**When Do I Get Out Of Here?**

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**Summary**

High School is never easy, but in South Park it seems unbearable. Drama! Featuring such favorite pairings as Creek, Bunny, Style & Stendy & Candy (ooh drama), plus some fun sibling relationships like Ike & Karen and Shelly & Kevin, AND MANY MORE!

**Notes**

Hey anyone! I'm posting to Ao3 now, wow! So far it'll just be this fic, but I might get around to posting my Damien one-shots-series here too eventually (if you're interested, those are on fanfiction .net for now).

Anyway, I decided to write a High School Drama AU for South Park, and this one is going to be a an actual chapter series! It’s going to feature such favorite pairings as Creek, Bunny, Style & Stendy & Candy (ooh drama), plus some fun sibling relationships like Ike & Karen and Shelly & Kevin, AND MANY MORE!
Gonna be really dramatic, and sometimes waver between fluffy as a feather and dark as Henrietta’s eyeliner.
Think Degrassi for South Park lol.
Anyway, here’s chapter 1!
Chapter Summary

Karen has a run-in with the school bully, Shelly Marsh.

***NOTE: Possible TW for Shelly's destructive words towards Henrietta***

POV - Karen

“Hand it over, Turd.”  Karen McCormick looked up from her phone, a shitty repurposed thing that her brother had surprised her with last week — he was the only family member not drunk or high enough to forget that it was her birthday. She stared up at the dirty-blonde bitch towering over her. She really wasn’t in the mood to get into a fight today.

Local bully, Shelly Marsh.  As a senior who was old enough to be in college already, Shelly was bitter. It’s true her schoolyard bullying has really picked up this year, but especially, it seemed, when it came to Karen McCormick. Karen didn’t know why Shelly picked on her. I mean, Shelly picks on anybody who has something she wants, so maybe that’s why she found her today, but in general, Karen seemed to feel like she had a target on her back. Ever since they were in middle school together (the year that Shelly had to repeat 8th grade, and Karen had jumped ahead to sixth grade) Shelly had singled out the shy sister of her brother’s poor friend and had taken a liking to stealing her free lunch, taking her notebooks, or vandalizing her homework. Karen couldn’t afford a lock for her locker, so she often opened it to a nasty note hanging in front of her, and sounds of snickering to her left. Shelly was a large part of the reason Karen decided mid-year to join back with her 5th grade class, and stay a whole building’s length away from Shelly — until now.

Even without the rest of her posse -- a ragtag team of mean girls who were feared throughout the town -- Shelly was mean. And what made her more mean was the realization that while her two friends got to move on, she was forced to stay in South Park and finish her senior year. Usually, she was flanked by two equally bitchy girls who’s involvement in Shelly’s relentless targeting ran somewhere between boredom and a sick sort of entertainment.

Karen had seen some of the run-ins between local South Park kids and Shelly’s gang; at the movies, on the street, at Stark’s pond… Karen has always been good at hiding, and was never even noticed by any of them until first day Freshman year when Shelly waved, smiled, and then spit at her walking through the front doors of the school. Happy first day. And Karen had been so excited too, then with the flip of a switch she was feeling beat down, stupid, and ugly when Shelly literally spewed hatred at her— just for existing! Karen spent the beginning of her first class crying in the bathroom before she dusted herself off, wiped her face, put on a smile, and apologized to the teacher for ‘getting lost on her way to class’.

And now here Shelly was, standing in front of her again, exactly a week since her first greeting, demanding the first good thing that has existed in Karen’s life in months — like hell; she wasn’t gonna just hand it over like it meant nothing!

“No.”  Karen stood her ground.  Well, as best as one can ‘stand their ground’ while still not moving from her sitting position against the tree.
“No?” Shelly scoffed incredulously.

“No.” Karen repeated. Although her voice sounded weaker, she hoped the expression on her face remained unmoved.

Shelly’s face melted into a scowl as she folded her arms and leaned down to get in Karen’s face.

“Are you sure, turd?” Shelly’s eyes bore into Karen’s soul, and she tried not to look away as she swallowed the fear rising up in her throat. Rather than potentially risk her voice betraying her, Karen just nodded slowly.

“Hm. I see.” Shelly stood up before squatting down to Karen’s level. “And what kind of phone is that, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“I’m not sure,” Karen answered honestly.

“Mhm. Is that because you’re dirt poor family got it out of some rich loser’s garbage?” Shelly smiled dangerously, “Or maybe your alcoholic dad had to beg Best Buy for one of the rejects.” Karen’s gaze narrowed but she kept her cool, no sense fighting Shelly Marsh if she didn’t have to.

