaced with excitement and exhilaration.

They finished the clean up job together, going back over the small details of their new plot, and just as they were finishing up, pulling the cover back over the well, Patrick piped back up.

“Why did you come here tonight?” He asked, strange because he was never one for questioning. “I thought you were still in the shit with your Dad.”

“I am,” Henry muttered, which was in fact the exact reason he had gone there. Despite all the things his Father did for him, it didn’t change the fact that Henry despised Butch Bowers with everything inside of him. Being his son had perks, of course, but it was just as much a burden when his Father wouldn’t let him run around shooting up Derry how he had always wanted.

Henry often had fantasies about how he would kill his Father when the time came. He thought that the most just way would be to do just what Butch had done to his own wife all those years ago. Henry could never forgive his Father for that, it was the reason for his intense psychological damage, but that could also be partially attributed to his friendship with Patrick Hockstetter, who had been born with more than a few screws loose.

Henry didn’t like to think about why he was the way he was, but that night, in a fit of rage, Butch had raised the question. “Why the fuck are you such hard work? Why the fuck can’t you ’n your piece of shit friends stay the fuck out of trouble for more than a week? Why the fuck ain’t you fuckin’ normal?”

The questions and general verbal abuse were always followed by the physical abuse, a couple of punches to his stomach, a few kicks in various places, and finished with an unpleasant amount of spit on his face. No less than he deserved. Hell, no amount of abuse that boy had endured at home was comparable to the torture he deserved. Still, Henry didn’t take it well.

Henry had escaped the wrath of his Father by storming out of the house. Those murderous fantasies had been a little too much that night. He knew that one day, not even walking out would be enough to tame them, and killing other people would never be enough to really satisfy that burning need.

“Don’t you worry about it,” Henry shrugged, “He’s still got us covered.” And he always would, because so long as Henry was safe, his own warped secrets were too.

“What about when we leave?” Patrick asked. Henry simply shrugged. He did not have an answer for that. The new plan was still fresh, after all, the small details were blurred and full of holes. They had time to smooth things out. Henry was not worried, and nor was Patrick. Worry didn’t register as an emotion to him, he was simply curious.

With no real answer to Patrick’s question, Henry headed back for the staircase, leaving Patrick down there in his favourite place. He stopped at the top, turning around only briefly. “Don’t tell Belch or Vic about the plan.”

The door slammed before Patrick could ask any questions, but he didn’t have all that many anyway.
Stanley Uris had accepted that his night would never have been that alike a normal eighteen year olds, he knew that a conventional night hanging out with his friends was a precious rarity, and that those times would not be common. He was always somewhat aware that things could get dangerous or weird or intense at any given moment, such was the nature of Derry, and Stan felt he was usually very prepared for this. He knew that life for him could go through all capacities of weird.

Somehow though, sat with a hunting knife in hand in Victor Criss’ kitchen was not the weird he had anticipated when he had ventured out earlier that morning.

After the whole conversation concerning the tongue, a plan was discussed, and the plan included three of the losers going over to question and warn Victor. They knew it needed to be Mike, but felt that two others watching over was a safe number, in case anything went wrong. Mike had asked who else wanted to come, and Bill had immediately stepped up, because of course, and insisted they bring the gun to appear threatening, or something along those lines. Richie had also volunteered himself for the mission, but Bev and Mike both vocally opposed this idea, so it was dismissed. It was Stan found himself stepping up then, and it had nothing to do with the fact he wanted to be with Bill, it was just because he felt himself the most level-headed of them all, despite his breakdown, he was cautious and wary and logical. Nobody protested to his offer, and the plan was set in motion.

It wasn’t going all that well, not for anybody involved.

First off, he hadn’t really expected to have to get out of the truck, getting forced inside the house was a whole other matter completely. Bill was kind of relieved though, because the heavy silence that had hung between them in the truck had felt almost unbearable, and wasn’t at all helped by the woeful expression on Stan’s face - the same look was still present, but at least now Bill could tell himself it was because of Vic’s unsettling presence and the alien surroundings.

“Let’s make this quick,” Vic said, throwing his gun on the countertop and pulling open his fridge for another beer. “I’m not all that good at hosting.”

“Hope you’re better with Q&A’s and co-operation,” Mike huffed.

“You wanna put your weapons down?” Vic requested, motioning to the gun, then flashing a nervous look to the knives Stan and Bill were holding. Normally, Vic would have laughed at the idea of the Losers being violent, especially to the extreme they were threatening, but after the incident with Bill the other week, he didn’t want to underestimate them again. Bill had stabbed him, after all. “I’m not stupid enough to try anything. Three on one? Fuck that. Gun or no, I ain’t gonna fuck around.”

The three men in his kitchen didn’t seem to believe him though, hesitating as they eyed each other and then their weapons. “We’re not taking chances.”

“Suit yourself,” Vic said, but he did not pick his own back up, instead he joined Stanley at the table, flashing him a grin. Stan seemed to tense up, but did not budge his own chair back or make any move away. Bill and Mike remained stood awkwardly, Mike leaning back against the counter as Bill shifted from leg to the other, eyes darting around the room.

There was an awkwardness, then. Vic didn’t know what to say, too cautious to keep pushing the tough guy act, but too uncaring to try and get them to begin, or ask them to leave. He was going to let them take the reigns, for the sake of ease and the sake of his safety. The silence wasn’t his
problem, he wasn’t the one with questions or needs.

Mike was struggling to think of a way to speak up, unsure of where or how to begin. There was so much that needed to be said, his thoughts were a challenge to collect in such an environment. Bill was having a similar issue, unsure of how to start with the interrogation, and thrown off after seeing Vic act so human around them, so completely passive. He still wanted to ram the knife through his skull, but it was refreshing all the same. Bill didn’t feel at all afraid.

In the end though, it was Stan who broke the silence. He got straight to the point, loud and blunt. “Whose tongue was that?”

The question threw Vic off, mostly just because he had put such little thought into the tongue since that happened. Obviously, he remembered, and was aware that the Losers would probably have found it, but he hadn’t really put much thought into what their response would be. He hadn’t expected it to be the first question, and he certainly did not have a prepared answer for it. He gathered they did not know about the eyeballs yet, and silently thanked God, or the Devil, or whatever.

“Nobody that’s going to be missed,” Vic replied, which was mostly true. He didn’t want to tell them the exact person, because that would be like confessing, and Vic couldn’t bring himself to do that, especially not in front of three people he shared such a strong mutual hatred with.

“Are they dead?” Stanley asked, his voice shaking as if he didn’t quite want to know the answer to that. Vic smiled, his eyes passing over all three of the losers. Bill was staring at Stan, eyes wide with something Vic didn’t care to read, and his lips pressed into a tight thin line, as if he didn’t really want to speak up at all. Mike was staring right at Vic though, and he looked angry, but the worry was much more definite in his expression. The worry was not misplaced, and the same kind was obvious within Stanley, though he seemed more at peace, as if he already knew.

He did, they all did, and Vic’s silence was proof enough.

“Who was it?”

“I don’t even know,” Vic lied, but he knew all too fucking well, and the guilt began pooling back into his stomach. As if Peter had heard him, as if the comment would offend him. Was he supposed to confess his sins to these fucking losers? Is that what Peter would have wanted? Tough fucking shit, Vic thought. Guilt wasn’t going to control him like that. But the paranoia might.

Though it did nothing for Victor, the lie actually eased Stan’s mind on the whole thing. At least he wasn’t dealing with the body part of someone he had once known - not his knowledge, of course. Bill and Mike didn’t really acknowledge the lie though, instead just focusing on what it meant: they had killed. Eddie was right.

“Are we next?” Stan asked, through gritted teeth and screwed shut eyes. Vic was still smiling, but it was beginning to drop, looking more and more like he was in pain of some kind.

“Henry sure thinks so,” Vic whispered, looking away from the three of them.

“You’re not going to let that happen, are you?” Mike shot, angrily. It wasn’t that he trusted or respected Vic to any extent, but after their first private conversation, Mike had assumed Vic to be a little more human than his friends. Too human to allow murder, at least. And at the time, maybe he had been right, but Vic was unhinged and unpredictable. Mike was wrong to be so hopeful.

“I’ll do what I can do,” Vic said, because it was the right answer. “You’re adults now. You can
fight your fuckin’ battles.”

“Been fuh-fighting buh-buh-battles since I-I was fuh-fuh-fuh-four,” Bill snapped, and Stan noted how much worse his stutter was. The circumstances were no doubt a factor, certainly after the undeniable confirmation that the Bowers Gang were killing people. Bill’s brain was not a fun place to be in that moment. “No more. This eh-ends now.”

Vic laughed at that. He noticed how much more tense this seemed to make them all, then laughed harder. “You think it’s that easy? There is no end. Not so long as Henry ‘n Butch run this town. Not so long as they’re living and breathing. You understand?”

“I don’t g-g-give a fuck,” Bill hissed, but Mike did, and he stepped forward. “This-“

“Understood,” Mike cut in, flashing a look to Bill, something close to warning. “So…so let’s say they weren’t living, or breathing? What happens then?”

The suggestion caught them all off guard, but Mike wasn’t suggesting they go off and kill the Bowers Family, he was simply entertaining the possibility. He knew, realistically, that it could come to that. Kill or be killed. And they had discussed this as a group, so Stan and Bill shouldn’t really have gasped when Mike raised it with Vic.

“I hope I live to find out,” Vic confessed, though he doubted he would. There was no shortage of people who wanted Butch and Henry dead, however there was a huge shortage in people actually willing to arrange that. Vic wondered if these seven, voracious idiots would be the ones to take on the challenge. “Is that your big plan?”

“We just want to be left alone,” Stan sighed, certain that the admission of their ‘big plan’ would bring an immediate end to it. Just because Vic didn’t want Bowers to kill them, did not mean he would support them killing Bowers, his dear friend. It would probably only hinder any move they made, if they ever made one beyond this. “Or left alive, at the very least.”

“He can’t kill you if he can’t get you alone.”

“Why does it make a difference?” Mike asked, “If he wants us dead so bad?”

“I don’t know,” Vic replied, which was true. He had never thought about it before, but Henry was a one at once kind of guy. He and Patrick liked to enjoy and make the most. Any more was too messy, too chaotic. But Vic didn’t really think about it. “Risk. Ease. I guess, I don’t know. Just thank your lucky fuckin’ stars, ‘cause if he gets ya’, I can’t help you.”

“Why not?”

“I just can’t,” Vic explained. “I don’t…I ain’t involved in what comes after they…I don’t fuck with that. And I certainly don’t fuck with Bowers when he’s about to…I don’t do that.”

“So why warn us?” Stan asked, unusual fury and frustration clear in his voice, “If you don’t want us dead, why go along with anything they’ve done? None of that seemed to bother you, but suddenly this crosses the line? Bullshit, fucking coward.” The surge of confidence and anger was so out of character that it took them all a little by shock. Stan was always the one cowering away and screaming for peace, and he himself wasn’t quite sure where the sudden courage had come from, but he didn’t really care to psychoanalyse the impulse in the moment. It was a pleasant surprise for his friends, but not so much for Victor.

“Don’t you call me a coward, you pansy ass-“
“Watch your fucking mouth—” Bill spat, extending the knife, as if threatening physical intervention. Vic smiled at this. Bill was shaking, but it wasn’t just because of Vic biting at Stan like that, no, that had started upon the confirmation that Bowers had killed before. Because that meant…

Well, it meant something that Bill had spent years denying was now a likely possibility. It meant he would have to grieve his baby brother all over again. And it meant he would have to kill Henry Bowers. His mind was still battling that conflict, trying to accept that maybe something else had gotten to Georgie.

“My bad,” Vic said, but that smug grin he was wearing did not convey the same apologetic tone. He turned to stare at Stan, his eyes burning into the clearly shaking boy. “To answer your question, Stanley, I was just trying to give you a head start. Don’t think I’m trying to play hero. Don’t think that this means I’m on your side.”

To be fair, he wasn’t much on Henry’s side either. Victor was out for himself, and in a situation like this, nobody would have blamed him had he confessed that.

“If this is some redemption bullshit, you’re doing a God-awful job of it,” Stan said, just loud enough for the others to hear. Vic let the smile fall, then nodded. He was beyond redemption, now, and he could barely be bothered trying.

Killing Peter Gordon was not the worst thing he had ever done, but it was the final nail in the coffin for his conscience.

“Are we done with question time, yet?” Vic asked, taking another swig of his beer and slamming it onto the table, demonstrating his draining patience.

“Not even nearly,” Mike scoffed, “I want know whose tongue you cut off. I want to know where they are, if they’re dead. I want to know how many people you killed, why and where and how—“ Mike’s voice was shaking, and the volume increased with every word. Vic tensed, knowing he couldn’t answer any of that with honesty or without shame.

“I don’t have the time for that,” Vic cut in, and he stood. “I don’t have the time for any of this bullshit.”

“Muh-Make time,” Bill spat, which earned him a shocked look from Stan, just from the sheer ice in his tone. It was then that Vic was reminded of his own powerlessness in the situation.

“You gonna stab my other leg this time?” Vic teased. The remark was instantly regretted when he saw the thunder on the faces of his guests, “Joking- Fine- Whatever. Ask away you fucks.”

“How many people have you killed?” Mike asked. Vic couldn’t make eye contact with anyone. His chest tightened as he thought back, evaluating the numbers.

“One,” Vic confessed, and technically, he was telling the truth, because assisted didn’t count as far as he was concerned.

Nobody asked who, and for that, Vic was thankful. Instead, Stan fired a follow up, “How many have your friends killed?”

“I lost count a long time ago.” Most people had, in fairness. Eddie knew by heart how many people had gone missing, and all of those had fallen victim to Bowers or one of his associates, but there were more than those who had faces printed on posters. Vic didn’t have much to do with any of them. He hadn’t seen much, either, at first. Henry and Patrick always kept him and Belch in the
dark, and Vic had preferred it that way, but now he wanted them to get involved in the action, and that wasn’t something either of them had prepared for. The list of missing in Derry was big, for a town so small, but Vic didn’t know the numbers. He liked it that way. “But they’re not gonna be pretty statistics, I can tell ya’ that much.”

“The missing kids?”

Vic nodded, and his face seemed void of all emotion as he thought back, countless cries replaying through his mind. He hadn’t witnessed much of it, thankfully, and didn’t actually know the fate of many of them, but the ones he did know, he wished more than anything that he didn’t.

One memory always caused a pull in his stomach. He remembered it vividly as the three boys in his kitchen stared, seemingly and understandably stunned.

Betty Ripsom.

She had been about fifteen, when they had taken her. She had been one of the first. Henry had his eye on her for a while, and they’d been cornering her for weeks at the end of a school day. One night, Henry had given Vic and Belch orders to collect her, to take her back to Neibolt for a fun time, and naturally they had complied.

Betty, on the other hand, had not. Vic shivered as he remembered the way her pleas sounded, genuine fear and panic, and how she had kicked and punched and fought back with Vic and Belch. When Belch had pulled up outside of Neibolt, she had tried to run. Belch took a bat to her knees, then they had dragged her inside. Henry had been waiting, with Patrick by his side, and his rabid expression was burned into Vic’s mind. They had pushed her into the basement, and then Vic and Belch had been dismissed.

That was usually how it always went: they took someone off the street, delivered them back, and then sat around whilst Patrick and Henry did whatever it was they did down there. Vic had never cared to know.

Betty Ripsom was different. Vic had never quite shook this one off, he figured he never would. Henry had come up early, covered almost entirely in deep red blood, yet acting borderline normal, getting himself a drink and sitting down on the couch with a magazine and a blunt. Patrick had come up only five minutes later, grumbling about some snapped blade and equally as blood-soaked.

There were wails coming from the basement though, Vic didn’t know how the others were ignoring them with such ease. Curiosity, above anything, sent Vic down there. It definitely made the list of his deep regrets, because nothing had ever shocked him like Betty Ripsom’s cut in half body had. That wasn’t the worst part though, no, the worst part was how she was moving, trying to claw at the floor to get to the stairs, her pleas muffled by the fabric tied around her mouth. Her bottom half was about half a metre away from her and an axe sat bloodied beside it. Betty had been pointing to the axe, then pointing to her head.

Vic had known exactly what she meant, but he did nothing. He simply stood, in a state of dull shock, at the top of the cellar stairs, staring down as she bled out, sobbing in an indescribable agony for death to come sooner.

Vic had always wondered if that was the worst thing that he had ever seen, but it was not. Nothing would ever be more soul-destroying than the death of Georgie Denbrough, and Vic, Belch, Moose and Peter had all known this. Luckily, Patrick and Henry never had souls to destroy in the first place.
Bill, shaking from the spectrum of emotion, refrained from asking about Georgie. Mike and Stan both knew better than to bring that up too, and so silence overtook the room. Vic was staring out of the back window, a distant look on his face and eyes that were glazed over in something close to terror.

“Not all of them,” Vic replied, snapping back into the room, “I don’t know what happened to some of ‘em, and I don’t even know if Henry had anything to do with…with some of them.”

Bill’s breath hitched, and he tightened his grip around the knife.

“You fucking monsters,” Mike said, repulsed, “You fucking pigs. Richie wanted to come over here and put a bullet in your head straight up. Maybe we should have let him—"

“Maybe you should have,” Vic cut in, and the smile was back, his ugly, crooked grin. Mike shivered, and his finger twitched around the gun. He didn’t have it in him though, not yet. That wasn’t the smart thing to do, and he knew it. Mike had too much self control. “You can’t kill me. You can’t kill me and you know it.”

“Rather you than us,” Stanley countered, which surprised his friends more than it did Vic, who simply shrugged. He understood that logic, in fact, he respected it.

“But you won’t,” Vic continued, “I don’t mean ‘cause you don’t have it in ya’. I think you’re all traumatised enough to want us dead, I think some of you are traumatised enough to actually kill us.” He flashed a look to Bill.

But he was right, they wouldn’t. Not right then. Because even after hearing such a haunting confession, they knew Vic alive was more use to them than Vic dead, for the time being. Stanley didn’t have that in him, not yet, and Bill wouldn’t do it without solid justification and a little more information. Mike was simply too afraid. Vic knew all of this, because he was intelligent like that. After spending so long making their lives hell, he had come to understand them all quite well, knew how to read them like he did his own friends.

“And maybe you will,” Vic went on, “But you’re not gonna kill me right now, because you need me. Think about it, you shoot me dead, and Bowers would know, because he just would, and he’d have you all hung in a second. And there’s nobody to keep him away from you if I’m gone. And even if he knew I stabbed him in the back, he’d stab you back harder. Just for the fuckin’ fun of it.”

The three losers despised how right he was.

“You’ll live and help us,” Mike said, “Or you die by Bowers.”

“I’ll die either way.” But he knew it would be a little nicer going out at the hands of his dearest enemies. He’d rather let karma take him than Henry fucking Bowers. Plus, he knew what that guy did to people.

“But you’re gonna help us anyway,” Mike insisted, and Vic did not protest to this.

“This is me helping,” Vic stood then, crushing his now-empty can down onto the table, “I’m answering your questions. I’m not bullshitting you. I’m complying. I think we’re even.”

“You’re a murderer,” Stan spat, “We’ll never be even.”

“Don’t call me that,” Vic said, quietly, “Don’t.”

“Since when have you had a problem with name-calling?” Stan inquired, and once again the
outburst was shocking to the rest of the room. Vic really wasn’t a fan of this version of Stanley, he decided in that moment it was much more fun watching him cry than it was watching him bite. “What? Killing kids and leaving severed tongues around is fun and games but I call you a murderer and suddenly I’m the one that’s crossed a fucking line? You’re a bunch of fucking psychos. You’re fucking killers. You’re twisted and evil and I don’t even want your help, but if it means my friends get to leave Derry alive I’ll-“

“St-St-St-Stan-“ Bill was about to tell him to calm down. He was a little late, though, and half wanted Stan to continue with the long overdue rant.

Something struck a chord within Vic. Because nobody had ever called him that word before, and that word was dirty and vile and hurtful. Murderer? Hardly! They had no fucking idea, and no fucking right.

Something inside him snapped, and he felt it how he felt it in the basement when his fingers had been deep into Peter Gordon’s eye socket. The white hot rage, the blood-lust.

Vic picked up his can and hurled it at Stanley’s face. It thumped and hit the ground, but no mark was left on Stan’s shocked, frozen face. He began to shake, then. Vic felt the power dynamic shift back to it’s usual state.

“You’re right,” Vic said, and he walked over to the counter where his discarded gun sat. Mike aimed his, but Vic wasn’t really all that afraid. They weren’t here to kill him, that had already been established. “I’m a fucking killer. I’m severely unhinged - astounding observation there, Bird Boy.”

He turned around, and aimed the gun at Stanley.

Mike was frozen, the gun in his hand aimed at Vic, but his fingers hesitant on the trigger. He couldn’t pull it, not yet.

Bill knew he wouldn’t be able to get his words out if he tried, so he didn’t try. He stepped in front of the gun, shielding Stan without a second thought. Mike aimed his, shaking as the fear came back to him. They had let their guard down too much, he realised. Vic was not there to help them, only himself, and Stan had taken too many blows at his guilty conscience for him to care anymore.

“I killed Peter Gordon with my bare fucking hands,” Vic confessed to them, smiling as he did so, “Chopped his tongue right out of his mouth, then ripped his fuckin’ eyes out. Felt so good. Felt so, so good. God, you’d fuckin’ love it, you know? Taking a life, you don’t expect it to feel like that. You don’t expect to feel so liberated, but you do. I bet you would too. Shoot me, Mike, see for you fucking self.”

He didn’t. Stan, shaking and ready to shit himself, half hoped he would. Bill, in a state of immense shock, wondered why the fuck he couldn’t. Bill was half tempted to ram the knife into his stomach, but that wasn’t an option when the maniac was holding a gun only less than a metre from his face. He didn’t intend to pull the trigger, though. Vic wasn’t so keen on getting his kill count up, but he knew how to scare them.

It was working.

“Thought so,” Vic scoffed, and then dropped his own gun, “You’re not killers, but I am. And Peter was. Belch is. Patrick is. Henry is. And they’re coming for you. I gave you my advice, you’ve got your answers, but I’m not your friend, I’m not here to help you. I humoured your little interview, I
told you what you want to know, didn’t I?”

Silence.

“Let’s not tell anyone about this. I can’t afford that sort of trouble with Henry, and I’ll do my best to keep him away from you. But don’t be fucking stupid. Don’t show up at my house, don’t go running round town looking for us, don’t try and dig for answers you ain’t gonna’ find. I can’t promise you shit, but I can bet your ass that if you go trynna’ prove anything about what Henry does, Butch will have you shot on sight. No snooping. No more questions. Keep your heads down and keep your guns out.”

“Understood,” Mike said, and he motioned for Stan and Bill to move. Slowly, they did, and Vic stared silently, but his eyes weren’t aimed at them, no, he was fixated on the corpse of Peter Gordon, sat at his kitchen table.

Applauding him.

“You can fuck off now,” Vic whispered, but he wasn’t really talking to the Losers, “Come back here again and I might have to kill you.”

Peter smiled at him.

“I’ve done it before.”

Mike, Stan and Bill couldn’t have ran out faster, scrambling out of the front door frantically as Vic stood in the middle of his own kitchen, eyes manic as he stared at the empty chair, gun aimed at thin air.

When the door slammed shut, the ‘ghost’ vanished, and Peter dropped his gun. He went down with it, and collapsed to the floor in pure hysteria. He had lost his mind, for the second fucking time.

Outside, Stan, Bill and Mike were running back to the truck.

“Whathefuck-whathefuck-“ Stan was shouting, pushing Bill into the truck before jumping in and slamming the door. Mike was slower on the other side, and silent as his two friends exchanged panicked words and phrases. “That was a fucking mistake-“

“Eddie was right,” Mike cut in, flatly. Bill tensed, then nodded. There was no denial anymore, except maybe about Georgie, and Bill would cling to that until the cord was cut completely.

“What are we going to do?” Stan asked, as if anyone held a good enough answer.

“Richies p-p-p-plan is suh-sounding pretty good right huh-now,” Bill replied, quietly, as if he was ashamed to admit it. Stan and Mike weren’t quite sure how serious he was, and they didn’t want to question it. Stan knew it wouldn’t take much to convince him that it was the best option, and Mike was already weighing up the logistics of such an act.

“Let’s go talk to the others,” Mike said, “We’ll figure this out.” Somehow, he wasn’t all that sure they would.

Figuring out how to deal with a psychotic serial killer was definitely something easier said than done.

Chapter End Notes
back with 8k, shower me with praise (kidding, but feel free to comment bc thats always great)

also hit me up on Tumblr (@dearg0d) would be cool to talk to some of you!!! esp. if u have any questions etc about this, I hate not interacting when I dont update all the time :)

Since the loss of their youngest (and dearest) child, Mr and Mrs Denbrough had not been the best of parents. They were distant, neglectful, and completely unloving. Bill struggled to remember the last normal conversation he had held with his parents. They only really spoke to him to ask him what he wanted for dinner, or ask why his grades were slipping, or to inform him that they were going out and sometimes demand he must come with them.

That was what they had done that morning, insisting that Bill needed to come and see his Grandparents, and that he had spent far too much time out of the house recently. Bill was surprised they had really noticed, and if it had been any normal day, he would have probably gone along and played at happy families. He kind of liked his Grandparents, they were sweet and funny and often gave him money at the end of his visits. He enjoyed his Grandpa’s stories and the fond look his Grandma gave him.

Being with them sounded far more appealing than any other option that day, but Bill knew he couldn’t do that. He told his parents that he was too ill to go, claiming that he felt sick and light-headed, and had probably caught it from Ben or something. They didn’t protest, or force him to come along. His Father simply sighed and told him they’d be back by ten - if the traffic wasn’t too bad. The drive was always painfully long.

Their lack of care had worked in his favour on that day, and was actually very convenient for all the Losers, who were now gathered up in Bill’s basement, commencing what had to be one of the most important conversations of their entire lives.

Richie and Eddie had been the last to arrive, which was standard for Richie, who had never quite mastered the art of punctuality.

Waiting on their arrival had been painful and awkward, with a heavy energy in the room as Bev and Ben held back questions about Vic, but they understood why they had to wait for Richie. It was beyond a pleasant surprise to see Eddie alongside him though, and the day began with a large and overdue group hug upon their arrival, when Ben, relieved and overwhelmed, flung at him with open arms. Richie joined, and then Bev, followed by Mike and a hesitant Bill. Stan was the last to join, but did so with love and passion, mumbling words of adoration for his friends as he dived into them. They were all happy and safe intertwined like that, but it couldn’t last, and eventually Eddie shook them all, suffocating in the centre of it all.

“Jesus, fuck, shit, you’re alive!” Bev exclaimed, laughing, as their anxiety was momentarily forgotten.

“For now,” He deadpanned, and faces around the room fell. The mood and energy dropped in an instant. Eddie didn’t even try to play it off as a joke, instead simply clearing his throat and neatening out his clothes as the other losers backed up to their respective places in the basement.

“For now,” Stan agreed, quiet enough for only Bill to hear. He sat himself down in the corner of the couch, eyes rolling as Bill placed himself beside him. Mike sat at the other side, mumbling something about how cold it was down there as he adjusted the cushions behind him.
Ben and Bev placed themselves on the arm chair, Bev slotting between Ben’s legs comfortably. He rested his head on her shoulder, and blushed as he noticed the way Stan was staring at them, almost longingly. Richie flopped down on the floor, laying his head against the side of the couch where Stan was sat, allowing his body to sprawl across the floor. Eddie, stiff and uncomfortable, remained stood. The beanbag didn’t seem so appealing when such a serious conversation had to take place.

“So…” Mike opened, looking around for someone to take the reigns. He eyed Bill, who seemed as distant as the others, then his eyes rolled to Richie, who was staring at Eddie with a somewhat nervous expression.

“So I had to threaten my Mom to get out yesterday,” Eddie announced, and Mike was grateful that he had spoken up first. He supposed this would probably be better if Eddie said his piece first, and it gave Mike more time to prepare how he was actually going to explain the events of the previous night to them all. It was going to be a huge blow, and a devastating revelation. They would need time to process it, something Mike had understandably failed to do overnight.

“How’d she take that?” Ben asked, because they all knew it couldn’t be well. It was an interesting way to begin what was going to be a mortifying conversation, because this was no doubt the least relevant aspect. Eddie felt that context was necessary though, and it didn’t hurt for them to know how he had gotten out, or why he probably wouldn’t return home for a while.

“Not so well,” Eddie said, flat, “But I didn’t have a choice. I was in danger there, too.” He explained the same things that he had to Richie the night before, about how he threw his pills, yelled at her, and gave a detailed run down of their conversation as they all listened in perfect silence, barely even moving. Eddie hadn’t yet explained why he had done these things, but as soon as he stopped talking, the question was raised.

“What was the danger?” Stan asked, “Why…Why did you do all of that?”

Eddie had a drawstring bag on his back. Nobody had thought to question the content of said bag. As he pulled it off and retrieved the something from inside - a small brown box - they no longer needed to.

“Bowers left Eds a gift too,” Richie chimed, a dark edge to his voice, “Gotta respect the generosity.”

The others gave him a strange look, but Eddie simply placed it on the table, seemingly unaffected by the comment. “I don’t wanna open it, because it’s really- I- Well, it’s not a pretty sight. And I know you saw that tongue but…”

Mike’s mind flashed to the reactions that the other losers had. The disgust, but also the speed in which they seemed to process and accept it. He wondered if this was going to be as bad.

“This is worse.” It was.

“I don’t think I want to know,” Ben grumbled, burying his head in the crook of his girlfriens neck.

Mike stood, and Bill followed, also rising and leaning over the box. Mike picked it up, and gave it a tiny shake. His breath hitched as a grim idea passed through his mind, and he put the box back down. Vic had warned them, he realised.

“Open it,” Eddie said, quietly, “If you want.” Bill picked the box up, shaking because he knew how horrific this could be, and then ran his fingers across the top.
“What’s in there, Eddie?” Bev asked, her own mind racing. Stan seemed to have an idea, as he was staring up at the item in Bill’s hand with a look of pure horror across his face. Ben let out a noise of anguish, a muffled groan, then shook his head, lifting it from the safety of Bev to also face up to whatever Bowers had left for them.

“It’s-“

Bill opened the box before Eddie could get the words out. As soon as his eyes registered what was in front of them, Bill screamed, then Mike screamed, and the box fell to the floor. The eyeballs rolled out, and the two boys jumped backwards onto the couch, clambering over it as the horror filtered through them. Stan was frozen, pinned to his seat by the certainty that his legs would fail him in that moment, and the intense focus he had on keeping that sick threatening to come down.

Beverly jumped up, and joined the screaming as she realised she was looking at two fucking eyes on Bill’s basement floor, throwing herself back against the wall. Ben remained seated but pulled his legs to his chest, mouth open as if he wanted to scream too. He resisted the urge.

Richie, almost desensitised to the sight, watched the display in a still, poised silence. Eddie was equally as calm, eyes wide upon seeing his friends crumble. He wondered if they’d been so horrified by the tongue, but knew from Richie’s explanation that they had not. Richie said they were surprisingly calm, actually, only Stan had vomited, and Eddie noted that he looked as if he was going to do so again. It was a rational reaction - a very human reaction, actually.

“Holy fucking shit-“

“Pick them up!” Stan gasped, but he was unwilling to do so himself. He didn’t like the idea of getting his hands dirty like that, but there was no way they could just leave them on the floor like that. “Fucking- Shit-“

Bill, attempting to pull himself together, rushed back around and scraped the eyes back up using the tip of his finger and the box, grimacing as he did so. Mike came back around too, and Bev walked back over, getting a closer look at them - as curious as she was disgusted. Ben remained seated, shaking his head frantically as they all crowded around to see the gory contents. Richie also stood, and walked over. He wanted to be close to Eddie, not the fucking box though.

For the first time since they had all arrived, the energy shifted again. The awkwardness had dispersed, replaced with communal panic and concern, but most notably, they were all finally speaking. The silence, and the heavy air that came with it, had gone. In it’s place were six, frenzied voices all half-yelling half-coherent sentences and curse words.

“What do we- How do we-“

“Get rid of them!”

“Stop screaming Bill you sound like a bitch-“

“Christ on a bastard bike-“

“Peter Gordon.”

The two words, spoken loud and certain by Stanley Uris, were enough to shut everyone else back up.

“Peter Gordon,” He repeated, looking up at his friends with a look of pure dread. He repressed the urge to vomit again, instead opting to continue speaking. “Vic wasn’t lying.”
The sentence only made sense to Mike and Bill, who exchanged looks of terror and discomfort.

“What the fuck?” Beverly asked, which was a more than valid question considering. “What does Peter have to do with any of this?”

She remembered seeing him only a couple of weeks or so ago, he was walking slowly on the other side of the road to her and Ben, smoking a cigarette with his head hung low. Beverly had only noted this event in her memory because they had made eye contact, (she shivered at that now) and she had commented to Ben about how strange it was that he no longer tormented them how he used to. He had looked right through them. Ben had shrugged and said something about him growing up or whatever.

Bev looked to Ben, who was also replaying that event in his head, and they exchanged knowing looks. Neither could remember the colour of his eyes, though.

“How the fuck is he related to any of this?” Bev scoffed, but she had already guessed. Verbal confirmation wasn’t going to change anything.

“Last night-“

“What happened last night, Mike?” Ben asked, knowing that it could not be good. “Did Vic listen? Did he agree to keep them away?”

“Something like that,” Mike said, though it really wasn’t. Vic had agreed to maintain his original promise, of course, but there was much more to it than just that. Much more than anyone really wanted to know. “Listen-“

Mike wanted to deliver it as nicely as possible. He wanted to give them a lengthy explanation of every aspect of the visit, a full run-down of every word exchanged and every move made. Mike thought this would be best in chronological order, and delivered calmly, in the nicest way possible.

Stan had other ideas. “He confessed.”

Silence.

“He confessed to everything. And Eddie was right - Eddie was right about it all.” Stan flashed him a look, and Eddie’s face was frozen in pure despair. No shock though, it was a little late for that.

“Fucking bullshit,” Bev snapped, mostly because she just didn’t want to hear it, but the reaction, especially from her, was not appreciated by Stan. “It's lies! It's-

“Oh shut up,” He hissed, taking everyone aback, “You weren’t fucking there-“

“S-Stan-“ Bill, as distressed as he was, hated seeing his friends in such a state more. He grabbed Stan’s arm and the shock of the tight contact was enough to silence Stan, who stared at him with a furious look in his eye. Beverly’s stare was somehow colder, which was so terribly unfair, but that was an issue for another day.

“Don’t-“ Stan whispered, freezing up.

“He’s telling the truth,” Mike cut in, louder, “Vic confessed almost…well, almost everything. They’re killing the missing.”

They had all expected it, at that point. Years of brushing off Eddie’s certainty had now come back to bite them in the ass, and that felt worse than any of them had really anticipated. Maybe that had
something to do with the guilt, or the torturous realisation that these people were not sadistic bullies, but sadistic murderers. And they were the next on the list.

Somehow, Mike remained calm as he spoke. “I couldn’t- we couldn’t get through to Vic, he can’t get Henry off our backs. He don’t think anything can. I think he’s right.”

Eddie felt his knees give way slightly, and he allowed himself to sink down to the floor, feeling around his pockets for his inhaler. Richie went down with him, burying his face in his hair. Ben raised, slowly, and walked over to join the group, completing the circle of seven as Beverly pulled him into a loose embrace.

Mike ran them through the entire story, somehow managing to get through without breaking down, or having to answer all that many questions. Bill did a decent job at filling in the parts Mike forgot to mention, and Stan remained silent, hoping that hearing it out loud might make it sink in a little better.

It did not, and all the losers were experiencing similar processing problems, unable to comprehend everything they were being told.

“That are Peter Gordons’ eyeballs,” Richie said, as if he didn’t believe it, “That was his tongue?”

“Vic said…” Mike didn’t think he could get the words out, so he didn’t bother trying. He cleared his throat, just to fill the silence, and then attempted an alternative explanation, “Peter’s dead. The rest of the missing kids are. And Eddie had it right this entire time.”

For some reason, they were not applauding Eddie’s brilliant intuition.

“And we’re next, of course.”

“And Vic isn’t gonna try and stop them?” Bev realised how stupid the question sounded as soon as she asked, and felt herself blushing, so she answered it herself, “Oh, I guess that’s our job.” She found her eyes drifting to Richie, but couldn’t stomach the thought of his plan.

“We can’t stop them,” Mike continued, flatly, “Not with any fuckin’ ease-“

“But Vic confessed?” Richie scoffed, “Of course we can-“

“He could be lying,” Ben offered, though they all doubted it. Plus, the mystery had always made the disappearances scarier. They weren’t mysteries anymore, they were tragedies, and somehow that didn’t feel quite as haunting. Bowers was human, kind of, and he could be stopped, there was no darker force at work. It was a psycho with a rich daddy. A tragedy.

“No,” Eddie insisted, because of course, “Why would he?”

“To fuck with us,” Ben said, as if it was obvious, “To scare us. I don’t know. I just…I don’t get it. Why would Vic just admit that? What the heck happened there?” But they knew it all, Mike had spared no details.

"I hope to God he's fucking with us," Bev mumbled, but she doubted it. "Fuck."

"He's not fucking with us," Stan insisted, "He's fucking crazy, Bev!"

“He puh-puh-puh-puh-“ Bill had known he would struggle, hence the long silence, but he hadn’t expected it to be quite so intense. His friends were patient though, they usually were. “He pulled a-a guh-guh-guh-gun. On us. On S-Stan. I duh-don't think that's just them fuh-fuh-fucking with us.”
“I'm gonna fuckin’-” Richie stood quickly, and was practically vibrating on the spot, so full of rage and anguish, he didn't quite know what to do. “I’ll kill him- I swear- I’ll fuckin’- Christ-“

The event had replayed in Stan's nightmare, and different endings to the scenario had plagued him all morning, he was also pretty torn up about every thing else they had discovered in the past twenty four hours. “I don’t think he would have killed us there and then like that. That’s not their style.”

“But he could have-“

“But he didn’t,” Stan cut in.

“We might not always be so lucky,” Mike said, and whilst his friends were not grateful for the brutal comment, nobody disputed the truth behind it. “And we can’t bank everything on staying together. If he realises that we aren’t splitting up, he might go two at once, or more.” The more Mike thought on this, the more absolutely fucked he realised they were.

“We’re fucked,” Eddie announced, vocalising Mike’s thoughts as well as his own.

“We’re beyond fucked,” Stan agreed, monotonously.

“We’re not,” Bill countered, and he sounded so certain that Stan almost believed him. “Not yuh-yet. We just have to huh-huh-hold out until the eh-end of suh-suh- end o-of summer, and we’ve made it th-this far-“

“Why the fuck are you talking about this like we’re kids hiding from bullies?” Richie cut in, refusing to hide his genuine frustration. “This ain’t the fuckin’ same as it was two weeks ago, Bill. This is life and death! Are none of you getting that?”

Silence.

“Stan?” Richie asked, and Stan immediately turned away, unable to make eye contact. He was so ashamed of how afraid he had been - how afraid he was - but he failed to realise that in that moment, Richie wanted to see the fear. He wanted his friends to be as shaken as torn as he was, and they were, but showing it wasn’t all that easy when they had spent so long trying to hide and bottle everything up. It was easier to treat this like another nothing, because then it didn’t feel quite so real or intense.

For Richie, the numbness had long since worn off, and now he was simply overwhelmed and enraged, even more so because nobody else seemed to be.

“It’s not that we don’t get it,” Mike said, a certainty to his voice that Richie really didn’t like, “I get it, and believe me, I’m as terrified as you, I just can’t process the thought of…I can’t kill them, Rich. I can’t be that person, I can’t be as low as them. What they do makes me sick, and I can’t…I can’t. We can’t - we aren’t them!”

“Oh fuck off with the inspiring speech bullshit,” Richie sneered, not because he meant it, but because he was too angry and overwhelmed to really think up a more rational response. Mike didn’t seem offended, he just sighed and shook his head. The others seemed pissed though, even Eddie’s face folded into an annoyed glare. “We’re talking about a fucking serial killer! These guys get caught and CNN won’t shut the fuck up about it for two years. This is next level! He has higher numbers than the fuckin’ Zodiac! And you want us to just sit here? I can’t fuckin’ believe any of you right now-“

“Nobody’s saying we’re just gonna sit here!” Eddie cut in, wiping himself off as he stood up.
“They duh-deserve to die s-s-slow and puh-painful deaths,” Bill said, “But I don’t know i-if we should buh-be ruh-res-res-pons-suh- be in ch-charge of that.”

“Who the fuck else will?” Richie asked, and it wasn’t something he expected any of them to answer, in fact, that was kind of the whole point. Nobody else cared enough to do anything about it, because if they did something would have happened a long time ago.

The Losers weren’t the only people in town to have suspicions about Henry Bowers and his bastard friends. Everyone knew that Butch Bowers was a terribly fucked up man, but they didn’t quite know the extent. People had thoughts and feelings and theories, but nothing concrete. There was no reason for anyone to go off on a witch hunt for his son, who in reality, and from afar, seemed like nothing more than an average nasty bully with a little too much free time and a little too big of an ego.

Then there were those bastard friends of his, who came across (from afar, of course) like lap dogs and pathetic sidekicks for Henry. They were cruel and nasty and violent, but to teachers and parents and everyone else who should have known better, they were classic bullies with no real agenda. Adults in Derry knew better than to go pointing fingers and spreading rumours when someone like Butch was watching.

Plus, no respectable agency was going to launch an investigation into Henry or his friends just because a group of teenagers were afraid. They had no evidence, nothing that would hold up with a law official, anyway, and anything that had connected the disappearances to the Neibolt House was long since destroyed.