“Or maybe,” Shelly smirked with evil invention, “your delinquent brother stole it.”

“Don’t talk about my brother!” Karen was standing now, towering over Shelly, fists shaking at her sides.

“Oooooh,” Shelly hooted as she stood to full height, now towering over Karen. “It seems we have a sore spot! Remind me to thank Kenny for my new phone when I pry it out of your cold dead hands—,” Shelly threatened maniacally.

At the mention of her brother’s name, Karen clenched her fists to look threatening, though she was sure it just looked more like a dumb kid’s tantrum.

Shelly’s eyes flickered to Karen’s fists them back to her face, feigning surprise as she advanced, eyes mean and voice menacing, “Are you gonna hit me, turd? That’s not such a good idea—”

“And I don’t think that’s such a good idea, you dumb bitch,” came a voice from behind the tree trunk. As the owner of the voice rounded the corner, Karen laid eyes on her savior: died black hair spiked up in a cool bun, mesh T-shirt over a skimpy black crop top, black lipstick, and tight black jeans with studded boots. This girl looked about ready to kick Shelly’s ass, and Karen could not be more grateful, if not a little frightened of her new protector.

“Get out of here Henrietta, why don’t you go sleep with half the track team again.” Henrietta’s gaze remained cool and unfazed. She tilted her head and rested one manicured, gloved hand against her plump hip.

“Projecting again, Shelly, you slut?!”

“Oh, go sl*t your wr*sts, you emo bitch.”

“Who are you calling emo, bitch?” A soothing male voice drifted over from where he smoothly pushed off from the tree he was leaning against and slinked over to the group. His cigarette dangled lightly from his lips as he cocked his eyebrow and rounded on Shelly with arms crossed.

It was clear she was outnumbered, but Shelly was never one to shy away from fighting boys. Karen still remembered the time Clyde Donovan had accidentally spilled something on Shelly at a
party last summer. She wailed on him endlessly while he covered himself and cried like a baby until Craig came to save him.

“Well?” The black-clad boy noncommittally demanded, “we’re waiting for apologies, skank”

“I don’t have to apologize to you,” Shelly spat.

“Then get the fuck out of here, and leave the girl alone, she’s with us.”

What?

Shelly scoffed sarcastically, “You mean you’re friends with this dweeb? You’re lying.”

“No he’s not,” Henrietta drawled, “She’s coming to my house after school. Come with if you want bitch, we’ll make it a threesome” Henrietta made an obscene gesture at Shelly that seemed to gross her out. Karen tried not to think or say anything until this whole mind-numbing interaction was over. She hadn’t realized how tightly she’d been clutching her phone to her chest until her knuckles started to hurt.

The boy sighed apathetically, “Get out of here Shelly, I’m not above defending my woman.” The boy slung an arm around Henrietta and they made out with lewd enthusiasm before he pulled away with lipstick smeared all over his face. He took a long drag from his cigarette, blowing smoke directly in Shelly’s face.

She winced at the smell and recoiled back, “Whatever, you guys are fucking gross. I’ll just take what’s mine and be on my way,” Shelly made a lunge for Karen’s phone, luckily Karen was quicker. “Hey! Oh, bad move, turd—”

“Hey, what’s going on over here, Shelly delivering another riveting performance as the pathetic, drop-out, low-life? Brava. I’m transported.” A third teen had entered the scene, this one with a red patch of hair messily splatted in the middle of his bangs.

He emerged rolling his eyes and clapping sarcastically as he strolled over to the scene.

What a weird comeback, and also where did he come from? Karen suspected there was a whole group of them that had all been listening the whole time, getting involved only when their friends needed backup.

Shelly clenched her teeth together “I didn’t drop out.”

“I’m sorry my mistake, I tend to lump all the low-lifes I know together.” This new boy chuckled meanly, “you’re a conformist freak, just like everyone else in this sad town, so I assume you’re life will go no where and you’ll be nothing after graduating your 5th or 6th year of High School, where you'll then drag your chewed up, spit out, washed up ass to your fancy new job pumping gas for all the other has-beens and wannabes who -- even you have to admit -- actually do have better lives than you do, because they were at least able to get out momentarily for college. Unlike you, per the obvious direction your life seems to be heading right now. That’s all.” He took a disinterested drag off of the other boy’s cigarette and chucked the butt at Shelly, who screamed and brushed it off of her now slightly burned shirt.

“YOU TURD!” Shelly stepped towards this new boy who, remaining unfazed, merely cocked his head and stood unmoving. Henrietta and her boyfriend, however, stepped forward menacingly, daring Shelly to take a swing at their friend.