“The fucking justice system, Richie,” Beverly replied, as if it was obvious. Richie gawped at her, then laughed, loud and obnoxiously. “Don’t start-“

“Please tell me you’re joking,” He sneered, shaking his head and stepping back, breaking the circle. “Because we all know better than anyone there ain’t no fucking justice here! Where was our justice when we got our skin carved into? Or all those times we’ve been assaulted and harassed? You think Mike got justice when he was racially abused? Where’s Stan’s justice for having a fuckin’ gun pulled on him? Or my justice for having my truck stolen and vandalised? Where’s Peter’s justice for getting brutally fucking murdered, only to have his body parts scattered around town like they’re part of a mother fucking easter egg hunt? Huh?”

Richie was yelling, probably louder than ever before, with more venom than any of his friends had ever heard. Beverly was genuinely afraid in that moment, no so much of Richie himself, who would never ever lay a finger or intend to hurt them, but of how completely broken down he seemed. She was afraid because the trauma was showing - after so many years of almost flawlessly hiding it.

They were all frozen, silent bar Eddie, who was sobbing, crouched back on the ground. Nobody was going to cut off this ‘inspirational speech bullshit’, because they needed to hear it, more than ever before.

“Where’s the justice for every other poor bastard they’ve killed?” Richie continued, “Or their families?”

He turned to Bill, staring his friend dead on in the face. They all knew what was coming, even Bill had an inkling, but nobody tried to stop him from saying the unspoken. “Where’s Georgie’s justice?”

That earned him a solid right hook to the face, and nobody was surprised, despite the gasps and
curse words that spread around the room.

Richie staggered back, clutching his bloodied upper lip. Bill’s face had gone from being bordering on obvious misery to pure, red rage. It was misplaced, because he wasn’t genuinely angry at Richie for making the suggestion, he was angry at the truth behind it. He was angry at Bowers, at the world, at God. He was angry that he couldn’t argue, that he didn’t know where Georgie was, that there was a fucking possibility his bully and tormentor had taken him away.

He was angry because there was no fucking justice. Richie was smart enough to understand that, which is why he didn’t bother trying to fire a hit back, he simply stood there, staring and waiting for a second punch to come.

It didn’t, thanks to Stan and Ben, who were gripping his shoulders in warning, and Mike, who had stepped between the two. Eddie was still crouched, staring up at Richie in something between shock and awe. Bev was on the sidelines, unsure of where to position herself in the situation. She didn’t know what to believe or think in that moment.

“Bowers didn’t k-kill Georgie,” Bill spat, but without the same certainty as every other time he had insisted this. “He-He’s alive and he’s out there-“

“My point still stands, Bill,” Richie countered, which was true enough. Bill clenched and unclenched his fists, and Stan guided him backwards to the couch. “But you believe that if it helps you sleep at night.”

“You’re such an asshole, Richie,” Bev yelled, finally settling on her stance. “You don’t know for sure! You don’t know shit! This could be one huge wind up-“

“Chance that then, princess,” Richie sneered, wiping the blood away in a fashion that was beyond dramatic. “This is one elaborate wind up, even for those pigshits.”

“I’m just saying that we should consider all avenues before we do anything too drastic,” Beverly explained, which was fair and logical yet so stupidly optimistic.

“What avenues?” Eddie asked, sounding genuinely confused. He stood again, running a hand through his hair and looking between the group frantically. “What fuckin’ avenues? They’re killing people! That’s the only avenue I can fucking see!”

“So you think we should murder them?” Ben fired back, because of course he wasn’t for that plan. “Eddie, come on dude, we’re better than that.”

Eddie wished he could still see it that way. He wasn’t at all sure this was about being better than anyone. As Richie had so eloquently stated, this was about justice. Justice wasn’t black and white, and their situation fell somewhere in the deep grey nobody could quite decipher. Black, that was where Bowers and the Gang fell. Pure black. Eddie figured he could live in the grey if it meant four less murderers in the black. His problem wasn’t with the act itself, because he doubted guilt would come into play knowing they were so deserving of it, but more so with the actual logic of it, more so with getting away with it. Eddie didn’t think any of them were built for prison.

“I’ll do what I have to do,” Eddie shrugged, and then stepped beside Richie. He had made his stance more than clear.

“This is crazy,” Mike insisted, “We would never get away with this, even if we were capable!”

“I don’t think we’d get too badly punished,” Stan said, flatly, as if he’d put a decent amount of thought into it (he had).
“Speak for your fucking selves,” Mike muttered, shaking his head. Stan flashed him a look of apology.

“Think about it,” He continued, “If we somehow found a way to prove everything they’ve done - or at least some of it - I don’t think anyone’s gonna be out for our asses the way they would if they thought it was some random attack. And we can claim self-defence - everyone knows how horrible they were. A full town of testimonies for that one-“

“You’re being delusional,” Bev cut in, because she truly believed it, and because Stan’s certainty unnerved her. “It wouldn’t matter. Butch wouldn’t have that, and even if- Fuck, why are we even entertaining this possibility?”

“Because it’s the only way to stop him,” Stan said, and he looked to Richie, who was offering him a small, but fond smile.

“No,” Mike countered, “It isn’t! It can’t be!”

“Well threatening them didn’t work,” Stan sneered, “Shit, Mike, we could have died last night!” And that reality was just beginning to set into Stanley’s mind. He didn’t want to die, not one bit. He wasn’t fucking ready.

“But we didn’t,” Mike said, a perfect imitation of Stan, who simply sighed. “And I would never let that happen.”

“It’s out of our control,” Ben reminded him, a painful truth for them all. “None of us can make a promise like that, Mike.” And it distressed him more so than anybody, because even the mere idea of Beverly being even slightly hurt made him want to curl up and scream into a void. There was nothing Ben wouldn’t do to protect her, and she knew this, but it didn’t mean he would always be able to protect her from the world, and certainly not from Henry Bowers or his clan. As much as he wanted to, Ben knew he could never make a promise like that, and in reality Beverly wouldn’t have wanted him to. She appreciated the prospect of his protection, but that didn’t mean she needed it.

“I can try,” Mike shrugged, and then he seemed to almost relax, sighing and slumping back down on the couch. “Christ, you really think we have to kill them for this to stop? You really think that’s the only option?”

“I wouldn’t suggest it if I didn’t believe that,” Richie mumbled. Then, in a poor British accent, “No time for tomfoolery.”

There were small smiles around the room, but they all knew that Richie was in no mental state to sit and play comic relief. Nobody was, and they realised the melancholy mood wasn’t going to shift anytime soon after such heavy news had been bestowed upon them.

“I can’t do that,” Beverly said, “Not unless…I mean, not unless I really had to. Self-defence, or you know, for one of you guys.” She was certain that was the only situation that could push her to do it, and same applied for all of them, just on different levels. Richie wanted to do it for his friends, but it was also self-defence - just premeditated. Did that really make it any worse?

“Think of the aftermath,” Mike huffed, “We can’t deal with that! We don’t know how to hide, or destroy or- Shit, we can’t deal with a dead body! We certainly can’t deal with four!”

“It’s just another few missing kids,” Richie shrugged, “Nothing Derry isn’t used to.” There was a silence then, as they all pondered this.
“Better them than us,” Stan mumbled, and it wasn’t a statement up for dispute, but that didn’t mean they were all willing to partake.

“If you want to do this, then go ahead,” Mike said, “I’m not going to stop you, but I can’t be a part of this. I won’t.”

“Go fuck yourself then, Hanlon,” Richie spat, and he regretted the outburst immediately. Mike looked like he’d just been punched, but his eyes showed only sadness with the shock, no rage or anger or disgust how his friends expected. “Shit, Fuck, I didn’t mean that-“

“Don’t talk down to me,” Mike cut in, his voice firm and unwavering, “I won’t apologise for not wanting to kill anybody. You and Eddie can run around playing God all you fucking want, but I won’t be joining you. Don’t think that’s a reason to disrespect me like that, Rich, I won’t have it.”

Bill, still holding back tears over the Georgie comment, was envious of such a monologue. He cleared his throat, which ended the heavy silence, and snapped a shaken Richie back into the room.

“Right,” Richie said, flatly, “Sorry, Mike.” Mike nodded, a fair acknowledgement, and then looked around the room, weighing up the reactions of the others.

“So what are we going to do?” Stan asked, “Because we can’t do shit without every one of us on board. And that isn’t gonna happen, is it?” His eyes flashed to Mike, and then to Beverly, who was staring back at him warily. She hadn’t really expected Stan to support Richie’s idea, none of them had, he wasn’t usually a fighter - and he was certainly not a killer.

“No,” Bev replied, “It isn’t. I’m with Mike on this one, hundred percent.”

Eyes turned to Ben, then, and he looked from Bev back to Richie, biting his bottom lip, before saying, “Me too.”

Richie’s dramatic eye roll did not go unnoticed, but everyone knew better than to comment. Instead, people were more interested in what Bill’s thoughts on this matter were. Everyone else had clearly positioned themselves, for or against, but not Bill. There was no giveaway, either, he wasn’t looking to Richie with a contemplative expression, or stepping towards Mike with certainty and a smug grin. Bill looked entirely emotionless, and his eyes were fixed on the wall ahead of him, straight over Eddie and away from everyone else. Nobody knew his stance, but they did know it would be the make or break. He was their leader, at the end of the day.

“Bill?” Eddie prompted, hoping and praying that Bill would go with them. He doubted it, though, especially after throwing that right hook at Rich. Nobody was mad about it though, not even Richie, who had breezed through the moment like it was nothing, too understanding of Bill’s reasons to really protest the action. Maybe he had kind of deserved it, bringing Georgie up like that.

“I-I-I don’t know,” Bill announced, which was the one response that nobody had wanted, “I don’t th-th-think I could. If…if something else h-h-happens, if they hurt one of you guys, then maybe. But n-not yet.”

“So it’s settled,” Beverly said, far too smug, “No killing anybody.”

“Yet,” Richie added. “But I swear to God, if I see another fucking body part-“

“Rich-“ Eddie cut in, softly, then louder, he said, “What do we do then? Sit around and wait?”

“Of course not,” Mike insisted, though he wasn’t sure what the alternatives were. “We could…”
“We could leave,” Ben finished for him, and the idea sat relatively well with him. “We could just leave before they get to us. If they are killing people, then the only reason they get away with it is because…well, because of Henry’s Dad. And if he isn’t there, Henry can’t do anything. So we should leave Derry. He can’t follow us.”

“I can’t just run away,” Stan countered, “We don’t have any money, for one, and where would we go? We’re not going to the same college. We’d have to- No- It wouldn’t work!”

“You’d rather stay in Derry and commit murder than leave town a few weeks sooner?” Beverly sneered, “Is that what you’re telling me?”

It was different for them all, though. Running had always been an option, and was something Richie had joked about doing with Eddie for years. Sadly, it was one of the many things that would be much easier said than done. There were many complications and faults with the idea, most of which Ben hadn’t considered when he suggested it, too busy romanticising the idea of taking off with his friends and the love of his life.

The biggest problem, aside from finance, was parents. Sure, if they didn’t say anything it would probably go down as another missing persons case - only people never vanished in groups, not all at once, and despite how awful some of their parents were, they loved them too much to leave without saying anything. Even Bill, who had been intensely neglected for the majority of his adolescent years, loved his parents.

“I can’t let my parents lose two kids,” Bill offered, quietly. Ben gulped, then nodded. Everyone made the wise decision to not speak out about how staying in Derry held the same possibility. Bill was already aware of that, without a patronising reminder.

“And my Mom would probably die if she…” Eddie sighed, which was true enough. Sonia was a monster of a Mother, but boy did she love Eddie, and despite everything she had put him through, Eddie loved her too - far more than she deserved. He didn’t want her to lose anybody else, because losing his Father had killed her enough. If she lost him…

Eddie figured the three of them could meet again in Hell.

“I’d run right now if I had the cash,” Beverly shrugged, but she understood that it wasn’t a logical possibility, regardless of how bad she wanted it to be. “We can’t go without each other.”

“We stick together,” Mike said, “No matter what crazy, bullshit plan we hatch, we do it together. We can’t be divided right now, okay?” He was looking at Richie, but then his eyes flashed over to Bev, and she nodded slowly.

“Together,” She confirmed. “No running. No killing. What else?”

“Vic told us not to go digging,” Mike said, “I don’t want to dig, ‘cause I don’t want to know how sick and twisted they really are, but I think we need to.”

“That’s the big plan?” Richie implored, “Playing detective?”

“It’s not playing,” Mike retorted, “We need to do this for real. Take it seriously, please Rich.”

“I’m taking this very serious!”

“That’s new for you,” Stan chimed, but there was no bite. Richie flipped him off, but he was smirking, seeming to calm slightly.
“I like that plan,” Eddie said, “I have so much research, and- and I can get more, I guess, we just have to figure out where to look.”

“Don’t keep it restricted to Henry, either,” Mike said, “We should get everything we can on Butch.”

“Are we gonna k-k-kill him too?” Bill asked, “You know, i-i-if it comes to it.”

Nobody knew, only they did, because if they wanted to get away with any of it then killing Butch would be compulsory. But nobody wanted to say yes, nobody wanted to admit they’d thought that much into it.

“It won’t come to it,” Mike replied, much too certain. Richies sighed loudly, but he didn’t protest further. “Eddie, do you have your files?”

“Of course.”

The rest of the day was spent recounting everything in the folder, going through every kid, pre-teen, teen and adult that had vanished, everything reported on said person and any connections Henry had to that person. There were more than a few tears shed, and Stan ended up lighting a candle when Eddie finished reading the list of names, a respect thing, he insisted.

Upon reflection, the losers couldn’t believe how they had ever been so certain Bowers had nothing to do with the disappearances, but Eddie was too sad to feel smug about it. He wished he could have been wrong, but there was no more denying it. The big question was where the bodies were, and how on Earth nothing had been found.

“28 Neibolt Street,” Eddie explained, “Nobody lives up that end. And there was once something about… I don’t know, they wanted to search it in connection with… I don’t remember who, but whatever, and Butch owns it, and-and, it’s the only property he owns that isn’t in use, from what I can find.”

“That’s true,” Ben confirmed, “I remember reading something about it. The houses on that end of Neibolt are death traps, they’re so rundown and…” Ben shivered.

“I used to take the shortcut home that way,” Eddie told them, “But it smells weird and it feels like someone’s watching and then that homeless guy chased me through the yard and-“ He grimaced at the memory, and Richie instinctively wrapped his arm around him.

“Did they search there?” Bill asked, and Eddie simply shrugged.

“Maybe we should,” Richie suggested, “If we find anything-“

“No way,” Mike cut in, “Trespassing. Butch would shoot the shit out of us.” He was right, but Richie didn’t care. He mentally tabled the idea anyway.

“Fine,” Richie huffed, unusually compliant.

They continued discussing theories and what not until late into the evening, when the mood had mellowed and true devastation hit. It was disgustingly hard to accept that they were on a serial killers “To Do List” - as Richie had so eloquently phrased it. It was the bitter truth, but they were somehow dealing with it with it somewhat well, or at least pretending to.

Ben and Mike walked Beverly home, and she crept into her bedroom to sob herself to sleep. Any interruption from her Father would have pushed her over the edge that night, so the alone time was
a small blessing. She was asleep relatively soon, drained from such a horrific day spent attempting to accept the unacceptable.

Ben and Mike were staying at Ben’s, where his delighted and talkative Mother spent far too long sat on the edge of Ben’s bed asking about their day and offering them her baked goods. Ben just wanted to think and Mike just wanted to stop, but Mrs Hanscom was far from a helpful distraction, despite her good intention. Ben ended up shooing her out so that they could exchange awkward conversation about the day in peace. Neither of them could sleep, which was the norm for Mike, but alien to Ben. It wasn’t something he wanted to get used to.

Richie and Eddie, naturally, returned to Richie’s. Maggie and Went left the two alone, and they snuggled down into Richie’s bed immediately, where Richie began to cry. The eyeballs were far away in Bill’s basement, stowed in the box with the tongue, but that didn’t make it any easier to deal with. Eddie cried a little less than Richie, who was sobbing loud and heavy into his chest, and instead whispered quiet words between soft forehead kisses.

“We’ll go to Neibolt, Rich. We’ll fucking kill them, if we have to. We’ll get out of here alive.”

Richie knew he couldn’t trust those statements, but that didn’t mean the words weren’t comforting to hear. He’d have taken anything in that moment.

“I love you,” Richie didn’t say it, he only mouthed it into Eddie’s chest, hoping to God that he would feel it or know what he couldn’t bring himself to truly say. Eddie didn’t know for sure, but he hoped. He hoped with all his heart.

Zack and Sharon Denbrough returned home at eleven pm, and they didn’t go to check on their son as they crept up to bed. Bill knew they wouldn’t, which was why he was so okay with having a half-naked boy beside him in bed. And Stan knew they wouldn’t, which was why he was so okay being there like that.

Only, he wasn’t okay being there like that, he wasn’t okay in any way, shape or form.

(It had been a nice enough distraction, in the moment, he supposed).

Only, on top of everything else he felt, Stan felt used again. The tears came naturally, almost as soon as Bill turned to lay with his back to him. It was a mixture of the usual rejection, fear and hurt, mixed in with the overwhelming knowledge that Henry Bowers wanted to kill them all, and had killed countless young citizens of Derry for years now. Bill, wide awake, assumed the sole reason for Stan’s sadness was the latter.

And it was, in fairness. Stan’s trauma was almost entirely Bowers-based, because his family life was pretty okay, and his friends were all wonderful 90% of the time, and really, Bill wasn’t all that cruel - and really, he had bigger issues than a boy not being in love with him. But it was much easier to write it all down to that than think about the real problems. Better Bill kill him than Bowers, right?

That was a dramatic way of looking at it, in truth, Stan knew so. He tried to muffle his sobs, he really did, but Bill heard anyway, and it wasn’t long before he rolled over, facing Stan and reaching out to run a somewhat comforting hand in his hair. “Are y-y-you okay?”

Stan opened his eyes to see that Bill’s were wet with his own tears. He felt his stomach twist a little at the sight, so he opted to nod. It clearly wasn’t the time for him to bring up his breaking heart.

“Are you okay?” Stan quizzed, daring to shuffle a little closer. Bill re-initiated the contact properly,
then, sliding his other arm around Stan’s bare torso, and Stan did the same. It felt almost wholesome, but then it was bold to label anything between the two of them wholesome in any way.

“How’s the fist?”

Bill laughed at that, “Perfectly fine.”

(He had already known this, what with fucking it a mere hour ago and all.)

Quieter, Bill said, “I shouldn’t have p-punched him.”

“It’s not the first time,” Stan pointed out, which was true enough. Richie and Bill had fought since they were tiny, always on the line of a little too violent due to Richie’s boisterous personality and Bill’s alpha-male complex. It was never will too much bad intention though, and that still applied here. It had been a bad impulse decision as a result of overwhelming and unbearable emotion. Nobody really blamed him for that, not even Richie. “And it could have been worse.”

“This is going to g-g-get worse,” Bill sighed, and Stan couldn’t bring himself to dispute it. Silence overtook, then, and they remained curled up in each other - a rare occasion that Stan never took for granted. He felt himself drifting into a sleep, a peaceful one too, with the feeling of Bill’s fingers running through his hair and the sound of his heartbeat below him. It was too good, so it was no surprise when Bill snapped him out of it. “Stanley?”

“How’s the fist?”

“Hm?” Stan lifted his head, only slightly, but enough to see the woeful expression on Bill’s face.

“D-Do you th-think Bowers did it?” Bill asked, a question he had put off even thinking about ever since the idea first formulated all those years ago. It wasn’t that easy anymore, it was harder than ever, and if there was one person Bill knew wouldn’t lie to him about it, it was Stan. “Do y-you think Buh-Buh-Bowers k-k-k-killed Georgie?”

Silence.

Stan pondered it, because he was torn. His first instinct was to lie to Bill, to tell him what he wanted to hear. But then, where would that get them? Stan wasn’t a liar, and this was too heavy to ever truly lie about. He didn’t exactly know the truth though. Did he really think Bowers had killed Georgie?

The thought made him shiver, and he had always tried to avoid it for the sake of Bill as well as his own sanity. Georgie was the youngest person to ever vanish in Derry. It was years ago, too, when people first started going missing. The idea that even people as evil as Henry and Patrick could kill a child like that…

Well, it wasn’t that crazy. The pair had obviously done a fuck-ton more vile things since, so it was hardly an absurd belief. Henry and Patrick, of course they could do it. Vic and Belch? And the other friends they’d had back then? No fucking way. Stan was truly torn.

“I don’t know,” He replied, eventually. Bill’s expression didn’t change, and Stan didn’t know what that meant. “I hope to fucking God he didn’t, but I can’t say for sure. There’s no way of knowing. But say they did, Bill, and we find out, what would it change? Maybe it’s better left a mystery. I think the truth might be too hard to bear.”

Bill disagreed.

“I-I have to know,” Bill insisted, quietly, “Buh-Because if they even l-laid a fuh-fucking fuh-finger on him, I’ll kill them, Stan. Mark my words.”
“Marked,” Stan whispered, and for once, there was nothing more that needed to be said.