Shelly looked between all of them, then back to Karen. She narrowed her eyes and shook with
rage, “Fine!” She screamed, “Enjoy hanging around with dweebs, I don’t need her shitty stolen phone anyway!” And stalked away to the front doors of the school.

“Bye Shelly!” The three goth kids chimed in unenthusiastic unison before turning back to Karen.

“You ok kid?” Henrietta asked quietly, her tone more empathetic than moments ago.

“Yeah… I’m fine… for now. Thanks.” Karen smiled up at her saviors.

“I’m Henrietta, this is Michael,” Henrietta gestured to the tall, curly haired boy who was now lighting a new cigarette, he gave Karen a nod in greeting. “And this is Pete,” Pete was now on his phone and walking away from them, but he did give a small ‘hey’ without looking Karen in the eyes.”

“Hey.” She waved shyly.

“This is Firkle, weird name I know, but he’s a nice guy. His real name is Georgie, but we reserve that for when we want to piss him off,” Henrietta winked at Karen. She started waving someone over as she spoke, “Hey, what grade are you in? You guys seem to be about the same age.” A third boy rounded the corner from the side of the building they must have been smoking behind… before they heard Karen was in trouble.

Firkle was small, with black hair covering one of his big eyes. They all wore heavy amounts of eyeliner — even the guys — and Firkle’s light gray version seemed to accent his dark-almost-black irises even more. They matched his clothes. And everyone else’s for that matter. He walked up with hands in his pockets and greeted “Hey.”

“Hey.” Karen responded.

“Sit with us at lunch.” Henrietta demanded as she took out a compact to reapply her black lipstick, “and come over to my house after school. We can hang out. Throw it in that bitch Shelly’s face,” she stated into her mirror.

“Oh-Ok… what… what would we do?” Karen asked nervously. She had no idea who these people were. Images of hardcore drug parties, or scary instances of peer pressure clouded her worried brain — but that could just be because that was an aspect of life she was already familiar with.

Henrietta picked up on her tentativeness and laughed “Nothing bad! Anything you want, I promise I don’t bite.”

“No promises,” Michael smirked mischievously as he bent down to bite Henrietta’s neck. Karen’s eyes widened at the strange PDA.

“Lipstick!” Henrietta chided as she shoved him off of her, wiping her neck from the small black residue transferred from his still-smudged lips. Karen was a little grossed out, but maybe this was just how older kids were. As much as he tried to hide it from her and ‘lead by example’, she knew her brother and his friends were kinda pervy too.

“But seriously, come over. What’s your name, kid?”

“Karen.” She’d always hated her first name, though not as much as her last.

“Karen,” Henrietta parroted, taking a dainty drag on her slender cigarette holder. Karen was thankful Henrietta had the curtesy to blow the smoke away from her direction. “You’re one of us
now, Karen, like it or not. We’ve got your back.” She smiled and clapped Karen’s back roughly, it reminded her of how macho/powerful men congratulate their constituents. Henrietta was strange.

The bell rang, and Karen was surprised to see the goth kids ‘conforming’ to the school’s rules and gathering their things right away.

“Let’s roll!” Michael announced with a circular hand gesture. He turned around with a bow to his new friend, Karen, and whipped back around with a flourish of his long coat. He tossed his long, dangly crucifix earring over his shoulder and began walking to the school. Karen noticed he walked with an elaborate black and silver cane, though she wasn’t sure he needed it. Pete shot Karen a nod as he flung his backpack over his shoulder and flipped his hair with more enthusiasm than some of the preppy girls Karen had seen at North Park parties. Firkle just speed walked ahead of all of them and shoved his way into the building, head down and hands never leaving his pockets.

“Think about it at least, ok?” Henrietta brushed Karen’s cheek affectionately then turned and walked through the doors, still smoking and not caring who asked her to stop. Karen stared after her new friends incredulously, simultaneously perplexed and inspired by them.

“Karen!” At the sound of that voice, she turned around with the biggest smile on her face. She sighed in relief as she walked towards the orange clad traffic cone that was her older brother, Kenny. He had Stan Marsh with him. She waved at them, got no response from a stern Kenny, and an apologetic wave from Stan. “Are you ok? Shelly just came inside and yelled at me, for real! She was like, ‘your sister is a turd!’ And like shoved me into the lockers!” Karen laughed at her brother’s spot-on Shelly impersonation — right down to the lisp — but she couldn’t mask her disappointment when she heard that Shelly had actually pushed him. No matter how light heartedly he’d chuckled afterwards, Karen didn’t like to hear about anybody pushing her brother, not Kenny.