Chapter End Notes

just wanna really stress that writing conversation, (emotional conversation) between seven different people with big personalities and feelings and thoughts is very hard so I really hope I did them all justice and communicated things well. I hope you enjoyed this, even tho it was technically only one scene (but its an 8k scene so take it) feedback is adored ! :)
Vic didn’t see Peter anymore. He could feel his presence looming, captured movement in the corner of his eye, and often heard his voice. But he couldn’t see him.

Peter, or ghost-Peter, never presented itself anymore, and that only intensified the paranoia. Being in the Neibolt house wasn’t helping matters any either, but they had to be there. They were gathering things. Henry had yet another idea, fuelled and ignited by the fact they couldn’t seem to get any of those bastard losers alone.

Henry was taking it up a notch. This did not please Vic, who was growing more and more conflicted by the day. The doubt he harboured did not change anything though, he was still doing everything his friends told him, too afraid to not, and at that moment, was looking around upstairs for a very specific old ‘trophy’. Henry was insistent they find it, but Vic was really struggling, and Belch had been set a different task. Vic knew better than to assume Henry would bother looking for it himself, and he had no clue where Patrick was.

The room was in a dire state of disrepair, but it was what Vic assumed must have once been a bedroom. It was the correct size, and a chest of drawers still sat in the corner, rotting. This room was brimming with trophies. Not everything was murder-related, as Butch had demanded those relics be incinerated a long time ago. Most of them had been, but Henry had hidden a favourite few. Regardless, there was still something haunting about the room, still something completely distressing about being surrounded by reminders of child-torture. Elsa Montgomery’s pigtail was to his left, Debby David’s broken glasses on his right, and currently in his hand was a box of teeth from a variety of different kids over the years. Vic shook the box and smirked to himself. Patrick loved collecting those, and Belch, with those iron fists, was very good at collecting those.

“What are you looking at?” The voice made Vic jump, and it took him a moment to realise that he wasn’t hearing things, that it was only Patrick, who now stood in the doorway, head tilted and eyes squinted. Observing.

“Teeth,” Vic mumbled, tossing the box back to one side. Patrick seemed to be staring at his empty hand, frowning. “Any luck finding it yet?”

“No,” Patrick said, “I just came to tell you that Henry and Belch are heading out, trynna’ find a loser. Just us here, now.” There was a sinister undertone to that last sentence, and it was very much intentional.

“You keep looking next door, then,” Vic suggested, grabbing at another random toy in an attempt to look busy. Patrick remained watching, and then slowly walked deeper into the room. Vic gulped and froze as Patrick sunk to his knees beside him. A range of disgusting possibilities crossed through his mind as he waited for Patrick to make any sort of move. He was expecting something violent, something vulgar, something intense.

What Vic did not expect, was for Patrick to run his finger down the side of his face. “What are you-

“You’re on edge,” Patrick whispered, smiling darkly, “You’re afraid.” As his finger neared Vic’s lip, it was swatted away.
“I’m not,” Vic insisted, despite the sweat beginning to form on his forehead, and the lump growing in his throat. “I’m fine, I’m just-”

“You don’t have to lie to me,” Patrick cut in, “I know things, Criss.” Vic doubted the extent of what he really did know. If he knew everything, Vic would be at the bottom of that well with the rest of the corpses. His breath hitched, none the less, and this didn’t go unnoticed by Patrick, who smirked at him.

The thing was, Patrick did know things. He didn’t know the things Vic feared he would, thankfully, but Patrick knew that something was wrong. He knew that Vic didn’t want to go through with their twisted plan, and he knew that Vic would probably take off the first chance he got. Those simple assumptions were correct, and explained the strange, timid behaviour Vic had exhibited recently. Patrick noticed that. He always noticed things.

“I got nothing to hide,” Vic said, an obvious lie. The waver in his voice exposed him, but Patrick didn’t seem phased, he was still smiling, and brought his hand back to Vic’s face, tracing one edge of his jaw lightly. It felt sadistically intimate. “I’m fine, swear it.”

“What’s scaring you?” Patrick questioned, ignoring Vic’s response. “Your Mom makin’ threats again?”

“No,” Vic mumbled. She had given up with that a long time ago, they didn’t really talk all that much, but he gave her rent money whenever he came into funds and she still cooked him meals and cleaned his blood-covered clothes without questions. “Ain’t nothin’, drop it-“

“I know when you lie,” Patrick cut in, his finger froze, and seemed to prod with more force. Vic gulped. “And Henry ain’t gonna like it if he thinks you got somethin’ to lie about.”

“I don’t think Henry needs to know,” Vic whispered, after a minute of thought. Patrick smiled even wider.

“Maybe he don’t. But I do.”

“You’ll think I’m crazy,” Vic said, and after a pause they both laughed, a twisted inside joke.

“I don’t think your crazy,” Patrick countered, as he knew crazy better than anyone, “I think you’re terrified.” He knew that better than anyone, too, and enjoyed it more than anyone.

“I am,” Vic confessed, but he was careful about his revelations, “I’m seeing shit, Patrick. Shit that ain’t real.”

Patrick, with an unchanged expression, ran his finger back down and planted his hand around Vic’s throat. Vic tensed all the more, but didn’t react otherwise, not even when Patrick clenched and unclenched, momentarily choking his friend. Vic remained still, as if he understood what was happening, as if he expected worse.

“Do you think this is real?” He asked, quietly, as he squeezed Vic’s neck again. Vic nodded, though he hoped it wasn’t as he grew increasingly uncomfortable, tears stinging his eyes. “What are ya’ seeing?”

“Peter,” Vic whispered, as if he was afraid saying the name out loud would summon him. Patrick laughed at that, a low, breathy giggle, and it didn’t put him any more at ease. “Always dead. Always watching me.”

“Ghosts aren’t real, Victor,” Patrick said, loosening his grip a little.
“Ghosts are bullshit,” Vic agreed, “I think it’s…I think it’s the guilt.”

“Guilt isn’t real, either,” Patrick shrugged. He tilted his head, eyes glazed over as he studied Victor’s pale, panicked face. “And we don’t got no reason to be feelin’ that, we ain’t done nothin’ wrong.” Vic did not believe for a second that brutally murdering half a town’s adolescent population hit the criteria for ‘nothing wrong’, however he knew that Patrick truly believed what he was saying. And that was what made him so terrifying.

“Nothing wrong,” Vic repeated, as if he wanted to believe it too. Maybe if he told himself it enough times, he would. “Nothing wrong.”

“So get your shit together,” Patrick said, and he tightened his grip again, stepping in closer. Vic’s mind flashed back to the cellar, and he was suddenly struck with a horrifying idea about Patrick’s intentions. The lump in his throat re-formed, bigger than ever. “Before Henry pulls you on it, ‘cos then, you’ll really have something to piss your pants about.”

“I’ll do better,” Vic replied, his voice trembling in time with his body. Patrick tightened his grip, then stepped in closer, pressing their bodies together. Vic was certain his twisted suspicion was right, even more so as he felt Patrick’s breath on his ear and neck. He froze, screwing his eyes shut as he felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand and his mind jumped to worst case scenario.

“There are no teeth, Victor,” Patrick told him, and then he stepped back, laughing. Vic’s eyes shot open, and he looked around the now almost barren room. He staggered back, taking it in with a much more clear mind. No. It couldn’t be. He had touched them…

Patrick reached down and picked something up off of the ground, which was still littered, but mostly with general waste and animal shit above crime scene evidence and children’s toys. Patrick was holding what had to be one of the only toys remaining in there.

They had all been destroyed. All but one.

Vic rubbed his eyes, just to be sure, but Patrick wasn’t fucking with him. The ponytail was gone too, and Vic couldn’t see Debby’s smashed up glasses anywhere, only a crumpled print out of her ‘MISSING’ poster. Had he hallucinated the contents of the room? The idea made him tremble, mostly because it forced him to question what else was a figment of his imagination. Was that really Patrick, stood taunting him?

“Is this real?” Vic asked, slumping down slowly against the chest of drawers in the corner. Patrick’s grin was as smug as ever as he watched his friend break down. Obviously, the scene was beyond amusing to him. He was getting increasingly excited by his friend’s performance.

“Very real,” Patrick confirmed, holding up the object that Vic had spent far too long looking for. It had been in front of him the whole time, but Patrick had taken great pleasure watching him root around in shit for it, too much pleasure to tell him straight away. It was only when he had seen Vic gripping at thin air that he made a choice to step in. “Look at this, Vic.”

Vic didn’t want to, and it occurred to him that maybe that was why his mind was conjuring up so much less troubling things for him to see. Anything was less traumatic than that, but it would be twice as traumatic for the Losers. For Bill. Vic understood why Henry considered it to be so worth it.

“What do I have in my hand?”

“The boat,” Vic replied, certain.
“Is it real?” Patrick asked, and the tone was so patronising Vic felt almost offended, but he was still too shaken to really do anything beyond nod certainly.

“Real,” He whispered, and Patrick nodded, then placed it back down on top of the drawers. He crouched to Vic’s level, and leaned in close. The hand closed around his throat again and Vic screwed his eyes shut, he knew what was coming.

“You’re gonna have to be more convincing than that for Henry.” But with that, he walked out, leaving Vic to ponder his increasing insanity alone.

Eddie never liked the library all that much. It smelled kind of musty, and the books were all falling apart and disorganised and that creepy old lady always used to pinch his cheeks and ruffle his hair. He hadn’t been for a long while, and knew he had outgrown having his cheeks pinched and his hair ruffled, but the place was as lifeless and unkempt as ever.

Mike seemed to come to life there, and that was probably the only good thing about being there right then, him and Ben were really in their element, though Eddie had kind of lost enthusiasm after the lack of interest the rest of the losers had displayed earlier that day.

That morning had been spent going through Eddie’s files in extensive detail. Mike and Ben were the only two truly invested, but everyone else had feigned enthusiasm for the first hour. After that, Richie had gotten bored and fidgety and started play-fighting with Stan, during which he accidentally kicked Bev, so naturally, she joined in- and Bill was throwing another bitch fit about Georgie’s inclusion, which Eddie admitted was insensitive of him- but the ranting continued none the less, and then Richie had tried to be useful but ended up messing up the order and then Stan had insisted the order didn’t make sense anyway because it wasn’t “technically chronological, and therefore unofficial and invalid-“ and-

Eddie had kicked the four of them out of Bill’s basement, despite Bill’s protests, and did not invite them to come and browse through the archives with them, despite how much quicker that would definitely make the process. Mike and Ben were probably the best men for it anyway, observant and genuinely interested, Eddie trusted them not to miss out a thing. They had never failed him before.

Plus, they’d never have gotten access to the archives without Mike. Lucky for them, one of the summer volunteers had a crush on him, and after he spent a couple of minutes exchanging pleasant small talk and offering her sweet and honest compliments, she pretended not to notice when the three of them slipped down passed the “No Unauthorised Access” sign. It wasn’t like anyone checked down there anyway, but if they did, Eddie highly doubted they’d be thrown out and banned for life, not by that librarian at least.

She was an old, melancholy woman who said little and did everything incredibly slowly. Eddie didn’t like her all that much, always remembering her as patronising and dull. Mike didn’t have an opinion, as she was so completely lifeless he failed to find a thing worth evaluating. Ben, on the other hand, was very fond of the old woman who ran the library. She had always been kind to him, her slow pace and soft voice offered him a familiar comfort. The library had been his favourite place, once upon a time.

And then, like most things, Henry Bowers had shit all over it. The memories were not repressed enough to stay away during their digging, and they crept back to him about an hour into their researching, flooding him with anxiety and dread.
“Are we going to stay here all day?” Ben asked.

“Most likely,” Eddie said, “And tomorrow. And the day after that. As long as it takes.”

“That’s fine, I just…” Ben didn’t really want to tell them why it unsettled him, because he was embarrassed, which seemed ridiculous considering everything. “I’d like to go back before dark, is all.”

“We can go back to Bill’s whenever you like,” Eddie shrugged, “So long as we keep coming back.” Ben nodded, then gulped. Eddie and Mike could sense how uneasy he was, watching as he shuffled in the chair and nibbled on his lower lip.

“Bowers used to wait for me here,” He mumbled, a sort of confession, though Mike and Eddie were already aware of this. It was where they had gotten him alone all that time ago, carved a large H into his tubby stomach as they held him against the bridge just down the road. “’I’d come and study, or read, or write and- And they always seemed to know. Like they could... Like they’d sniffed out my scent. And they’d sit out there and just... wait. And when I eventually came out, they’d yell at me, take my books or- chase me! And they always caught me. Always. I was too fat to get away back then. And... And being here, I just... I just remember it all so vividly.”

His attack had been vicious, but Ben never considered it to be the worst. He got away lucky, making a quick and tactical escape through the barrens, despite the agony and mess. It had been a bit of a blur, rolling down the hill and then shooting through the woods clutching his wound, somehow losing the four men pursuing him, to then make it to Bill’s without stopping. Bill had been home, and Stan had been over, and they’d collected Eddie and Richie to help stitch him up, because Ben didn’t trust anybody but Eddie to go near him with needle.

“You’re not on your own this time, Ben,” Eddie reminded him.

“He won’t come looking here anyway,” Mike added, “You haven’t hung round here in years.” It was true enough, but Ben came by more than Eddie or Mike knew about, and he had encountered Bowers in that end of town more times too.

“I know but I…” Ben couldn’t explain it any more. “I guess you’re right.”

They continued going through old documents for a while, and Ben managed to get through a hefty amount much faster than Eddie or Mike. The three were barely talking, silently browsing and scribbling down notes, occasionally making use of the photo-copier that sat in the corner, which was definitely not meant for public use. Neither boy noticed when Ben stood and walked up the stairs, both too busy to really question where he was going. It was a large library, and there were plenty of logical things he could have been going to look for.

And it was rational indeed. Ben had no motive as he scurried upstairs, he simply needed the bathroom, and imagined he would not be gone for longer than three minutes maximum. It only took him two, but on his way back out, he ran straight into the librarian. She smiled at him, the same as she always used to. Ben smiled back, and mumbled an apology.

“What brings you back here, young man?” She asked, and Ben tried desperately to recall her name. “I haven’t seen you all summer.”

“I’ve been busy,” Ben shrugged, gulping as his eyes flashed to her name badge.

“What brings you back?” She inquired, “Anything I can help you with?” Ben thought about it, because she was ever so useful when it came to information. He very much doubted it this time,
“I-I don’t think so,” He mumbled, “Personal project.”

“What’s it about?” Ben had forgotten how nosey she could be. Mrs Creed. Of course. “History again?”

“History,” Ben confirmed, though it was a little different to his previous history projects, the ones that had never really related to Derry. “I uh-“

“What part of history are you looking at this time?” She asked, “Another war? I have plenty of stories about those, you know.”

“It’s not a war-“

“Politics?” Mrs Creed didn’t realise how close she was. In some ways, yes, they were very much looking at politics. And war, but not the kind the sweet old woman was imagining. Ben very much doubted she’d have books stock-piled on this one. “Something else?”

“Derry’s history, actually,” Ben explained, suddenly feeling a little less reluctant, “Recent history.”

“Nothing interesting happens here,” She chuckled, “It’s a very unremarkable place. If you want some interesting history, you should take a look at Castle Rock or-“

“I wouldn’t call the disappearance of thirty six children unremarkable,” Ben cut in, an edge to his tone so sharp that he took even himself by surprise. “I’m not just looking at that, though. I’m looking at the amount of unsolved crime, the amount of cold-cases and unreported violent crime. I don’t suppose you have any books on that, do you?”

Her face seemed to pale, making her look borderline dead. “No. I don’t suppose we do.”

Ben cleared his throat and forced a smile, but her stoney face did not revert with his. “Do you mind if I search through the archives a little? I figure I’ll find the most down there, right?”

“I...I suppose,” She replied, flatly, and Ben began to walk back towards where he had come from. “Benjamin?” He stopped in his tracks, turning on one foot to see her face, now furrowed with concern.

“Yes, Mrs Creed?” She beckoned him back with her finger, and he followed her down the hallway and right behind her desk, where she proceeded to sit in her seat and organise loose papers on her desk. Ben realised that she was trying to remain composed, trying to appear normal. Clearly, she was unsettled. “What is it?”

“You’re playing a dangerous game,” She whispered, and Ben didn’t take this reminder lightly. He already knew this, and the two boys rooting through papers and articles and facts downstairs also knew this, as did the four sat in Bill Denbrough’s basement, pretending to pass time watching shitty sitcoms. They all knew the dangers, much better than some ancient librarian. She gulped before continuing, “This little project...is there any reason for it?”

“Curiosity,” Ben shrugged, and it was hardly a lie. “Interest. Hope.”

“Those are foolish things to feel here, Benjamin,” Mrs Creed said, and Ben felt his stomach churn. Maybe she knew more than he had thought. “It won’t achieve anything, digging all of that up, you know?”
“I know,” Ben lied.

“Foolish,” She repeated, “And dangerous. Everything you need to know about the things that happened here…you can ask the people that lived through it. No black and white article will tell you different. And no real book will ever be written about Derry, know that much.”


Mrs Creed smiled at him sympathetically. “Ignorance is bliss, Benjamin, and I think the reason Derry’s tragedies remain untouched and ignored is because people know that. People understand that it is better to leave some stones unturned. It’s because we all know better. You’re a smart boy, you should know that too.”

“With all due respect, Mrs C, I ‘been ignorant my whole life,” Ben said, “I’ve never experienced bliss with that.” She gulped, and paled even more, as if she knew Ben was right.

A heavy silence hung over the two, and Ben decided it was about time he returned to his friends, but his feet remained stapled to the ground next to the librarians desk, and his eyes remained glued on her. The conversation was unfinished, he could feel it. Something was on the tip of her tongue, and Ben knew he’d have to stay there until it inevitably leaped off.

“I don’t think a bit of investigating is going to hurt anyone,” Ben said, knowing better than to truly believe this.

“Do you think you’re the first person to think that?” Mrs Creed asked, and she began to fiddle with her wedding band - something Ben had never even noticed before that moment. She had always struck him as a lonely wench kind of woman, a cat lady of sorts, though the stereotype was clearly unfair and out of place. The ‘Mrs’ should have probably given it away.

“Most likely not.”

“Do you know what happened to last person that came around here trying to dig things up, Benjamin?”

“I don’t think so,” Ben mumbled, though he recalled hearing about the small-time journalist who died in the fire, and realised it was probably what Mrs Creed was so subtly referencing. “May I ask what, Mrs Creed?”

There was a long pause. Then, in the quietest voice ever, Mrs Creed replied, “She burned to death, Benjamin. Most likely joined those poor little youths that she was trying to report on. Still, people expected as much as soon as she turned up in town.”

Ben didn’t know how to respond to that. He gulped a few times, licking his lips in hopes they’d form some sort of verbal response, but he didn’t know what words to use or what question to ask. He knew, for certain, that Mrs Creed was referring to Julia Shumway, the reporter that died in the Black Spot along with Mike’s parents and a fair amount of other locals. He also understood that the statement implied it was no accident. And that was the part that left him speechless, because that meant…

Well, it meant a lot of things.

Louder, Mrs Creed continued, “I’m sure you’ll read all about it in your research, should you choose to proceed with it. I’ll say a prayer for you, if you do, Benjamin.”
“Thank you,” Ben managed, and he staggered back, slow, watching her expression drift back into it’s usual lifeless stare. Her eyes remained fixed on the wedding band, but Ben knew she was still watching him as he shot back through the library and down into the archives.

She did not stop him.

“You alright?” Mike asked, as soon as Ben came into sight at the top of the stairs, he shook his head, racing down them and then stopping for breath at the bottom. “Where did you go-“

“Bathroom,” Ben replied, which did nothing at all to explain his clear state of distress.

“And what?” Eddie snorted, “Did a snake crawl up the shitter?” Naturally, this was a private concern Eddie often had using public bathrooms.

“Mrs Creed,” Ben said, “She…” His eyes locked on Mike, and suddenly, he wasn’t so sure he could bring himself to say what had been oh, so heavily implied by the quiet, cryptic librarian. It would be sure to break him.

Mike had been traumatised by a lot of things during his life, but nothing quite as much as the Black Spot. Nobody ever brought it up, nobody ever wanted to see the unmissable agony on his face when he was reminded of the incident. Ben didn’t want to do that to him, implant such a horrific idea in his mind. Especially with no real evidence.

“She was…”

“Spit it out,” Eddie urged, panic growing within him.

“She said some weird things,” Ben explained, “About Derry. About our…well, research. She thinks we should drop it.”

“Maybe she’s right,” Mike sighed, ignoring the look of disgust Eddie shot him. “Come on, man, we’ve been doing this for hours, and what have we found? I don’t think this is the right place to look.”

“Well I do,” Eddie countered, “Of course she won’t want us snooping around, Ben, why would she? Nobody ever does. Don’t you think that means something?”

“It means they’re tired of teenagers trying to play detective,” Mike said, very certain of himself. He knew how it looked, and his Grandpa had always warned him away from meddling in adult affairs.

“We wouldn’t have to if they were any fucking good at it,” Eddie hissed, and then he sighed, rubbed his hands together, and picked up one of the plastic wallets. “Look, we haven’t even scratched the surface, but the cops here have never even tried. I pinned this five fucking years ago, why haven’t they? Something’s going on.”