“I’m ok, Ken, really.” She looked at him in what she hoped was a convincing manner, though by the look on Kenny’s face she knew she wasn’t succeeding.

“What happened?” He demanded as he folded his skinny, bracelet clad arms over his chest.

Karen sighed. She wasn’t going to get out of this interrogation until she told the truth. “Shelly came over — I guess I remember her from when she picked on me for half a year in middle school—” Kenny scoffed and rolled his eyes dramatically, he remembers those years when he wanted to kick some sense into Shelly for making Karen doubt herself, “and she wanted my cell phone, because I guess I’ve never had nice things before and it felt like an easy target… Then she insinuated that you stole it for me, which I know you didn’t! And I… I just stood up to her a little, I don’t know, and now she probably hates me even more!” Karen was starting to cry — a mixture of fear that Shelly might want revenge, frustration at the untrue gossip regarding her beloved brother, the stress of it all and the guilt of being targeted at all in the first place. But mostly she cried over the realization that this is the first nice thing she’s ever been able to bring to school. The melancholy memories of that special birthday flashed in her head and only made her cry harder.

“She tried to take it from me and I didn’t let her, and I probably made it worse for myself, but I couldn’t let her take it!” Karen was full-on stress crying now and she didn’t relax until she saw orange obscure her blurry vision and felt warm arms around her.

“And I couldn’t do it, even if it would have made everything better, because I felt bad! Because you had given it to me, and I know you used everything you had to get it for me, and I just couldn’t
let her have it! Shit, shit I think I made it worse! She’ll kill me!” Kenny shushed her as he tried to soothe her panic. Karen took a deep breath, just like Kenny had taught her to do when their parents fought with each other at home.

“Shit,” Karen looked up to see Stan Marsh looking helplessly apologetic as he kicked absently at the grass “I’m sorry Karen, my sister is a cunt.”

“Hey!” Kenny chided, “don’t say ‘cunt’ in front of my sister.” Karen rolled her eyes and Stan smiled at her attitude. “Shelly kind of is a cunt though…” Kenny mused with a snort as he ruffled Karen’s hair briefly, before she pushed him away and attempted to smooth it back down.

“Don’t fuck up my hair at school.” She joked. That was the double standard: Karen was grown up enough to hang with Kenny, but none of his friends were allowed to be vulgar in front of her, no matter how much she herself had adapted to swearing like a sailor. Sometimes she did it just to piss him off, but mostly it only made him laugh harder, anyway.

“Anyway, how’d you send Shelly away? She was practically in tears when she was screaming at me.” Kenny wondered.

“Henrietta saved me, actually. Her and her friends.” Stan and Kenny reacted exactly how Karen expected them to, with raised eyebrows and dropped jaws.

“Well… remind me to buy the goths a shitty carton of cigarettes then,” Kenny laughed incredulously.

The second bell rang and they were all now late to first period, something neither of the three of them really cared about anyway, but they all shuffled towards the doors nonetheless.

“Come on, let’s get you to class, we’ll deal with Shelly later,” Kenny promised as he clapped a hand around his sister’s shoulder. Stan looked less than convinced at the idea of confronting his bully sister, who though no longer taller or stronger than him, was very much still meaner and more violent than him.

Once inside, Karen sat next to her best friend Ruby, who also had been late to first period as she was horrible at waking up in the mornings.

“Hey! Just getting in?” Karen joked with her. Ruby — or Tricia, as all the teachers called her, since that was her real first name — responded with a half-hearted death glare and a sparkly black, manicured middle finger. Karen smirked and kicked Ruby’s shoe under the desk, which sparked a slow smile to crack through the tough Ruby facade.

“What did I miss?” She whispered with a giggle, having little regard for the teacher at the front of the room.

“I’ll tell you at lunch, but we might be moving tables.” Ruby raised her eyebrow in interest.

“Do tell! Who would we be sitting with besides our badass loner selves?” Ruby’s eyes sparkled with anticipation, no doubt picturing scenarios which included the prospect of sitting with some new boy, or maybe a cool new bunch of art kids. Karen smiled, knowing Ruby was ill-prepared for her shocking response.

“The goths.”
A Rollercoaster of a Birthday

Chapter Summary

Karen's 14th birthday goes from heartbreak, to cherished memory.

Chapter Notes

Before we move on to the rest of the school days' events, I thought it would be fun to see a flashback of Kenny actually giving the phone to Karen! It's incredibly sweet and it melts my heart every time I read it.

Enjoy! <3

POV - Karen's Flashback

As Karen and Ruby successfully ignored their teacher and prevented getting caught talking in class, Karen recounted the events of that morning with the usual McCormick drama & flair.

"Wait, why didn't you just give it to her? I'm sure Stan could have gotten it back for you once she'd gotten bored of it." Karen shot Ruby a doubtful glance, and Ruby had to cover her mouth to muffle the snort that came out. "You're right, at the very least Kenny or Craig would have done it for you" she laughed quietly.

Really, Karen just didn't want to give a bully like Shelly the satisfaction. She had lots of experience dealing with her older brother bullying her at home, and she knew the more they got what they wanted, the worse it got down the line. But it was also more than that. In the moment, she felt like if she let this phone go, she would be letting go of one of the only good pieces of her life she had. She knew it would have been easier then if she had just given Shelly what she wanted, but it was her phone and most importantly Kenny had given it to her. She smiled to herself as the droning voice of her teacher was overrun by daydreaming memories; she remembered that night vividly.

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It was last April, and she had come home from school, not really expecting much of anything, but at least hoping her parents would be lucid enough to remember to wish her a happy birthday. They weren't.

"Hey baby!" Her mom had slurred from the couch, where both her parents were passed out in the middle of the day. Karen motioned to her sleeping father,
"Did Dad go to work today?"

"What? No, he said he took a sick day I think." Carol smiled at her daughter dopily, "You off to school?"

Karen didn’t wait around any longer to delay getting her heart broken.

Around dinner time, she went downstairs to find her parents now completely gone from the house altogether, with no food or money for food left for her. She had walked back upstairs despite her growling stomach and attempted to fall asleep before the tears could come.

Around 8pm, she was woken by her drunk brother, Kevin, screaming and throwing things downstairs over the lack of food in this ‘damn house’, before he slammed the front door and left her alone again to her sobering miseries.

It wasn’t until 11pm, when Kenny came home — still no sign of Carol, Stewart, or Kevin — that she didn’t feel so alone anymore.

She was woken from yet another stress-nap by the smell of leftover food from the City Wok Kenny worked at. Whenever he could swing it, he always managed to bring leftovers for her. Sometimes he would share with their Mom, but only if their Dad wasn’t around to hog it all too.

"Surprise!" He’d cheered as he shoved crispy beef under her nose like smelling salts. Karen sat up in partial disbelief — her birthday was already almost over! She sat up in bed as Kenny prepared their midnight feast on her nightstand: crispy beef, steamed vegetables, and a slew of appetizers like egg rolls, dumplings, and rangoon. Usually employees were only allowed to take the extra food that was close to expiration, but Mr. Kim has a special fondness for Kenny because of his work ethic, so he lets him take bigger portions; and whenever Kenny said the food was for Karen, Mr. Kim made sure to throw in some fresh appetizers free of charge. She too had become a favorite of the City Wok owner. He’d grown fond of her thanks to her polite manners and willingness to help close on the nights when she did her homework at the restaurant.

"I don’t have a cake for you this year, BUT I told Mr. Kim that it was your birthday today and he threw in… like a million fortune cookies!" Kenny cheered as he dumped a bag full of crunchy sweet fortune cookies onto her bed, "and he said he wishes you a happy birthday, and he hopes your studies are going well," Kenny laughed.

Karen looked around at everything and was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that it was all for her, on her birthday. "No one else remembered..." She muttered in appreciation. Kenny frowned and made a noise of disapproval. "Thank you" she beamed at him.

"Anytime!" He ruffled her hair. Kenny had always felt like the father she wished she had, rather than just a big brother. Her own father -- when fucked up -- would let her get hit by a car to save himself. In fact she remembers one time when he did just that. If Kenny hadn’t been there to yank her away in the nick of time, she wouldn’t be here right now.

Kenny fidgeted with something behind his back. "I did, however get you a really cool present, hence the lack of cake," Kenny grinned as he tried to hide his excitement, "close your eyes."
Karen closed her eyes and waited for what felt like forever. Suddenly, a ringing noise pierced the air. "Your phone is ringing." She told him.

"Nope!" She could hear the smile in his voice. "Open your eyes!"

She cracked open an eye to see Kenny’s phone held up to his ear, and another one in his hand. The one that was ringing. "Phone call for Karen McCormick!" He called jokingly around the room, "Pick it up, you’ll miss it!" She looked at the screen.