“Eddie…” Ben didn’t know how to argue with that logic, and with Mike present, he wasn’t willing to go into the fine details of everything Mrs Creed had said. He wasn’t even sure it would be right to tell Eddie at all. Didn’t Mike have the right to know before his friends? This concerned him more than anyone, but Ben didn’t want to tell him that. Ben wished he didn’t know at all, actually.

And then he understood. Mrs Creed had been right: ignorance truly would have been bliss. But the losers were long past that. Ignorance wouldn’t save their lives, and that was what this was about. Life and death.

“You can’t change my mind on this,” Eddie said, certain. His friends believed him, and respected
the determination to do something, even if it didn’t feel like much.

“Can we pick this up tomorrow?” Ben asked, “I just…I’m kind of shaken now and- I… I’m sorry. We don’t have to go, if you don’t want, but I’d rather-“

“No,” Mike cut in, “Let’s call it a day. I have some chores to do anyway, and Grandpa’s gonna be pissed if I keep putting them off. We can pick this up tomorrow, right Eds?”

Eddie let the nickname slide and nodded reluctantly.

The walk back to Bill’s was incredibly uneventful, with the three of them barely even bothering to try with the small talk. There was too much to say and too little that they dared say.

Back at Bill’s was equally as uneventful, with the four losers squished up on the couch watching yet another re-run of ALF, pretending like they weren’t contemplating murder or their potential demise. It was uncomfortably quiet, with even Richie barely laughing along.

It was a relief when Ben, Eddie and Mike finally returned. They walked into Bill’s without even knocking, more comfortable there than in their own homes.

“Did you find anything?” Richie asked, as soon as they passed through the door.

“Jack shit,” Eddie spat, kicking off his shoes, “There’s too much to go through.”

“Why are you back so early?” Bev asked, not that she minded. Ben’s presence automatically made her feel more at ease, and the lack of information was a blessing as much as it was a curse. They had taken in too much. Bev didn’t think she could handle another heavy revelation for a while. “I thought you were going to stay ’til late.”

Mike and Eddie looked to Ben, but he said nothing, which only raised the curiosity in the other losers.

“Did something happen?”

“No,” Mike said, “It’s just kind of claustrophobic in there. And dull.”

“Bullshit,” Richie sneered, “You just missed us too much, didn’t ya’ homeschool?”

“Snap Tozier,” Mike chimed, “You got me! I couldn’t bare to be away a second longer-“

“That better not be sarcasm, asshole!” The atmosphere shifted, then, as Mike playfully leaped forward and onto the couch, sprawling across his friends. They were laughing, like they used to, and conversation remained positive and playful as Ben launched into a story about how much ALF used to scare him, and of course Richie attempted to impersonate the character, bad enough to send his friends into hysterics.

It felt, for a short time, normal.

The golden half hour didn’t last though, and as soon as the laughter died down and Mike announced his need to return home, things felt a little heavier again. Bill drove him, with Eddie accompanying him on the drive. The others quietly waited in the basement, and Richie rambled about everything but Bowers to fill the silence.

“Why’d you r-really come back so early?” Bill asked Eddie, almost as soon as Mike had gotten out of the car. He had expected the question, but had by no means prepared an answer.
“I didn’t want to,” Eddie shrugged, “It was Ben. He got spooked.”

“Spooked?” Bill questioned, frowning. He could feel the anxiety creeping back, and his grip around the steering wheel tightened. “What do you muh-muh-mean?”

“I don’t know, Bill,” Eddie explained, as best he could, “Ben went to the bathroom, and as soon as he got back he just started spouting off about how the librarian told him not to do any investigating and…I don’t know. He didn’t really elaborate, but whatever she said didn’t sit well, ‘cos then he said he wanted to leave, and I ain’t ever heard Ben want to leave the library before.”

Bill thought on that for second, but he was just as clueless as Eddie as to what the librarian could have said to Ben.

“Mrs Creed is w-w-weird,” Bill concluded, “She probably juh-just said something c-c-cryptic and got him all worried.”

“Cryptic?” Eddie scoffed, “Like what? That woman doesn’t say more than two words unless she’s cooing about how cute we are or asking for overdue books.”

“All my books are overdue,” Bill said, smiling. “She’s probably gonna sue me if she ever sees me again.”

“You haven’t even stepped foot in there since seventh grade,” Eddie huffed. Bill laughed, but it was probably true. He and Eddie, in the earliest days of their friendship, used to go their a lot. Eddie liked the quiet and Bill liked to write there. That was before they had even befriended Richie and Stan, though, and long before Ben had even moved to Derry.

Those days, they had barely even worried about Bowers. Back then, he had just been an angry punk that occasionally stole their lunch money and mocked Bill’s stutter. It had felt terrible at the time, but Bill longed for those days back.

“Better keep it that way, right?” Eddie muttered some form of agreement, and the rest of the drive was completed in silence. Bill’s parents were still out when they returned, which was no surprise to Bill. His Father had made a habit of not coming home until late, and his Mother barely spoke either way, though he was sure that she had mentioned plans that evening, maybe with a friend from work.

“You got any decent videos, Bill?” Beverly asked, as soon as the two returned, “These assholes are driving me insane with ALF. I wanna watch a movie-“

“They’re all on the shelf,” Bill replied, kicking his shoes off and rushing back to sit by Stan, who smiled softly at him.

Eddie rushed to Richie, shoes still on, and placed himself so that he was borderline in his lap. Richie kissed a large, smacking kiss on his cheek, and though it was a sweet, somewhat playful gesture, the others pretended not to notice the way Eddie’s eyes lit up and the way Richie was gripping his waist with white knuckles.

Bev was browsing the shelf, ignorant to the scene behind her. “Ghostbusters? Nah, I’ve seen it too many times…Big? God, Tom Hanks looks good-“

“I like Big,” Stan offered, but Bev did not acknowledge the comment as she eyed up more of the Denbrough’s collection. Bill had hardly watched any of them, and he doubted his parents had too, but they were often bought as gifts, or rented to be watched and never returned.
“Footloose?” Bev suggested, then immediately after, “Oh! Gremlins! Yes-“

“They creep me out,” Ben confessed, his face still balled up.

“Any horror up there, B?” Richie asked.

“The Thing,” Bev said as she pulled it out and held the box up, grinning wide.

“Not horror, please,” Stan requested.

“Don’t be a bitch,” Richie scoffed, “It’s not even scary!”

“So why do you wanna watch it?” Stanley countered, smugly. “Can’t be all that great of a horror movie if-“

“Shut your fuckin’ trap! Have you seen the effects in that movie? Christ, Stan, you have no respect for cinema-” And off the two launched, into a long, playful debate over a film Stan had never seen before, and a film Richie had seen all too many times. Stan gave in, eventually, and they spent the rest of the day watching The Thing and pretending like life was normal.

Eddie and Richie walked home when it was finally finished, and managed to do so quickly with no interference from Bowers. Bev and Ben remained at Bill’s for a little longer, but eventually Bill drove them home. Stan was also in the car, but he was spending yet another night at Bill’s. His parents hadn’t really questioned it when he informed them earlier that day.

It had been a peaceful day, all in all. The group felt almost relaxed, in comparison to their previous few days, but not entirely - that would have been foolish. The conversation that had been avoided all day started up again on the journey, somewhere between Bill’s house and Beverly’s apartment. It was the start of a series of overdue and unexpected events for The Losers Club.

“I’m picking the movie next time,” Stan said, a casual and thoughtless comment to fill the silence. “Better get something good rented, Bill, because that collection was pretty poor to me.”

“So long as Rich doesn’t pick again,” Ben said, “I can’t stand horror movies. And he shouldn’t be watching that stuff - he’ll be getting ideas.” That was the line that flicked the first domino.

“Horror movies aren’t giving him ideas, Ben,” Bev scoffed, “He’s just fucking… stupid.” She didn’t mean it, and the word tasted wrong in her mouth, but once it was said, it could not be taken back. It hung in the air, replaying in her mind.

Richie was many things, but stupid? Beverly didn’t truly believe that. Delusional, maybe.

“It’s not stupid,” Stan cut in, rushing to his friends defence. Bev was not surprised, and almost agreed with him, but instinctively fired back.

“Don’t try and defend his bullshit,” She shot, “He wants us to kill a person, Stanley. You can justify it all you want but for him to suggest we become murderers? It’s stupid. Stupid as shit.”

“Do you really believe that?” Ben asked, quiet, as if he dare not hear the answer. The thing was, he didn’t always agree with everything she impulsively said and did, however he would have defended her to the end of the Earth for said things if he knew it was what she truly believed in. Only, Ben wasn’t all that sure this was what she truly believed in. He was right to doubt her, and she knew it too, which only made her react more.
“Yes,” She lied. Bill stared at her through the rearview mirror, forehead creased and his lips pressed into a thin line. He wanted to disagree with her, wanted to defend Richie and argue that he was only suggesting it out of fear and a panicked desire to protect his loved ones, and that Bowers deserved it anyway. He figured it wouldn’t sound all that impressive stuttered out, and turned his eyes back to the road.

“If you think we’ll get out of here alive without doing anything that drastic, maybe you’re the stupid one.”

Stan knew he’d crossed a line. He continued anyway, because he had never really known when to stop with Beverly. And she was really throwing him bones when it came to reasons to be angry at her.

“It’s pathetically optimistic,” Stan continued, ignoring the looks of shock on his friends faces, “And after everything we know about Bowers, it’s almost disgusting that you don’t want to put him six feet under. He’s a monster. And if you keep ignoring that it’s gonna be one of us six feet under-“

“Enough,” Bill snapped, and Stan felt something in him burn. “J-J-J-Just drop it! Sh-Shit, I-I don’t want to h-h-hear about it. Not today. We’ve h-had a good day, nobody’s fuh-fucking d-d-dying. Nobody’s getting fuh-fucking killed. We’re gonna f-f-figure this out, okay? But not like this.”

“Fucking inspirational,” Stan spat, turning to look out of the window. To his friends, this was a dramatic way to depict his frustration and intention to ignore them, however Stan only did it so that none of them would notice the tears welling in his eyes. Beverly did anyway, sat diagonal, and felt herself cave in a little. Bill had a point somewhere in there. “Investigating won’t get us anywhere, you know that, Bill. Vic said it himself! We can’t prove a fucking thing and we’re wasting our time and risking our lives! He warned us away for a reason!”

"Because they don't want us meddling," Beverly shrugged, as if it was the only logical and possible explanation.

"What's it going to take to convince you he needs to die?" Beverly didn't have the chance to ponder the question.

“Shit,” Ben gasped. It was enough to silence Stan, taking everyone else in the car aback. Bev had heard Ben swear on only three occasions prior to that. This was number four, peculiar because it was the first to occur out of nowhere. Every other time had been provoked in one way or another.

“What?” Bev inquired, reaching out to squeeze his arm. He didn’t respond to the touch, and his face was frozen on the intersection of horror and panic.

“Mrs Creed…” Ben began, and Bill felt his stomach churn as he recalled his previous conversation with Eddie. “She warned me away, too.”

“Any adult with common sense would warn us away,” Stan shrugged, a debatable response, and one that Ben did not appreciate. Bev didn’t disagree though, and nodded slowly.

“This was different,” He insisted, “She…She said some weird stuff. I’m talking really weird, like, bad weird.”

“What did she say?” Beverly asked, and her voice wavered as if she almost didn’t want to hear it. She didn’t, in fact, because there had been too much tragic news recently. It was building and building, and Beverly knew that the bad would break her. Bill was in a similar position, simply
waiting to be pushed over the edge.

And knowing Bowers, it wouldn’t be long before they were fucking launched from said edge.

“She…” Ben was trying to articulate it as best he could, but words were never his strong point, especially not under pressure. It wasn’t helped by the uncertainty, either, knowing that The Black Spot may not have been an accident would be game-changing for the Losers. Ben didn’t think that was entirely a good thing, considering the sort of game they’d been playing, and the sort of moves they were contemplating making. But it wasn’t something he could keep to himself forever, and he trusted his friends not to run off and tell Mike before they were certain.

“Come on,” Stan encouraged, softly. He could sense how concerned Ben was, how completely uncomfortable recounting the story was making him, but they needed to hear it.

“She said that it was dangerous,” Ben began, “That trying to research anything connected to the disappearances is foolish and…and dangerous.”

“She isn’t wrong,” Bill mumbled, and nobody tried debating this.

“That wasn’t all,” Ben said, “She went off on a rant about how things are better left unknown, as if knowing would make it worse. Like we’re not supposed to know. It just made me think that people already do know, I guess. But why- how? How would any of them know? That makes no sense.”

“Shit,” Bev whispered, only just audibly. “Shit.”

“Nobody knows a-a-a-anything,” Bill insisted, “Nobody that c-c-can d-do anything, at least.”

“She knows something, Bill,” Ben continued, a certainty to his voice that nobody dared protest. “Then I tried to argue that what we’re doing is harmless and she asked me if I knew what happened to the last person who thought that.”

His friends were silent, need for the rest of the story outweighing their need to throw questions at him.

“I said no,” Ben explained, “Because I didn’t think I did, but then she told me, and it fell into place. I asked, obviously, and then she said that the last person who came here researching the missing kids burned to death. It took me a minute, because I don’t remember anybody that got torched, right? Because fires are unusual in Derry, and we’d have heard about it if someone got set on fire like that. But Mrs Creed wasn’t talking about no random fire, she was talking about—”

“The Black Spot,” Stan cut in, his face draining of all colour. Bill and Bev looked equally as horrified at this suggestion, with wide-eyed and dropped-jaws. “Julia Shumway. She burned to death in there. She was…She was writing a story about the missing kids, supposedly.” He knew the story well, they all did. Her death got more attention than anything else in Derry ever had.

Ben let this realisation settle for a second before speaking up again. “Mrs Creed said that people knew that was gonna’ happen as soon as she turned up, people were expecting it. So they know it was no accident. They know that—”

“No,” Beverly snapped, holding back tears, “They don’t.” Ben reached over and interlocked their fingers, squeezing.

“It’s not the first time somebody’s suggested arson,” Stan pointed out, though he despised the idea as much as the next person. “It ain’t something you’re supposed to say out loud, mind.”
“But…” Beverly knew there was logic in what her friends were saying, but that didn’t make it any easier to accept. Her mind was melting as the prospect, and her heart was burning. “Mike…”

“Mike,” Ben whispered, an agreeing statement of sorts. “I don’t want to believe it. I don’t want it to be true. But she was so certain, she was so…”

“Maybe people know more than we think,” Stan said, “Maybe this isn’t such a mystery after all.” He gulped at that suggestion, but there was something strangely comforting about it, like maybe there was help out there. Like maybe they weren’t all that alone in this bullshit.

“No,” Bill mumbled, like he couldn’t quite believe that. Because if it were true, it only made things all the more complex. Things were already fucked enough, without half the town keeping something like that in the dark. “No fucking way.”

“I’m with Stan,” Ben concluded, “I don’t think we should investigate this any more. We don’t know what we’re messing with.”

“We do,” Stan scoffed, “We know exactly what we’re messing with. It’s Beverly that doesn’t seem to grasp that concept - and she had the audacity to call Richie stupid-“

“Stan-“

“No,” He spat, once again going in a little too hard, unintentionally intentional. “You’re wrong about this, Bev. This isn’t gonna work your way and you know it! Ben knows it! Everyone does deep down! So face up already.”

If it had ended there, maybe it would have been different, because Beverly could handle being told she was wrong. Being wrong was alright, being wrong was acceptable from time to time. Stan didn’t end it there though, not even when he received absolutely no verbal response from any of his friends.

“I can’t believe you shits think I’m the weak one.”

It was a matter of bad timing, is all. Because Stan announced this right as Bill pulled up around the side of Beverly’s apartment, and in an act of frustration and pettiness, Beverly jumped out of the car, mumbling a range of curse words, Ben tried to protest, but Bill and Stan were silent - something that only angered her more.

“I, for one, know exactly what we’re messing with,” She said, ignoring Ben’s plea for her to stay in the car. “And I’m not playing his fucking games. I’d rather be weak than a killer.”

“Beverly-“ She slammed the door, with all the force she could muster, and stormed up the stairs. Bill waited until she was inside before setting off to Ben’s, when the silence finally broke again.

“You should be nicer to her, Stanley,” Ben said, quietly. Stan rolled his eyes at the statement.

“She should be nicer to me,” He mumbled. Bill tried to keep a neutral expression, but it was hard to act void of emotion after such a display, especially with a conversation like this threatening to begin. He wasn’t ready for that. “I didn’t start that.”

“But you didn’t stop it,” Ben pointed out, “Look, not the point- Sorry. I just… I hate when you bicker like that. Why do you do it? You love each other.” There was an innocence to the statement, and it made Bill hurt all the more knowing that Ben was so clueless as to where it all began. Stan was equally as clueless, but Bill preferred it that way.
“I never said I don’t love her,” Stan shrugged, “It’s got nothing to do with that, Ben, it’s just her attitude. She can’t help herself, she’s always digging at me and I don’t know why. I never done anything wrong to her. Or have I? You’d tell me, right?”

“Of course,” Ben insisted, “She’s never said all that much. You just clash, I think. You’re both too passionate.”

“Richie’s passionate and she don’t jump down his throat every time he opens his mouth,” Stan said, and it was a statement that neither of his friends could dispute.

“I guess,” Ben mumbled, then louder, “Just try and fix it with her, please? We shouldn’t be fighting with each other like that. ‘Specially not now.”

Stan couldn’t bring himself to respond, really trying not to go off at Ben over this too. It wasn’t the first time he had been lectured for his treatment of Beverly. He wondered if she had ever been lectured for her treatment of him. He longed for their friendship to return to normal, but it was going to be harder than ever - they were all crumbling now.

“I’ll apologise,” Stan sighed, giving in after a few painful seconds of silence. Ben let out a sigh of relief. You see, they all knew that things would not remain as careless and fun and stable as things had once been in The Losers Club. Things changed, people grew and that could often lead to clashes. They were all accepting of this, even when it began to happen to them, because it was part of life, and because it was normal. The concept alone was not the source of the issue.

The reasoning was. The suddenness was. The context was.

Because there was no clear reason. There was no trigger, just an explosion. And there was nothing normal about it, considering the shit that the Losers had lived with so far. Not that any of them liked to blame things on the trauma, regardless of how responsible and impactful their experiences were.

Nobody spoke again until Ben said his goodbyes and walked to his front door. Bill waited for him to go inside before driving away, and Stan waited some more before finally speaking up.

“How does a movie sound right now?” Stan asked, seemingly out of nowhere. It was a distraction tactic, was all, but it made Bill smile seeing the apparent change in mood, forced or not.

“Good,” Bill replied, smiling, “Buh-But you did say my collection was puh-puh-poor. So maybe not.” Stan giggled, and it was forced, but they pretended like it was genuine for the sake of ease.

“We could stop by the store,” Stan suggested, “I’m kind of feeling popcorn, too.”

“I’m choosing the m-movie,” Bill bargained, “You can pick the popcorn flavour, I suh-suppose.”

The light conversation continued, even as they left the vehicle in the parking lot and ran into the rental store. Bill picked out some sleazy thriller that Stan had never heard of, and Stan, naturally, chose sweet and salted. They raced back to the car, Bill won by a second.

They settled into the car, and Bill paused for a second before setting off, staring at Stan with a look that he was unable to decipher in the few seconds it lasted.

“Are you alright?” Stan inquired, bordering on hesitant. Things had felt bearable, he didn’t want that to fall at the last minute, not when they’d done so well all day. “Bill?”

“Yeah,” Bill said, flatly. “I was just…” His hand left the wheel, and he placed it for a second on
top of Stan’s, which was laid flat on his knee.

“Yeah?” The way Stan tensed was impossible to miss.

“I’m glad you’re here,” Bill confessed, because it was the closest he could get to saying his real truth. It was part of it, at least. Stan smiled, the widest he had in a while - and the most genuine too. For a second, he was rendered speechless, forcing down the lump in his throat and trying to will away the butterflies.

“You too, Bill,” He replied, softly. Bill smiled back, smaller than Stan, and then things fell back to reality, and Bill drove home making comfortable small talk and passing him small side glances.

It felt, in a word, normal. And they felt, in another, comfortable. That was a fools feeling in Derry, because they could never remain that way for long, and they should never have expected such a luxury given their current situation.

Stan got out of the car first, and Bill tossed him the key to the front door - though he wasn’t sure they’d even locked it to begin with - as he fiddled with his tangled seatbelt and gave himself a once over in the mirror. Stan walked up to the porch the same as he always did, except maybe with a little more of a bounce in his step as he replayed Bill’s words in his mind.

He almost didn’t notice the brown box sat on the porch, placed directly in the middle, just to be sure that it wasn’t missed at all. The joy and the peace drained in an instant, because Stan’s mind jumped to a close conclusion of what was waiting in the parcel.

And he stood, frozen on the cusp of terror, staring down at the thing, it did not occur to him that the contents would be worse than his wildest dreams. And the beginning of Bill’s personal hell.

He wanted to make a sound, but everything, breath included, was stuck in Stan's throat. His eyes were blurring and it felt like white noise was overtaking, so much so that he didn't even initially register Bill's approach.

Bill clocked that something was off as soon as he left the car, sliding the keys into his pocket and walking over with a noticeable hesitance in his step. Though he could not see Stanley’s expression from the angle, the way he was stood - completely frozen mid-motion, head aimed at the ground and his knuckles white around the keys - Bill knew something was very, very wrong. He ran, albeit not very far, and stopped beside Stan as the parcel came into view.

“Fuck.” He whispered, and there was no hiding the pure terror in his voice. It belonged there.

It was Stan who leaped into action, though, dropping the keys and then to his knees. He looked to Bill, who gave him a small nod, before he tore the lid off of the cardboard box. Bill dropped too as he saw the contents, his legs giving way beneath him as the true horror hit.

Repulsion. Dismay. Anguish. Horror. Neither of them knew what it was coursing through their veins, but it was maybe the worst, most intense negative feeling that either of them had ever been hit with. That spoke volumes considering the torment and grief they had endured.

There was no sound, either, just more white noise as Bill stared at the box, eyes void of anything Stan could recognise as human.

He collapsed then, dropping onto Stan and letting out a harrowing sound of despair. Stan made an answering noise, a woeful sob as he stared, uselessly, as he wondered if they would ever be able to comprehend what was there, finally, in front of them.
Henry Bowers, in what was possibly his most diabolical act yet, had returned something to the Denbrough’s that he had taken many years ago.

*George Denbrough’s paper boat.*

Chapter End Notes

its been a while (but ive been working on other things - pls check those out) and this is like 8k which is a lot of words u kno ! anyway I really hope you enjoyed this, let me know what you think because it truly does mean the world to me, main source of motivation right now, so yah, thank u for sticking with me on this.
The death of George Denbrough had been the first in what would eventually come to be the greatest tragedy and most painful series of events Derry had ever endured.

Shockingly enough, it had been nothing but an accident.

October 4th, 1988

The day was dreadful from the very beginning, with the heavy downpour setting an uncomfortable, melancholic mood. Bill Denbrough, who had just turned thirteen, was bedridden - taken out by a nasty case of the flu - but managed to crawl out of bed to watch as his little brother ran down the street in his yellow raincoat, rain splashing around his ankles from his heavy footsteps as he eagerly attempted to keep up with his paper boat.

Nobody could ever have known that it would be the last time he would see his only sibling.

So Bill crawled back into bed, and drifted off into what would be the last comfortable sleep of his life.

- 

On the other side of Derry, Henry Bowers, two months from sixteen, was playing around with his Father’s shotgun in the yard. He had blanks, of course, because Butch kept a lot of those - insisting it was to scare off visitors without wasting actual bullets on them. Henry had giggled and asked why they couldn’t use real bullets on them. Butch had ignored the question.

He had ignored another one of his son’s question that day, telling Henry to “fuck off, maggot” as he inquired how Butch felt about him playing with the gun. Henry took that as an okay, and brought the weapon down to his friends in the yard. They had all gasped upon seeing it, never having seen something so deadly so up close before. They gasped louder when Henry showed them the box of ammunition he had also stolen.

“Shoot something,” Patrick had demanded, practically frothing at the mouth. Back then, such enthusiasm hadn’t seemed to absurd. They all loved guns, like the good little American boys they were.

“Let’s line up bottles,” Moose Sadler had suggested. He had been a long reigning member of Henry’s gang, but was quickly added to list of missing kids. Vic, Belch and Peter played ignorant when the news broke that their life-long friend was gone, only one month after George Denbrough.

They lined up bottles.
Henry found he had quite a talent when it came to aim, but he didn’t particularly like playing with the gun. The bang made his ears ring, and the weight made his arms ache. There was also a growing concern that all the noise would wake his Father, but the playing persisted, with Patrick taking over the gun and then Belch having a shot or two. When it was returned to Henry, they were all out of bottles.

Patrick lined up a cat. He missed that one, half on purpose.

And then Butch really did wake up.

It was at that point that the Gang ran from the property. They intended to venture to the Neibolt House, where they liked to play despite the state of disrepair it was in. Butch hadn’t gotten round to doing it up yet, and Henry didn’t really want him to.

The rain meant that the streets were bordering on desolate, and the two people that drove past on their venture did not care to question the adolescent wielding a shotgun - if they even noticed. It was a foggy day, after all.

They started out playing around with the gun, never shooting it, because that would have attracted too much attention, but pretending to, and hitting each other playfully with it, and tossing it to one another as they raced down the streets. It was a very dangerous practice.

When they got to the corner of Jackson Street, Patrick stopped dead, staring at a cat that laid, soaking wet, on the edge of the curb. He had never seen a cat in rain, come to think of it, and he slowly approached it, beckoning. The closer he got, the clearer it became: the cat was already dead.

Patrick smiled, and picked it up.

“Look,” He called out, holding the corpse up to his friends, who reacted with a mixture of grimaces, confusion and amusement.

“That thing will be crawling with disease,” Moose scoffed, because he was kind of smart sometimes, “Gross, dude.”

“Shut up,” Patrick muttered, and then as his friends approached, voicing other similarly disgusted and displeased opinions, he sighed. “Can’t just leave it out in the rain.”

“Yeah you can,” Vic scoffed, because they all knew Patrick did not care at all for animals or their feelings. Patrick laughed at this response, and agreed. This was not out of the ordinary. And what followed was not, either.

“Fuck yeah I can,” He replied, and then, just to assert his authority, and remind his peers of who they obeyed, he snapped the cats neck. It was already dead, but the crunch was audible through the heavy downpour. Peter gasped, and then, as Patrick threw the cat to the ground, gasped louder. But nobody’s eyes were on him. They were dancing just behind, in somewhat panic.

“Patrick, no-“

The smallest gasp Patrick had ever heard came from behind him. He whipped around, kicking the cat corpse out of the way as he did. Stood there, with an expression of true terror, was George Denbrough, frozen and afraid.

“What the fuck are you staring at, huh, kid?” Patrick asked, his voice icy.

“He’s like five,” Vic had protested, somewhat weakly. This statement went unacknowledged.
“D-Did you just…hurt that cat?” Georgie had asked, his voice hesitant as he came to a stop in front of them. His eyes were on the small paper boat that he had been running after only moments ago. Belch noticed this, and went to pick it up, undecided on his motive.

“What did you see?” Moose asked, squatting to be on level with the boy. “Huh?”

“I-I-I don’t know,” Georgie mumbled, because he did not know. Georgie hadn’t been paying attention until he saw the group in front of him, and hadn’t realised what he was witnessing until he had come to a full stop and saw the cat. It was all quite disturbing, and the boy was really trying to hold back his tears. He liked cats.

“Did ya’ hear that, boys?” Henry said, his voice bordering on monotonous, “Kids’ got his brothers stutter.” The Gang erupted into laughter, despite this being untrue and unfunny. Georgie did not understand the laughter, nor the comment at all.

“I do not!” He was really trying not to sound as upset as he felt. Bill would have wanted him to be brave. He wanted to be brave, like Bill. “C-Can I have my boat back? I won’t tell anyone that you k-killed that cat, sir.” Georgie was directly addressing Patrick, who he assumed to be the leader. He was lying, which he knew was bad, but he knew he would have to tell Bill about what he saw. Bill was good at secrets, so it would be okay.

“If you can get it,” Belch shrugged, dangling it just out of reach. Georgie made a grab for his, jumping as high as his little legs would allow. They did not allow for much, and his fingers didn’t even graze the bottom. “Nice try, maggot.”

“What are you doing out in the rain, you little shit?” Henry asked, stepping forward. Georgie gulped, because he was sure this was the boy that sometimes gave Bill trouble at school, but he didn’t know for sure. The previous comment had been a hell of a hint, though.

“My boat…” Georgie mumbled, pointing at it weakly. He feared if he spoke more that his voice would crack and he would cry. That happened a lot, and his Dad always lectured him on being too sensitive. Bill didn’t though, not ever. God, he wished Bill was there then. “W-Why do you have a gun?”

“For killin’ cats,” Patrick cut in, smirking, and pretending like he had actually killed the cat. He wished. “And little snitches that see.”

Georgie, too young to truly understand, began to cry. Even harder when his tormentors did nothing but laugh at this. All but Vic and Peter, who exchanged concerned looks. Kid was too young for this, they thought, because everyone else they picked on deserved it, and everyone else they picked on could count past one hundred.

George never would.

“He’s crying, asshole,” Peter huffed, nudging Belch, who stopped chuckling so and lowered the paper boat back into the child’s reach.

This wasn’t enough, though, Georgie was in hysterics at the prospect of a premature death, despite not really understanding what any of that meant. He knew that one of his hamsters was dead, and buried somewhere in the backyard courtesy of Bill and a cardboard box. He knew that a great Aunt or two had died, and that they were living in the sky with Jesus, but that wasn’t where Georgie wanted to be - he just wanted to go home, to Bill.

“Poor baby boy,” Henry sneered, crouching to his level.
“I’m gonna tell on you—” Georgie sobbed, stumbling back as he rubbed his eyes and reached back for his boat, which Belch moved back out of reach instinctively, smirking. Henry and Patrick were the only ones truly laughing now. The rest of them were somewhat uncomfortable, and ashamed of the amusement they did feel. “I’m gonna- I’m gonna tell my brother! I’m gonna tell Billy on you—”

Henry and Patrick laughed harder.

“Run along and tell him, I dare you,” Henry spat, “What’s Billy gonna do? Beat us up?”

“He’s gonna- He’s gonna—” Georgie was too distressed to think of anything. And he really didn’t know what Bill would do.

“I’ll fucking crush him,” Henry hissed, and he gave Georgie a little shove, just to assert it. Patrick laughed at that.

“If you tell Billy we’ll have to kill him too,” Patrick taunted, and the idea excited him a little too much. “You don’t want us to kill Stuttering Bill, do you, snitch?”

Georgie only cried more.

“Keep crying, I fucking dare you—”

“You’ve had your fun, guys,” Peter cut in, beginning to panic. This level was normal with the older kids, and he enjoyed partaking in it with some of those nerds, but anyone so young never usually got it this harsh, Peter thought it was a little unfair. Maybe he was just sensitive because he had a younger sister of his own. “Let him run along.”

“You’re not going anywhere, shitbag—” Patrick hissed, but Georgie, mustering all the courage he could, decided that he was. He was being brave. For Bill.

“No!” Georgie cried out.

“Get him,” Henry hissed.

“Leave him—”

In the panic, Georgie ran at Belch, wanting to retrieve his boat. There was nothing aggressive about the way he moved, and his height and weight meant it would have been bordering on impossible for him to do any damage at all. Anyone with a rational mind would have known that.

But nobody present, bar the child himself, had a rational mind.

As soon as he launched off, crying, Henry went for him. Patrick snatched the gun, and Henry swooped the child up off the ground laughing hysterically and gripping much too tightly. The screams of terror were harrowing, but Henry and Patrick were only more encouraged by them.

The four other boys present stepped back. Belch was still clutching the boat.

It all happened so fast, after that.

One minute, Georgie was screaming and sobbing and kicking. The next minute, his little foot collided with Henry’s face, and Henry threw him, crying out. It was somewhere between the large drop and the heavy land that the barrel of the gun collided forcefully with the child’s skull.

And then silence.
“It was an accident,” Patrick would lie, minutes later, as the Gang would crowd the dying body, panicked like never before. “It was an accident, I fuckin’ swear it.”

It was.

Patrick Hockstetter had killed before, he had killed younger than George Denbrough, and he always hoped that he would again. But he hadn’t intended to do it like that, not in front of his friends, and not out in the open like that. But he couldn’t stop the exhilaration flooding him, he couldn’t hide his visible joy.

It was an accident, but for Patrick, it was a happy fucking accident.

And maybe they all knew this, but nobody voiced it. It was too harrowing to even ponder at that point, though the child was still breathing. That didn’t last long, because Patrick insisted it couldn’t. Because then Georgie really would tell on them, and they’d die in prison and they couldn’t go to prison because they had done nothing wrong, it was a mere accident and they’d all suffer for it-

And so the best thing to do was to take him to Neibolt, and put him out of his misery. And so they ran there, panicked and dazed in the rain, feeling like they had just entered some sort of dystopia as Belch cradled the child, holding in his own hysterical sobs. The paper boat was still in his hand, too.

They made it to Neibolt in record time, and if anybody saw them on their frenzied journey there, nobody confessed to this when the missing posters were released days later. They laid the body out in the hallway as they entered, and Patrick tried to repress the pure thrill coursing through his veins. Henry tried to too, but the adrenaline was giving him too much of a sick kick. It was a new, exciting feeling, one that he had been chasing his entire life, one that would dictate every choice he made from that moment on. And he really wasn’t hiding that well enough.

The other four were not having such a good time. Moose threw up down the front door, and the Peter and Vic were sobbing and yelling unintelligibly. Belch was void of any readable emotion, stood in the corner, pale and quiet. Still clutching that boat.

He didn’t let it go. Not even hours later, as they all silently watched Patrick drop the body down the well, pretending like they hadn’t noticed how much of a kick this was all giving him.

And one month later, when Moose disappeared and they saw Patrick burning bloodied clothes, they maintained the ignorance.

And five years and thirty four missing people later, it was almost easy.

Almost.

-

Stanley had never seen Bill like it. He was enduring what was sure to be the worst emotional breakdown of his life, incapable of rational thought or communication. Stan wasn’t asking him to get it together or toughen up, though. At first he had been enraged, yelling and crying and uttering every curse word under the sun. Bill had shared the rage, but it had quickly grown into grief, into pure and unwavering agony. Aside from the howls and sobs and occasional curses that Bill was releasing, the house completely silent, Stan was opting to support him with presence and presence alone. There was nothing that could have been said to comfort him, nor change the situation in any way. The words would have been wasted, and Stan knew this. He was very good at reading
situations, and he knew how to comfort Bill. He knew, probably, better than anybody.

When his parents returned home that night, they did not go down to check on their son, which was a relief, because Bill wasn’t sure how to explain the object laid out on there basement table, didn’t think he was capable of speaking even if he could somehow conjure a bullshit story for it. Stan would’ve figured something out, he briefly hoped. Stan, who rarely engaged in conversation with Bill’s parents, did not even ponder the possibility. They never checked on them, they knew better than that.

The two sat in silence all night, with only Stan occasionally speaking up to ask if Bill wanted a glass of water or to go up to his bedroom. He did not. They remained there, huddled up on the basement couch with a single blanket over them, as Bill wept and mourned and Stanley attempted to process what was happening to them, though he concluded by the end of the night that such a thing would be impossible. It was truly incomprehensible.

They didn’t sleep, but they had never expected to. Partly because it was cold and uncomfortable, partly because there would never be a way to sleep with such a thing on the mind. The exhaustion kept threatening to take them, but their heavy, stinging eyes were not enough to override their racing minds.

“We need to tell the others,” Stanley said, when the sound of birds chirping began and the sounds of sniffling slowed. It was around five am, probably, and it felt like an age had passed since they had sat in Bill’s car, innocently conversing. He wasn’t sure if Bill had managed to get any sleep, but if the sounds of anguish he had made all night and the large bags under his eyes were anything to go by, he doubted it greatly.

Bill didn’t verbally respond, but the small nod was noticeable enough. He didn’t really have the energy for conversation, and the idea of having the entire group there, seeing him in such a vulnerable position, trying to discuss the events, did not seem in any way appealing. Of course they needed to know, but he didn’t particularly want them around. Stanley was just enough.

“Bill…” Stan continued, letting the word drag out as tried to sit up. Bill was having none of it, and nudged him back down, nestling closer and pressing his head into the crook of his neck. Stan didn’t have the heart to resist. “We can’t stay here all day.”

“Bet,” Bill mumbled, and it was the first thing he’d said in hours. His voice was hoarse.

“We should sleep, or shower, or eat-“ They were all simple, rational suggestions, but all of the above felt fucking impossible. Bill knew he couldn’t sleep, they had been trying for long enough - yet he didn’t have the energy or motivation to get up and shower, and was certain that if he tried to eat anything he would vomit it straight back up.

“No,” Bill cut in, “No, no, no, no-“ His voice cracked, and he felt the arms around him tighten all the more, and warm lips press against his head.

“Talk to me?” Stanley requested, almost a full ten hours since they had found the boat. It wasn’t that Stan really expected him to have processed it or accepted it, just that he felt Bill was cried out enough to try and make some sense of it verbally. They were never all that good when it came to talking, but Stan knew this was different. There was no wrong way for Bill to feel about this, there was no agenda or hope or desire or curiosity behind this conversation. It would all be love, support, selfless empathy.

When Bill did not instantly reply, Stanley assumed this to be a rejection of this request, but took no offence. He sighed, and then his hand travelled from its place on Bills waist to gently entwine their
fingers. He did not mean it to be a romantic gesture, for once, and it was not mistaken to be such. None of that really mattered, none of that was even crossing their minds. It was just love, the kind with no agenda or deeper meaning. It was support and friendship and comfort.

So maybe it was this intimacy, this comfortability, that encouraged it. Or maybe Bill just decided it was time, that he wanted to - needed to. Regardless, it was a shock and a relief to Stan when Bill finally spoke up, “You know what th-th-the worst part is?”

“No,” Stan replied, honestly. Bill didn’t immediately respond, taking a moment to gather the courage and the will to confess.

“I think I always knew deep down.”

And Stan wondered, privately, if they all had.

- 

It was gone midday when Richie and Eddie decided to make a move. As agreed the previous day, they would first call on Beverly, followed by Ben, and finally Mike, to go back to Bill’s for the third day in a row. It felt like a safe, peaceful option.

Little did the five of them know, it was far from it.

The visit was unexpected, because in the horror and overwhelming nature of the last twelve hours, Bill and Stan had kind of forgotten that their friends would be arriving. They had relocated from the suffocating confines of the basement, and were now laid in Bill’s bed, drifting in and out of consciousness as their insomnia finally began to wear off.

Stan heard the knocking before Bill, and sighed heavily as he realised it was time to tell their friends of what had happened. It wasn’t a conversation either of them were eager to have, but they understood the necessity of it enough to force themselves out. Stan went downstairs, Bill remained curled up. It was quite different to the last time they had been interrupted, though.

The Losers knew that something was wrong, very wrong, as soon as Stanley swung the door open. They noted, initially, that he looked horrible. He was paler than usual, and his hair and clothes were unkempt and the bags under his eyes were unmissable, but the most worrying thing was the obvious lack of life behind them. He looked traumatised.

And then they noticed how Bill wasn’t there, how weirdly silent the house was, and how completely everything felt.

“Come in,” Stanley said, monotonously, after a strange second of silence. The Losers, strangely silent, marched in one by one, each removing their shoes in the doorway. “We’re upstairs.”

“You alright, man?” Mike asked, his concern growing by the second, “You look tired.”

“Up all night,” Stan replied, and briefly wondered if that came out how he had intended.

“Shit, Stan my Man!” Richie snorted, telling Stanley that no, it had definitely not come out how he intended. Richie wasn’t always all that good at reading situations, though, so the comment didn’t come as a surprise to anybody. In fact, nobody even bothered forcing a smirk. Eddie rolled his eyes and nudged him, and Richie cleared his throat, wondering what on Earth else Stan could have meant by such a statement.

“Are you alright?” Mike asked, firmer, because Stan hadn’t at all answered his original question.
Stan simply shook his head, and then began walking back up the stairs. They all followed, habitually.

“What’s happened?” Eddie inquired, cautious. They all knew that something was off, something had to be. It was clear even in the air. Beverly briefly wondered if it was because he was mad at her, then brushed the thought off and cursed herself for thinking this might be about her in any way. Richie forced himself not to ponder the possibilities, because he knew his mind would take him to places much too dark for what had been a relatively nice morning. And Mike had already clocked it would be Bowers.

It always was.

Bill did not expect to feel anything at all positive upon seeing his friends, but as the group walked in, crowding in the doorway awkwardly, a feeling of warmth pooled into his stomach. He felt at ease and comfortable, not anxious and vulnerable as he had anticipated. And they weren’t looking at him with pity, nor smug, they were looking at him with expressions conveying concern, and concern of the purest kind.

“What did he do?” Mike asked, quietly. There was a silence, but nobody pressed for a quick answer or threw another question into the equation. They waited, frozen in the doorway of his bedroom, Stan floating in between, tense and keen.

“Georgie,” Bill whispered, in admission, “He killed Georgie.” It was probably the most important sentence he had ever uttered without stumbling. But that, of course, was not the thing the Losers were so stunned by.

There was a brief silence, but it was quickly broken by a loud, wretched sob, emitted from Bill himself. Stan was over to him in a second, holding back his own tears because he didn’t think his body could handle another cry that day. The others were unfazed by the emotion, and Bev, Ben, Eddie and Mike joined the two, crying as they grieved with their friend. Richie remained stood by the doorway, his face pale and his expression woeful. Nobody beckoned him, but the separation felt alien.

“How do you know?” Richie inquired, dazed. It wasn’t that he wasn’t relieved or angry or any of the things he knew he was supposed to be or that his friends were, it was more that this was still another obstacle on the course. Another shot by Bowers. Another reason to fight back. He needed this to be true, to add up. And he was grossly curious.