The picture ID had a dumb picture of Kenny’s smiling face flipping her the bird, and the caller ID said ‘Mysterion’ with a bunch of stupid and random emojis. Her heart pounded in excitement as she slid her finger over to accept the call, "hello?"

"Hey, what’s shaking, babygirl?! Heard you got a new phone!"

Karen squealed with excitement and threw her arms around her brother’s neck, thanking him profusely. She stared down at the phone in bewilderment "This is really mine?"

"All yours! I put you on my cell phone plan so it’s only a few more bucks a month for me, no big deal, and you won’t have to worry about Stuart forgetting to pay for it or something like that."

Karen screamed and cried like a little kid on Christmas, she could not be more grateful. "That’s amazing! Thank you so much Kenny! I know this must have set you back some, and I appreciate it so much, really!"

He shrugged humbly, "Well we may be eating City Wok exclusively for a few months, but to me it’s worth it." He beamed at her.

"Thank you, again. A million ‘thank you’s’ for this, really," she smiled down at the first smart phone and first cell phone she’s ever owned. In that moment, she felt spoiled for what was probably the first time in her life.

"Well I don’t know about you, but I’m hungry! Let’s eat!" Kenny declared as he pulled two forks from the plastic City Wok bag. They watched some show Kenny was always torrenting for free on his phone, and joked and laughed together while they ate. Then he showed her how to customize her new phone and logged her into Kyle’s Netflix account, assuring her that she had permission, and it was Kyle’s birthday gift to her. She texted him the next day to thank him and he had no idea what she was talking about, but was totally cool with it. He wished her a happy birthday, and told her to keep it and watch whatever she wanted anytime. That warmed her heart.

The next morning her mom walked up to her in tears.

"My baby! Karen, I’m so sorry I forgot your birthday!" Karen suspected Kenny gave his parents a good talking to when they came home around 3am that day. She could never stay mad at her mom for too long, so she wiped her mother’s tear stained cheeks and assured her that it was ok, even though it absolutely wasn’t. "I know it’s a little late but I have something for you anyway," Carol turned around with a plate of syrup-drenched microwave pancakes with a lit birthday candle in the middle and sprinkles on top. "It’s not a cake but I figured since it’s breakfast time anyway this is just as good…"

"It is Mom, thanks." Karen blew out the candle and smiled at her mom.

She handed the plate over to her daughter and turned around to grab something bundled up in an
old scarf. "I didn’t have time to wrap it, but I wanted to give you something."

Karen put her plate on the table and unwrapped her mother’s gift. It was a pair of emerald-colored earrings, and they looked real! "Are these…?"

“They’re real, yes, the only asset from my grandmother’s will your father hasn’t pawned away yet," Karen frowned at that, "but yes, they’re real emeralds, and I just thought you would look gorgeous in them, they would look much more dainty on your sweet face than they would on me…” Carol trailed off. She herself must have been pretty at one time, and her smile — though rare — was evidence of that. But years of drugs and alcohol had withered her skin, and twisted her expression into one of pain and worry. She absently ran a cigarette-stained hand across her pock-marked cheek and smiled lovingly at her daughter.

"Thank you, mom" Karen was breathless not only at the beauty of the jewelry, but also at the meaning behind the gesture.

"You’re welcome, baby" Carol cupped her daughter’s cheek lovingly.

"I’ve got to get to school," Karen kissed her mother on the cheek and gathered her backpack for the day, "Where’s Dad?"

"At work." Carol smiled.

"Best Birthday present he could have gotten me" Karen muttered to herself as she left to walk to school.

That afternoon after getting home from school, Karen heard her brother, Kevin, stumble out of his room, a 50/50 toss up whether he was drunk or hungover. He walked down the hallway rubbing his face and went straight to the kitchen for a glass of water. Hungover, thank goodness.

Karen couldn't help but scowl at her brother, clearly just woken up at 3:30 on a Tuesday, dirty pajamas still on, still smelling of puke and strong alcohol. If he never did anything else good for her, at least he steered her away from the desire to ever drink herself into obliteration.

He noticed she was staring and finished his glass of water hastily. "Oh, Happy Birthday," he told her flatly.

Karen smiled at him before he turned around and walked back to his room without another word.

Later that night when her father got home, he called "Babygirl! Get in here!" and picked her up to swing her around like he used to do when she was younger, but not much smaller. He gave her a few quick kisses on the top of her head and looked her in the eyes as he smoothed down her flyaways. "Babygirl, I'm sorry. I completely forgot your birthday yesterday, and it's all my fault, but I'll try to do better and I still love you very much."