“I’ll show you,” Stan said, removing himself from the group embrace. Richie remained still as Stan walked past, and out of the room. Nobody else made a move to follow, but they did pull out of the hug, and no eyes were dry.

Eddie, with tears still running, shot Richie a warning look. Richie pretended like he hadn’t seen.

Stan returned in less than a minute, with a cardboard box in hand. It was strikingly similar to the one that Eddie had received, and they all knew exactly what that meant: a gift. Only, Bowers wasn’t so good with those. It really was the thought that counted in such a case.

“Fuck,” Someone, probably Richie, uttered, as Stan produced the small, crumpled, boat. Bill had stopped crying, and his expression was transitioning from anguish and grief to rage and venom. And the faces among his friends matched up.

“Take it the police,” Bev shot, immediately, “The authorities, outside of Derry-“
“No,” Bill cut in, his voice void of anything but fury. “No!”

“No pigs,” Richie agreed, beginning to pace.

“But this is…” Bev wasn’t sure where she was going with that. How was it any worse than anything else? Just because it was Bill’s brother? They hadn’t handed the eyeball in, nor the tongue, and they were most definitely more incriminating than a paper boat that probably hadn’t even been mentioned in the missing reports.

Only it was different, and it was worse, in a way. Because this wasn’t something they could sit back on, it was far, far too personal.

They had all gathered, or at least began to realise, what this meant.

“I’m going to kill him,” Bill announced, shocking nobody, “I’m going to fucking k-k-kill them all.”

Richie bit down the smile. But shit, was he relieved.

“Be rational about this, Bill,” Mike sighed, “I know it’s a lot to take in, and I’m so sorry-“

“I think that’s perfectly fucking r-r-rational,” Bill shot back. Mike gulped, but shook his head. He was unwavering on this, and even Bev couldn’t claim such a thing anymore. Part of her knew that it would be inevitable. They were set on this, with or without support. And she would always sooner be with them than against. “He killed my b-b-brother. He killed Georgie. A-A-And f-f-fuck knows how many other k-kids-“

“So let him rot in jail,” Bev protested, weakly. With every passing second her mind was talking her out of it. There would be no justice for Bowers, not unless they delivered it. Still, knowing it was true didn’t make it any easier to deal with. Bev could feel herself crumbling, legs literally shaking beneath her.

“Fuck that,” Eddie spat, defensively, and Richie was sickeningly pleased about it. “Fuck waiting. Fuck researching- Shit-“

“We’re going to kill them, aren’t we?” Ben realised, his voice riddled with fear.

“We’re not!” Mike yelled, and he sounded genuinely angry. It was scary, actually. Mike didn’t have a temper, it took a lot to piss him off. This, apparently, had done the trick. “We’re not!”

“You’re not,” Richie corrected, stepping closer to his friends again. Mike took a step back.

“Damn fucking right I’m not.”

“Mike-“

“You seriously gonna do this?” He asked his friends, accusingly. They exchanged looks, the six of them, confirming and searching for some form of validation. Bill’s obvious anguish was enough, but nobody directly answered Mike. Words would’ve made no difference, anyway. “You’re fucked. All of you.”

Richie scoffed, because he figured that much had always been obvious.

“We were fucked long before we thought up this,” Eddie said, “And we’ll be fucked if we don’t do this.”

“He’s right,” Beverly whispered, telling herself more so than Mike.
“No,” Mike insisted, “He’s not. But you ain’t gonna’ listen to me...so go ahead, tear ’em to pieces. But I ain’t having shit to do with this. I don’t want to deal with any more death this summer Or ever, come to fuckin’ think.”

“Mike-“

“Have fun planning your murder spree,” He continued, “N’ good luck getting away with it. I’ll see myself out-“

“You’re not going home-“ Ben said, sounding genuinely shocked by the idea.

“Don’t-“

Mike didn’t even seem to acknowledge the comments, walking back out of Bill’s room without so much as a second glance. They all followed, of course, and Eddie threw himself in front of the door as Mike crouched, lacing up his shoes. “Eddie, please get out of my way.”

“You’re not going home-“

“Yes. I fucking am.”

“No, you can’t leave! We’re all in this together! Mike, you can’t walk out-“

“Don’t tell me what I can and can’t do,” Mike snapped, and the tone of voice even shocked himself. “I’m sorry. I love you guys, more than anyone that I have left, and you know that. I’d do a hell of a lot to keep you all safe, I got fucking scars to prove that.” Richie recalled, for just a minute, how large the one running down his spine was, and how noticeable the large L on his ankle remained. Mike had a lot of scars, and he had done a lot to protect them. Nobody could dispute that, and not one them was willing to try.

"But I won’t kill. I won’t be that person, and I can’t sit here and watch my best friends be those people. We’re meant to be better than that, this is fucking insane! You’re not killers. You’re good people, and I would like to believe you will remain that way. So if you’re going to go through with this, understand I can’t sit back and watch or listen.”

He paused for breath, but they were all too speechless to interject or comment. Mike continued.

“If Bowers and his scumbag friends go missing in a couple of weeks, if their mangled corpses wash up somewhere, I’ll keep my mouth shut. But I don’t want to know how they got there. I don’t want to know shit. The less, the better, you understand? So, if it’s okay with you all, I would like to go home, and pretend like this isn’t happening.”

And so he did.

Ben and Beverly walked him, and returned in short time, but it felt different, somehow worse, without Mike present. There was nobody to ground them anymore, no voice of reason or rationality. Bill was usually that person, but he had lost all sense of those things, and Stan’s concept of rational was much too skewed to be of use. Beverly would have tried, but it felt fruitless. Nobody was going to back her up there, except maybe Ben, but even he was swaying to the dark side.

Or at least, the dark side was swaying to them, beckoning. And maybe it wasn’t all that irrational for them to finally see some appeal in that dark. What had the light ever done for them, anyway?

“We start with the N-N-N-“
“Neibolt,” Eddie supplied, quietly.

“We s-s-start with Neibolt,” Bill said, certain and loud, like a leader. A sense of pride filled him as he realised, for the first time in a while, they were all looking to him again. Reliant and compliant. “We should go there, j-juh-just to s-scope it out, s-see if there’s anything f-fucked in there.”

“Then what?” Ben asked, because he was too anxious about the sound of it all to keep his mouth shut.

“We kill them,” Bill whispered, just to taste the words in his mouth. He licked his lips, then continued, “One by one, p-probably. Get them alone - you know, h-how they want us.”

It was a vague plan, naturally, because Bill had no idea about the logistics or the small details. It was all impulse and optimism, with no second thought given to the more important and horrific aspects of the plan. Bill didn’t want to think about those parts, figured they’d cross that bridge when they got to it. He hadn’t really realised they were already there.

“Where?” Beverly inquired, softly, “And how? Are we at least going to, I don’t know, make it look like…like they did it to themselves?”

“Maybe we could plant evidence on the scenes,” Richie suggested, “Make it look like Henry did it.”

“How?” Stan pressed, though he knew none of them had thought that far ahead. “This is…” He wasn’t going to back out, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t going to think critically about what they were doing. It was in his nature to do so, and in such a context this was nothing but a curse.

“Crazy,” Ben finished, gulping hard. Bill shot him a glare, because he really didn’t want to hear that, and Ben seemed to understand this, straightening up and clearing his throat.

“We have to do this,” Bill insisted, stern, “We h-h-have to f-find a way.”

“We will,” Eddie offered, “One step at a time, though.”

“So we start with Neibolt?” Bill asked, because he was always a democratic leader, of sorts.

“We start with Neibolt.” And with the simple confirmation, the plan finally began.

Chapter End Notes

comments give me motivation pls leave me one thx
Henry was getting into trouble again. It wasn’t exactly uncommon, but it was never something he enjoyed, and never something he aimed to do, regardless of how reckless his actions were. Henry could not comprehend consequence, certainly not from his Father, who had shielded him from that for as long as he could remember. Naturally, he despised being on the receiving end on one of his Fathers infamous rants.

But Butch Bowers had always, above anything, tried to protect his son. He had gone to great lengths to do so, because not doing so would have resulted in him also facing up to consequences that he didn’t want to. The system worked for them, and thus far Butch had never caught Henry causing trouble he couldn’t pay away. This time was no different at all, but the rage he was exhibiting suggested otherwise to Henry and his friends. Seething wasn’t the word.

“You fuckin’ shit for brains bastard,” Butch yelled, kicking the door instead of Henry. “How d’ya want me to clean this one up, huh fuckface? You got any bright ideas knockin’ around in that airhead of yours? You fuckin’ dumbass shit-”

Vic, Belch and Patrick had been dismissed, and sat silently in the other room, listening uncomfortably. Patrick was smirking, running his index finger up and down the edge of the bloodied knife; remarkably, the skin was did not slice open.

“You and your screw-loose friends,” He continued, and Vic winced, wondering if the screws had fallen out completely. “I told you. I fuckin’ told you, Henry, I warned you! Ain’t no more of this reckless bullshit, you understand me? Fuck up like this again ’n you’re all on your own. No more blood on my hands, boy. Understand?”

Henry understood, but he did not like it, not one bit. He stood, staring at his Father with the coldest expression he was capable of. Bowers returned the loveless glare, and stepped forward, stranding straighter. Henry did not budge, though.

“Understand, Henry?”

Henry didn’t even flinch.

“Understand?” And when that one was equally as ineffective at gagging a response, Butch went for his old classic method, and threw something that resembled a messy right hook at his son.

He should have expected it, really. This wasn’t the first time his Father had knocked him across the room. But with his friends next door? His inferiors, hearing all of it? Well, Henry wondered if it may be the last.

His Father followed where he flew, and backed him to the wall. Henry was smaller, but he refused to act like it, squaring up silently. He winced, though, as Butch put his hand firm around his throat. “You fuckin’ understand me, you little rat?”

There was a pause, but they all knew it was coming. “Understood.”

Butch left then, muttering angrily under his breath and he pondered how much it would take to pay off the family, buy their silence. He knew they’d want to press charges, but money could change
that. It usually did, and when money didn’t, threats, blackmail and intimidation always did the trick.

Henry gave himself a minute before going back to greet his friends, wiping the blood from under his nose and repressing the tears until he was sure they could not fall. But he didn’t bother trying to smile, and made no snarky comment when as he slumped down into the couch next to Belch, who nodded at him sympathetically. He had faced similar torment from his own Father, once upon a time.

“What are we gonna do?” Vic asked, bravely.

“Ain’t shit we can do,” Henry admitted, knowing that the consequences of attacking any more random kids would be too bad. “Got to focus, understand? Get those bastard losers. No side shit, no distractions.”

“We should go looking,” Belch suggested, because he was eager to get it over with, eager to watch it all play out - and most likely fall apart before their eyes. “Ain’t nothing better to do today.”

“They’re hiding from us,” Patrick pointed out, his voice flat, “Driving round, walking through their spots, it’s pointless. They know better…somehow.” He flashed a look to Vic, a look so vague and meaningless it felt threatening. Vic tensed up.

“So fucking what?” Belch scoffed, “They can hide, we can hunt.”

“But where are they going?” Vic asked, sounding genuinely confused, as if the truth - or even the idea of it - had not really occurred to him. It had, because he was intelligent and somewhat logical, but in the midst of the tension and the anxiety, such things had slipped his mind.

“That’s the thing, idiot,” Henry said, “They ain’t going anywhere. They’re staying home, tucked away, thinking they’re safe.” And it had worked, thus far.

There was a silence then, until Henry spoke up again, a much more sinister edge to his voice, “But they ain’t fuckin’ safe anywhere anymore.”

An even heavier silence followed.

“We can’t trespass…we can’t invade their houses- I mean, Henry, that’s-” Belch, never one to protest in such a way, sounded horrified by the idea - as if it was worse than the murdering, robbing, drug dealing- as if trespassing wasn’t already on the list! Henry and Patrick laughed at him. Vic remained silent.

“Breaking and entering too much for ya’, Belch?”

“Well, no, but-“

“He has a point,” Vic cut in, “If their parents are around-“

“Shut the fuck up, you pussy bitch,” Henry sneered.

“Who said anything about going inside, anyway?” Patrick always sounded cunning, despite that being a descriptive he was unworthy of, but this sentence sounded especially so, “We could just chase them out. Scare ‘em out of safety, you know?”

Naturally, Henry loved this idea. And it sparked interest in the other two, as well. It wasn’t the worst idea Patrick had ever had, though probably better in theory than practice.
“I guess that’s today’s plan formed,” Henry said, his smile reforming.

“Your Dad’s gonna kill you,” Vic said, voice wavering, as if he didn’t like suggesting such a possibility. Henry laughed though, and that was not the reaction he had anticipated. Patrick joined in too, and then Belch began to chuckle, as if he had caught on to the inside joke, or maybe he was just pretending.

“I’d like to see him fuckin’ try.”

- 

After a few days alone, Mike was more than surprised when he heard a knock on the front door. It was rare for them to get visitors at all, certainly ones that were uninvited. The knocking sound alone made Mike feel uneasy, which was only natural after so much solitude. And it didn’t help that his Grandpa was out tending the animals.

He approached the door slowly, with caution. The knock came again.

Mike had visions of opening the door to greet a double barrelled shotgun, to greet Bowers and a knife, to greet one of the local white men he had been warned so many times about. And then his rationality took over, and he pictured one of his friends, or a neighbour hoping to borrow some sugar, maybe the local Girl Scouts trying to sell cookies.

He opened the door and sighed, a breath of relief.

“Ah shit,” Mike chimed, relieved and laughing at his own mind. Somewhere though, he knew that those thoughts and concerns were not all that absurd. In fact, they were very much grounded in reality. His warped, fucked reality. But he was laughing, and it didn’t matter, for that short moment. “Kind of hoped it was gonna be Girl Scouts.”

“I did think about bringing cookies, you know,” Stanley replied, grinning. Mike laughed and opened the door wider, allowing his friend to step inside. “Sorry to disappoint.”

“I don’t care for the cookies, but that uniform…” Stan laughed again and batted him lightly. “Dude, I know you still have it!”

“Maybe my Mom has it folded up somewhere,” Stan confessed, smiling, “But I’d sooner die than let any of you shits see me in that. And I’m pretty sure Rich stole half my badges.”

“Of course he did,” Mike said, shaking his head. He noted Stan’s chipper mood did not match his appearance, at all, in fact.

He looked like he hadn’t slept for days - weeks even, with the size of the bags beneath them. And he was paler than Mike had ever seen him before, sheet white and shaking, with hair uncharacteristically greasy and untamed.

Though painfully curious, Mike didn’t want to immediately point this out, afraid of sounding rude or calling out what he assumed would be a big insecurity for someone usually always so put together. It was tragically expected, but despite the merry attitude, there was nothing put together about Stan. Not anymore. He could barely even unlace his shoes, crouched on the floor fiddling with the knot, borderline shaking. Mike knelt to his level and took over, Stan said nothing but there was gratitude buried in his expression.

“What brings you here then, Stan the Man?” Mike asked, starting to untie the second shoe as Stan kicked off the first.
“Do I need to reason to come visit my friend?” Stan shot back, defensive. Mike smiled softly.

“Of course not,” He replied, “Just curious, is all. You didn’t come here alone, did you?” He couldn’t recall hearing a car outside, but the possibility of Stan walking all that way with such danger around seemed too absurd.

“Bill drove me,” Stan shrugged, “I’ll get my Mom to come pick me up later, if that’s okay.”

“Totally fine,” Mike said, “Did Bill drive alone?”

“Rich and Ed are in the car,” Stan explained, “They’re…doing things.” Mike knew what that must entail, and though he wanted no involvement, he couldn’t repress the aching curiosity. It stemmed from concern, more so than anything, and that existed despite the hurt he felt.

“And you didn’t wanna go with them?”

“I can’t,” Stan whispered, the shame seeping into his tone. "They're...I juh- I can't."

“Are you okay, Stan?”

“Are you?” Stan scoffed, as if he already knew the answer. He did, really. Because it had to be a No. There was nothing okay about anything anymore, and that was undeniable, no matter how much any of them distanced themselves from what was going on, or from what they were going to do. One would have to be insane to be okay in such a situation. Stan wondered if they were all heading that way, because he was certain that he was.

“I’m coping,” Mike said, as if that revealed anything. Stan laughed, then shook his head. “Are you?”

“Do I look like I’m coping?” Stan asked, running one hand through his knotted hair. Mike wasn’t all that good at lying, so he didn’t even try to pull that card. Stan didn’t deserve, nor need to hear it.

“Nah,” He mumbled, “You look fucked up.”

Stan laughed at that, well aware of his state. He appreciated the honesty. “I am fucked up.”

Mike didn’t dispute that. He wouldn’t have had it come from anybody around him. And he would’ve probably said the same for himself, only he wasn’t willing to face up to that. Being fucked up wasn’t something Mike was okay with, he was far too stubborn to let his trauma rule his life like that, or at least he tried to be.

“My parents are worried that I’m doing drugs,” Stan continued, smirking, “I wish I was, you know, I wish that was it. I told them it wasn’t, insisted I was fine, and they don’t believe me - not a fucking word. And I don’t blame them.”

“They’d never guess the truth,” Mike shrugged. Stan shook his head. They were both still sat on the floor, unmoving.

“They already know the truth,” Stan whispered, looking down at the floor, “Half of, at least. Shit, I know they won’t just figure out that me and our innocent childhood friends are trying to murder four guys, but they know about them. They know that they’re out for us.”

Stanley’s parents had always been aware of the treatment their son received. When he had returned home from school battered and bruised and almost always in tears, things had been crystal clear, and Stan’s Father had simply sighed and given him a harsh talking to about the “real world” and
how he had to have “thick skin” because people would always hate him for something, be that his religion or lifestyle or, apparently, choice of friends.

His parents had known this abuse was continuous, had watched from afar as their only child spent his high school years anxious and angry and so obviously afraid. And the marks were always there, though they had never noticed the large “L” carved into his flesh. Nothing was ever done, nor said, and not because they didn’t care, but because they knew of their powerlessness.

It was easier for them to pretend like it wasn’t happening. Stan and every single one of his peers were robbed of that privilege.

“But I ain’t gonna tell ‘em shit,” Stan said, “And they don’t wanna know shit. Not really. If they really thought I was getting fucked up and high with my friends, you think they’d let me leave the fucking house?”

“Never,” Mike mumbled, knowing how strict Stan's parents could sometimes be.

“You look fucked up, too.” The comment caught Mike off guard, and he frowned at Stanley, who was smirking, but the expression didn’t reach his eyes. It was a sad smile if Mike had ever seen one.

“I’m coping,” He replied, dryly, “I miss you guys. I just…”

“We miss you.” Mike didn’t doubt him. “It’s not the same. It’s strange, incomplete, like we’ve lost a limb. Yeah, that’s how it feels.”

When Mike didn’t immediately respond, Stan kept rambling, filling Mike in on everything except from the plan of action. Eventually, they made their way to Mike’s bedroom, where Stan rambled some more, still avoiding the elephant in the room. Mike talked a little, because he could tell that Stan was quite uncomfortable, like he was itching to say something. And because he couldn’t carry the conversation alone like that. But they were talking bullshit, and they both knew it. There was no time for meaningless conversations anymore, not with everything going on around them.

Mike had enough, his curiosity getting the better of him.

“And I don’t know why Ben won’t just-“

“Stan,” Mike cut in, speaking up for the first time in a short while. “Why are you here? Why are you here alone?”

“Stan,” Mike cut in, speaking up for the first time in a short while. “Why are you here? Why are you here alone?”

“I wanted to see you,” Stan insisted, as if it was obvious. “Shit, Mike, is that alright?”

“I wanted to see you,” Stan insisted, as if it was obvious. “Shit, Mike, is that alright?”

“Look me in the eye and tell me that’s the only reason.” He could not, of course, because they both knew there was more than one motivation behind this visit. There had to be a reason that Bill would drop Stanley there and drive away without so much as saying hello to Mike first, without so much as waving from the car. And there was a reason it was Mike’s, and not his own home.

“I didn’t want to talk about it,” Stan confessed, eventually. He was whispering, as if ashamed, as if afraid. And he was both. “I don’t want to think about it, okay? And you’re not supposed to ask. You said you didn’t want to know!”

“So this is a distraction?” Mike questioned, though he didn’t really mind being used as that if it meant he got some decent social interaction. If it meant seeing his friends. Distractions worked both ways, kind of. Well, they were supposed to, this wasn’t actually a distraction at all - quite the opposite, in fact.
“I’m not distracted.”

“Maybe you should talk about it,” Mike suggested, because in truth, he really wanted to hear it. “I don’t think there is a distraction from this. I sure as shit haven’t found anything.”

“Do you really want to know what they’re doing right now?” Stan asked, because he wished that he didn’t. It was only causing more worry and anxiety. Mike gulped, but nodded.

“Shoot,” He said, with obvious hesitance. Stan didn’t respond immediately, allowing time for his friend to back track and change his mind. He half expected him to, they both did. Mike had been so insistent that they kept him out of it, that he was to know nothing.

Things changed.

“They’re going to Neibolt.”