"I love you too," Karen muttered as her dad kissed her forehead lovingly. If there was one thing you could say about Stewart McCormick it's that, for all his faults, he was honestly a good man who always owned up to his faults. Whether he changed the behavior was another issue, but he
always owned up and he always whole heartedly believed in the promises he made -- as evidenced by multiple good streaks in his life, in between periods of falling down the usual rabbit holes. And Karen admired him for his heart. His demons were one thing, but his intentions were always true.

"I got KFC for dinner!" He announced happily as he kissed his wife and went to go wake up their son. KFC must have cost him a whole week's worth or bar tabs, and it really showed how much Karen truly means to him. It slightly worried her that he would spend money at the bar anyway, and tonight's dinner would end up being more like the electric bill, but she wouldn't insult him by asking him that.

Kenny had come home minutes later and she'd expressed this worry to him. "Don't worry Kare bear, I always have extra money saved for emergencies like that. Enjoy your birthday dinner!" She didn't much appreciate being brushed off like that, and she didn't like the idea of her 16 year old brother always holding the family together, but he was. And for now she was just grateful that someone was.

Her loud family of 5 were sitting down to a real family dinner together for the first time in months, and everybody was in a good mood. Karen decided to count that as a win.

Despite the rollercoasters, this ended up being the best 2 days of Birthday she had ever had.
Clyde's Second Breakfast

Chapter Summary

Tweek's version of the morning's events. We find out he has a not-so-secret not-so-obvious crush on none other than Craig Tucker.

POV - Tweek

“Hand it over, turd!” Tweek looked to his right to where Shelly Marsh was bothering some poor kid outside the entrance of the school. What a sad, loser bitch Shelly was. He decided it was best to keep walking, so he did exactly that.

Getting to school early was always Tweek’s thing. He wished it would be Craig’s thing too, but he was a Tucker, and Tuckers were stubborn sleepers.

Craig Tucker: sort-of-boyfriend/sort-of-best-friend to Tweek Tweak. They started out as friends. Then they became best friends. They were so close in fact, that rumors started spreading about them, even as children. They decided to give in — somewhat — and act like a couple… you know, as a joke.

At least that’s what it was at first. They would cuddle each other, and hold hands, and kiss each other on the cheek — and Craig would purr disgusting things in Tweek’s ear just to freak him out and then laugh about his reaction. Tweek would never tell Craig the butterflies it gave him to hear him talk like that. Or that Tweek’s favorite music was Craig’s laugh. It was rare, but it was the most beautiful, innocent, obnoxiously loud and nasally laugh Tweek had ever heard. Tweek could hear it forever. He wanted to hear it forever… but that’s stupid because they’re not even dating. They’re not even sure if they both like men since neither of them has been with anybody else to even test hypotheses. It’s complicated.

Taking a few rather large gulps of coffee from his thermos, Tweek tried to push these thoughts of Craig out of his mind. ‘Try to think about something else’, he told himself.

Tweek ran his thumb along the edge of the large sticker adorning his precious thermos.

…Craig had given him this thermos. It was a gift, from last Christmas. It was a plain, shiny, chrome colored thing, but Craig had given it to him because it was the only travel thermos he found that could miraculously could hold 24 oz of liquid heartbeat vs the usual 16 oz. Tweek was happy with it just the way it was, but when Craig said ‘turn it over’ he was greeted with a giant sticker of a rainbow pair of lips — which Craig had ‘customized’ in Sharpie with two lip rings on each side and a barbell right through the tongue — plus a large, black sticker with neon rainbow lettering that read ‘Fuck Off ‘Till I’ve Had My Coffee’. All of a sudden this was the most important thermos Tweek had ever owned. It wasn’t even because of the mind blowing 3 cups of coffee it allowed him to lug to school.

Even though he would never let his wild and rebellious side leave the safety of his bedroom décor, Tweek had a flair for (hypothetical) teen angst. His vandalized band posters and mean-looking
‘Go Away’ sign were evidence of that, but they were perfectly happy staying hidden in his room where they didn’t draw the attention of strangers, thank you very much. The most rebellious thing about Tweek’s physical appearance — besides his untamable hair — was the black leather wrist strap he wore under the sleeves of his button downs so he could choose to hide it if need be. Tweek was very particular about how he presented himself to the world, and he preferred to give the illusion that he was as ‘normal’ as possible. Rather than who he really was.

This sticker clad thermos from Craig represented who Tweek really was. No, it represented that Craig saw who Tweek really was— Ah! Stop it!

Pushing Craig out of his mind, for what felt like the millionth time, Tweek pushed open the doors to the cafeteria and found his usual seat with Token and (eventually) Clyde.