Bill parked up four blocks away, his car blended with the masses of others lined up down the street. They doubted anyone would be observant enough to note it, and they were right about that one.

The agreement was that if any familiar vehicle was on a surrounding street, they’d try again another day, not risking being caught for even a second. But Richie had been pretty insistent that today was as good as any, and little did they know it was actually better than any.

The danger still loomed over them, and nobody was going to address it as deeply as necessary, because that would make it more real, and it wasn’t quite real enough to have them shitting their pants yet. And Eddie figured the risks didn’t need to be discussed anyway. If Bowers saw them, they’d be shot on sight. He had no doubt about it.

They were all armed, just to be safe. Bill had the gun, much to Richie’s annoyance. The debate around that particular weapon had been heated, but none of them were experienced enough with it to really argue they deserved it more, Bill got it by default: it was his fathers, after all. So Richie and Eddie had baseball bats, which were considerably less impactful, but Eddie was incredibly skilled with one, so they had that to their advantage at least.

Beverly and Ben were on watch outside, with pen knives, and Beverly had spent the morning mumbling unhappily about Stan dropping out, though it had come as a surprise to nobody, and meant that they could all fit in Bill’s car no bother. It wasn’t quite betrayal they felt, but something close to that, abandoned, maybe. Much like Mike was feeling, actually.

“They come, you fuckin’ yell,” Richie repeated to them, “We still out number them. We can fight.”

“We’re on their turf,” Eddie reminded them, “They come, we go. It’s safer to run than to fight right now—"

“It’s all h-h-hypothetical,” Bill cut in, “Let’s just get this oh-oh-over with. If th-they come back, we’ll d-do what we h-have to.”

He was met with silence, his friends pondering whether or not any of them were really capable of doing what they ‘had to’, and privately concluding that despite the facade, they were not at all. Not even Richie was sure of himself as they approached the house, filling with an intense anxiety completely alien to him. This feeling was erupting inside them all, mutual to even Mike and Stan across town.
As they approached the house, and collectively agreed that they could be there due to the lack of vehicle around, they slowed. They slowed as much as they could bring themselves to, observing the street with eagle eyes. It was quiet, quieter than any other street they’d been down, but maybe that was because they weren’t talking, and the other houses down there were owned by decaying old people or nobody at all. The silence was ominous, threatening.

The reality hit like a speeding bus, and as they reached the front of the path, Ben felt his legs give way beneath him. Beverly and Richie were at his side in a second, pulling him back up as he gasped and quivered.

“You can’t go in there,” He whispered, grabbing Richie by his collar, “You can’t go in there- We need to go back-“

“No,” Richie cut in, tugging free despite his nerves, “You know what we need to do Ben.”

“They’re not here,” Beverly insisted, “There’s nothing to be afraid of.” She was wrong, and they all knew it, herself included, but Bev was optimistically operating under the idea that if she told herself it enough it would become true.

“There’s a-a-always suh-something to b-b-be ah-afraid of. But we can’t run f-forever.”

Ben was silent, though he begged to differ. If it wasn’t for his unconditional adoration for his friends, he’d have run a long time ago.

Nobody replied to Bill, and the five of them stared up at the building in silence, taking in it’s unsettling presence. Ben recalled his Mother telling him that every house had a personality, an aura of it’s own, and the Neibolt House was the most extreme example of this that Ben had ever encountered. He could feel the house, they all could, burning into their memories, minds and nightmares.

It bared a comical resemblance to a stereotypical, cartoonish haunted house - it’s rotting, aged structure warped from neglect, and the garden overgrown into a miniature forest over run with weeds and litter. The windows were bordered up, and if it wasn’t for local rumour, it would be easy to believe nobody had stepped foot in there for years. Nobody normal would dare.

“Come on,” Richie said, pretending like he wasn’t borderline shitting himself. “Hey, maybe there ain’t gonna be jack-shit in there anyway.” And if the Bowers Gang had at least half a brain cell between them, maybe there wouldn’t have been.

“How long do we wait before coming in after you?” Beverly asked, fumbling with her pen knife.

“An hour,” Eddie said, “Maximum.” If Mike was there, he’d have laughed and told them they weren’t gonna last twenty minutes. And he’d be right, because Mike usually was. Eddie tried to brush the thought off though.

“Got it,” Ben mumbled, nodding at Bev. Bill nodded back, then looked to Richie and Eddie, who nodded at him also, a mutual agreement that it was time.

“See you on the other s-s-side, Losers.”

- 

It was Patrick who suggested they try Mike’s house first.

*Intuition*, he insisted. Just a funny fucking feeling they’d be there, with no real reason or way of
knowing he was right. Or at least a little bit right. Two sevenths right.

They parked up at the bottom of the street and walked up, freezing outside the gate, exchanging awkward looks as they wondered who would be the first to trespass onto the Hanlon Family Farm. They all knew it was daring, they all knew the risk. They weren't exactly afraid, just a little unnerved.

“Ain’t nobody gonna be in there,” Henry scoffed, “Go!” He shoved Belch forward, deciding that he could take a bullet for them if it came to that. But he doubted it, or else this wasn’t something any of them would have agreed to.

Belch obviously felt the same, but muttered under his breath as he swung the gate open and crossed the threshold, looking around nervously. Henry, Patrick and Vic followed closely. “Do I just knock or…”

“Knock?” Henry sneered, and Patrick began to chuckle, “Are you fuckin’ real? What the fuck you gonna’ say when they swing the door open, huh, douchebag? We need to split, hunt ‘em down.”

“Vic and I can search the house,” Patrick said, throwing an arm around his friend, “You two search the farm. Maybe they’ve got a clubhouse or something, you know, like they used to.”

The clubhouse Patrick was referring to had been long since destroyed, after a rather extreme incident involving fire crackers, missiles and lots of fighting left it inhabitable. It was a small miracle that the rest of the woodland hadn’t caught fire that day, and an even bigger miracle that Eddie Kaspbrak hadn’t choked to death on the masses of smoke.

“We meet back at the car in thirty minutes,” Henry said, “If we ain’t there, you wait.” They all seemed at peace with this plan, and split off accordingly. Henry and Belch disappeared to the left, setting off to roam the fields. Patrick doubted they’d find a fucking thing.

The house, on the other hand, he was a little more optimistic about. That fucking intuition.

They weren’t stupid enough to try the front door, instead sneaking around the sides and to the back. It seemed simple - easy, even. Patrick imagined that the door would be open, that they’d just waltz in and snoop round and be done with it. Maybe, if they had arrived five minutes prior, that would’ve been the case. Only, they couldn't be so fortunate. When Patrick and Vic approached the back yard, they were greeted by the sight of an old man sat with his back to them, smoking a cigarette on the stairs that lead up into the house. Little more than two metres away from the man, a truck was parked up, one door open. Drawing a sharp breath in, Patrick and Vic froze. If the o maldn turned, he would see them, no doubt about it.

Vic let himself gulp, and tensed even more as he felt Patrick pinch him - a punishment for the reckless noise. He made the same one only a second later though, spying the same small detail as Victor had: a shotgun, propped up on the seat inside the truck.

He took a single step backwards, disappearing back around the side of the house, and Vic followed his lead, finally breathing out. “The door was open,” Vic whispered, and Patrick knew he wasn’t referring to the truck.

He smiled at his friend, though it came across unintentionally sinister. Vic tensed again. All they had to do was wait, and with Henry and Belch going around the other side of the house, neither of
them believed they would have to wait a while.

And they didn’t. Because thankfully for them, Belch and Henry were incapable of being quiet, and their loud, incoherent uttering could be heard all the way over where Vic and Patrick stood, pressed up against the brick. Those idiots had no concept of stealth.

“Fuckin’ punks,” Mike’s Grandpa spat, throwing his cigarette out and jumping to his feet. Within a minute, he was in the truck, speeding over to where Bowers and Belch were walking, and throwing a rather large wrench into their grand fucking plan. It had been horseshit from the off, and something like this had always been inevitable. Not that it had dampened Patrick’s spirits at all - quite the contrary, he was laughing.

“Better them than us,” He shrugged, noting the judgement in Vic’s expression. No counter argument came, and they silently crept back into the yard, where the truck was still visible - and if they had really looked, so were Belch and Henry, legging it east.

“Inside,” Vic said, and somehow, as he walked into Mike Hanlon’s family home, he felt much calmer. Safe, even. Patrick was a second behind, taking in his surroundings as they intruded. He shut the door behind him, and twisted the key that sat in the lock. Then, he walked out of the kitchen, as casually as he would have done in his own home, and down into the hallway. “What are you-“

“Locking them in,” Patrick said, “Locking them out.” The key for the front door was a little harder to find, hung on a hook with several others next to the empty coat rack. Patrick locked that one too, then placed it back where it belonged.

“And if they aren’t here?” Vic asked, frowning.

“They are,” Patrick said, smiling, “Well, somebody is. Listen.” The silence felt unnatural at first, but Vic quickly realised that there wasn’t silence at all. Barely audible, yet still present: music.

“Upstairs,” Vic identified. Patrick laughed.

“Too fucking easy.”

-  

“Hide,” Mike hissed, shaking. Stanley nodded, looking around frantically. They were kind of short on options. The size of the house wasn’t matched by amount of items inside of it, but Mike managed to slide under the bed, a glass ornament in his grip, ready to be used as a weapon.

He had reached for it as soon as they had seen the Gang approach the house - which had been nothing but luck. Stan was looking out of the window aimlessly, making small talk with Mike about music he knew little about, when he scouted them coming down the road.

If he hadn’t, Mike dreaded to think what may have happened. He hadn’t known where his Grandpa was to warn him, but knew that he usually had some form of weapon nearby on the farm - usually something to shoot the vermin with.

“Fuck,” Stan whispered, swinging open the wardrobe door and sliding inside. It was awfully claustrophobic, and he knew that if he moved he’d make far too much noise. Even breathing felt deafening, paired up with the pounding of his heart against his ribcage.

The footsteps coming up the stairs were fast and loud, like they were rushing, or maybe just eager.
“In there,” A muffled voice said, and Mike was certain it belonged to Vic. He was afraid, but maybe less so than Stanley - despite being in almost full view. He wouldn’t be hard to spot, but at least he had something to fight with if it came to that.

For a couple of minutes, there wasn’t much sound or movement clear enough for either of them to pinpoint. The record player was stopped, and then, a large smash sent shivers down Mike’s spine, and he tensed a little more. Then the footsteps grew louder, and the voices became all too clear.

“Bastards,” Patrick Hockstetter hissed, “I can smell ‘em, Vic.” The door was kicked open, hard.

Stanley didn’t remember the last time he had been so close to pissing himself, his hand clasped over his mouth to hold in the sob that was so close to coming out.

The room was close to silent, as Mike laid still, eyes locked on his foes feet and as he held in a heavy breath. The only real sound was Vic’s breathing, which was unnaturally fast.

“Patrick,” He called out, his voice shaking. And then there were more footsteps. And Patrick entered, slow and cautious, and the floorboards creaked - confirming his presence to Stanley. “Can you see him?”

Mike could’ve shit bricks, but the confusion struck him before the panic could fully set in. Were they just saying that to lure him out? Could they see Stanley through a crack in the door? It didn’t make sense. He doubted, from their angle and the fact they were facing the other direction, that they had spotted him. Maybe if they turned around, but the door was directly right of the bed, and they were facing forward anyway. He remained silent, hoping Patrick could reply with more context.

“You know I can’t,” Patrick said, offering Mike and Stanley absolutely no fucking help there. “Where is he? What is he doing, huh?”

Mike was resisting the urge to crawl out and see for himself, but the curiosity didn’t out do the fear just yet. Maybe this was part of some more elaborate scheme, or maybe Vic was just batshit crazy. The latter definitely being the theory with more weight and truth.

“He’s just…” Vic let his voice trail off. He sounded disconnected, broken, or maybe like he was just too afraid to talk. “He’s standing there. He’s- I…I- Patrick- I don’t like this- I don’t like it-“ And Patrick, being Patrick, laughed.

“He’s looking at you-“ Vic snapped, and Mike saw Patrick step back, as if that shocked him. As if it scared him.

“He isn’t fucking real-“

“He just- He-“ Vic started crying, then. Staggering backwards, from what Mike could tell. Stanley, inside the closet, with even less context, was trying desperately to piece it all together, but even with all of his intellect and grounded lens, it made no fucking sense. “Fuck off Peter!”

And then, suddenly, it made perfect sense.

“I killed Peter Gordon with my bare fucking hands,” Vic confessed to them, smiling as he did so.

The realisation hit both Mike and Stanley at the same time - Vic was seeing Peter. He was truly that unhinged, but neither of them were sure that would work in their favour.
“Stay focused,” Patrick snapped, “You can talk to your ghost friends later. We have fucking shit to
do-”

“’s laughing at you-”

“He wasn’t laughing the last time I fuckin’ saw him.”

“He’s- Fuck-Patrick-“

“Calm the fuck down already,” Patrick scoffed, “He ain’t real! Ain’t nothing to be fuckin’ scared
of.”

And he was almost right. Almost.

And then came the distinct, harrowing sound of gunshots off in the distance, and there really was
something to be scared of. Vic almost pissed.

Mike gasped, out loud, a reaction he had been unable to prevent upon realising his Grandpa may
not have been the man firing said shots, and the fear for him overtook all of the threat he was
under. Naturally, the two intruders heard it. Even in their panic, it was unmissable.

“Bastard,” Vic spat, dropping to his knees, and Patrick dropped with him, hissing a word much,
much more offensive. They reached for him, each grabbing an arm and dragging him out, ignoring
his kicks and pleas.

Stanley could hear the commotion, and he knew what needed to be done. Even if it meant getting
taken too. He threw himself out of the closet, staggering out and to a stop, holding his hands up in
surrender as Patrick and Vic stared, shocked.

“Two for one,” Patrick said, smiling maliciously. Stan felt vomit beginning to rise as the reality hit
them. Was this it? Was this how they went out? Kidnapped from Mike’s own home?

Mike stood, shaking out of their grip and rushing to the other side of the room. Stan noted that he
was still clutching the ornament; a little bit of hope sparked. They didn’t pursue him, Vic in a state
of utter confusion and Patrick uncertain of what to do for once - though he would have sooner died
than confess this.

“Get out of my house,” Mike hissed, sounding more angry and afraid than Stan could ever recall
hearing him before. “You’re intruding.” The simplicity of what he was saying made it a little more
unsettling for Patrick and Vic.

“What are you faggots going to do?” Patrick sneered, “You can’t fight. You can’t win.”

“We’re still alive,” Stanley cut in, yet again being braver than he believed himself to be, “That’s a
fucking win when we’re playing with you sick fucks.” Patrick laughed, but the comment didn’t sit
so well with Vic, who seemed to be caving in on himself more and more with every passing
second. Peter was still present in his mind, stood between Mike and Stan with an ugly, bloody grin.

“You can’t win,” Patrick repeated, seemingly unphased. “You’re coming with us, or we’re gonna
make ya’.”

“Do you think it’s going to be that easy?” Mike asked, forcing his own sick smirk. It was an
attempt to intimidate, and it was working. Without Bowers, without Belch, and more or less
without Vic, Patrick wasn’t a hard nut to crack. “I’m not going anywhere, and neither is my friend.
We’re fighting, this time, and considering all seven of us are alive and well, we’re winning.”
The knife came out then, and Patrick held it up as if he was more than ready to use it. Mike forced a laugh, but it didn’t meet his face. Stanley couldn’t believe it, bordering on breaking down.

“You gonna stab me in my own home?”

“Stab?” Patrick scoffed, “You think I’ll be that nice about it? No, No, No. I’ll slash you into fuckin’ ribbons, slice your stomach open and pull out your fuckin’ organs.”

“You’re gonna need a bigger knife than that,” Mike replied, stepping back a little. He knew that he was pushing his luck, but he had confidence in the idea that Patrick was too smart to do anything of the sort so long as they were on the Farm. They weren’t going to risk everything like that, no matter how desperate they were getting.

“I won’t,” Patrick said, “I’d know from experience.” The latter part of the sentence sent shivers down Mike’s spine. Which poor bastard had suffered that, then?

“Get out.”

“Not without one of you,” Patrick said, evidently backing down if only a little. Stan and Mike exchanged glances. Neither one of them would be willing to let the other go, but they would have both been more than willing to go for the sake of each other. Even if it did mean getting sliced up with Patrick’s small knife (and it did).

“Not a fucking chance,” Stanley shot, his voice shaking, “You’re fucked. You’re so fucking fucked-“

“Right back at ya’, faggot.”

“I’m serious,” Mike continued, “You need to leave. You heard those shots. I don’t suppose your psychopath friends were wielding shotguns on my fields?”

“Henry had a gun,” Vic offered, quietly.

“A shotgun?” Mike asked. Vic shook his head. The gun Henry may or may not have been in possession of was not capable of causing almost a fraction of the damage that the shotgun was. They all knew that it was a shotgun that had been fired. What were the chances of Henry acquiring one of those?

“Your friends could be bleeding out in my field right now,” He continued, “He’s a great shot, my Grandpa. Taught my Dad. Taught me. I don’t think he’d miss, and he has a fair defence for firing at armed intruders. He could be marching back here now. If he find another two of you psychotic white boys on his property it’ll be like fucking Christmas for him.”

Patrick, for once in his entire life, was a little bit shaken by the prospect. A gun had been fired. It was not Henry’s. That was something they needed to consider. Would Henry really be that mad if they fled without a loser? Maybe they could lie and say the house was empty. How would he ever be able to disprove that?

“I don’t want to give you rats credit for anything, but even I know you’re smarter than this. You can’t hurt us right now, broad daylight, in my own home. That’s not your style, is it? That’s too risky. Who’s idea was this? ‘Cause whoever it was fucked up. You ought to pray Henry doesn’t have a bullet in him right now.”

“And you ought to pray he does,” Patrick spat back, but clearly ready to retreat.
“I do,” Stanley muttered, and Patrick smirked. “Three times a fucking day.” It was a lie, because Stanley never bothered praying all that much anymore. He had decided a rather long time ago that no God, Jewish or otherwise, was looking out for him up there. Stan believed God did exist, just maybe not in Derry.

And as if he had read his mind, Vic spoke up, “No hope in that, Uris, don’t you know already? *Derry’s fuckin’ Godless.*”

And before anybody could think of a worthy response, a deafening bang came from downstairs. Four gasps followed, and they waited for any indication of who it could be. There was no hint for at least a minute, as more, quieter bangs followed. Knocking, furious knocking.

“Leave now,” Mike said, “And maybe I’ll talk him out of calling the cops.”

Vic stumbled to his feet and shot out of the room. Patrick stayed still, weighing up the options, silently.

“This isn’t fucking over,” Patrick hissed, “Next time I get my hands on you, ain’t nobody gonna be there to save ya’.” It was a promise, Mike knew. Still, he was grateful that this had ended his way, so far.

Patrick spat at them both before he left, and he had always been a good enough shot to hit. This time was no different.

Mike and Stan followed them out of the room, anxious and shaking as they tried to process exactly what had just happened, and everything it meant. Mike went to the back door, confused about it being locked, but more than anything just grateful his Grandpa was alive and well, muttering curse words and dialling the police reluctantly.

Sadly, he hadn’t hit either one of the intruders on the farm, but the shots had sent them running, screaming and shitting their pants as the legend went. He had chased them off the property, down the fields some distance before driving back.

Mike left out the part about Vic and Patrick walking into the house, knowing better than to add fuel to the fire. After all, they hadn’t been genuinely hurt. They were just more afraid, which was nothing new.

“You still don’t want ‘em dead?” Stanley asked, as they retreated to Mike’s room, feeling much more unsafe that before.

“I never said I don’t want ‘em dead,” Mike replied, double checking the lock on his window, “I just don’t want to kill ‘em myself.”

“I think we have to, now,” Stanley concluded, pacing around the room aimlessly. It felt wrong, after such an incident, as if it had been violated. And it had been violated, so much so that Stan wasn’t sure it was going to feel right ever again. The Bowers Gang had that affect - destroying everything they touched just for the fucking fun of it. “I think we’re out of options. And time.”

They were out of a lot of things, in reality: hope, optimism and luck to name but a few. Time was the real thing bothering Stanley though, because things were picking up speed. Henry had been patient for too long, and the desperation had very clearly hit, and hit hard. That was both good and bad for the Losers.

If one was to take an optimistic perspective, it was a good thing because it meant that he’d get sloppy. He’d get careless and erratic and panicked. They’d fuck up, get caught, give themselves
away. But then, that was a very optimistic perspective, and Stanley knew better than the have one of those. The bad side of desperation was much more present in Stan’s mind, because he knew how dangerous that could be in a man like Henry Bowers and his fucked up friends. They’d be unpredictable. They’d be quicker. They’d be afraid, and even more dangerous as a result.

And regardless of anything, Stanley knew that they’d be back. They always came back. And it always got worse.

Chapter End Notes

im not proud about this piece of shit taking over two months to write but here we are. i can only apologise n rly hope ur still around n give a shit !! feedback would be super bc im honestly not too proud of this but the urge to get it out was too much. see ya in another month or so im sure.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!