Even if nobody else was hungry, it was a give-in that Clyde would be having second breakfast from the cafeteria, whether he ate breakfast at home already or not. You could bet money on it, Tweek thought, but he probably never would.

“Rough morning?” Token laughed at Tweek as he sat down next to him.

“What?” Tweek smoothed down his hair. It was part of a nervous tick that he’d been working on his whole life.

Tweek used to pull his hair all the time, or scratch his neck until it was raw and sometimes bleeding if no one stopped him… or if it was finals week. In an effort to stop his hands from being destructive, Craig suggested he tried to replace one action with another rather than climb the impossible mountain that was keeping Tweek Tweak still. ‘I read it in a book’ he’d told him when explaining the process of identifying behaviors in order to change them. It sounded nice in theory, but it definitely didn’t work at first.

Craig used to just grab Tweek’s wrists to stop the movement, but that only made him mad. Or cry. Or spiral into a panic attack. So one day, when Tweek reached for his hair, Craig ran his fingers through it so there was no room to pull on it. The action made Tweek’s hands stop, but the feeling made his heart stop.

From then on, whenever Tweek reached for his hair, Craig would shuffle his fingers through, detangling wild strands and gently massaging his scalp wherever Tweek was aiming for. Eventually Tweek trained himself to become aware of the subconscious behavior, and now whenever he noticed his hand lifting towards his head, he just ran it through his hair instead.

Token chuckled, bringing Tweek back to reality and out of his thoughts of Craig. Again.

“Your shirt isn’t buttoned the right way.”

“Oh.”

Token reached over and re-buttoned the top section by his neck, where it was bunched up and wonky. As Token’s fingertips accidentally brushed against Tweek’s skin it didn’t give him butterflies the way it did when Craig did this. A few times in elementary school, Tweek even showed up with his collar mis-buttoned on purpose just so he could feel Craigs fingertips brush against the soft skin of his neck— GAH! He was thinking about Craig AGAIN!! Why couldn’t he get him out of his head?? STUPID, Tweek, stupid!

“Gah! hm” Tweek twitched to his side and let out an involuntary noise. Something he rarely did
anymore, but still couldn’t suppress when his brain started to go haywire. Token looked at him worriedly, like he was skeptical of Tweek’s grip on reality. He didn’t blame him.

“Have you been taking your meds?”

“God! Yes, Mom.” Tweek scoffed as he rolled his eyes.

Token frowned, “I hate it when you guys call me that.”

“Sorry Mom, jeez…” Tweek smirked and nudged Token with his shoulder.

“And then!… she had, like, totally huge boobs? But when he took her bra off, they were padded! They were fake!”

“Lots of girls wear padded bras, Clyde, join the rest of the knowing society, would you?” Tweek stilled and remained frozen at the sound of the approaching monotone voice with Clyde.

“But like, don’t you think that’s weird?! I mean her boobs are like, huge! When she’s in class and stuff sometimes I look over and—”

“Clyde, really? I can’t listen to you right now. And I don’t think you should be believing gossip that one of your dumb jocks friends spreads about an ex-girlfriend anyway, he’s probably exaggerating to make her look worse.”

“Hm, maybe…” Clyde looked off into the distance like he was lost in some serious, philosophical thought… about boobs.

They were both sitting at the table now, next to Token and across from Tweek. Normally Tweek didn’t blush around Craig anymore, but whenever he was unprepared for an interaction, Tweek couldn’t help but heat up a little bit.

“You’re up early, what’s the occasion?” Token gestured to Craig with his half eaten apple.

Clyde stood up from his place at the head of the table, too excited by an impending joke to contain himself.

“‘YOUR MOM’ kicked him out of bed this morning, that’s what!” Clyde interrupted with a full mouth, spewing food and jokes from 2002 all over the table. He waited with palms raised and smile agape for a high five that was never coming.

Craig flipped him off, deadpan as he answered, “Ruby was still sleeping and I would have been late if I waited for her so it was either stick around for her fight with Mom or leave for school early, so… here I am.” Craig shrugged and reached for one of Clyde’s hashbrowns.

“He spit all over that.” Tweek muttered disgustedly.

“Chew with your mouth closed, Clyde.” Token chided.

“Thanks, Mom.” Clyde sassed, chewed food on display as he leaned on his elbow and rolled his eyes with all the sass of Cher Horowitz, Clyde’s favorite character from his favorite movie: ‘Clueless’. You could usually get him to quote it at least once a week if you set it up right*

“Stop calling me, Mom!” Token muttered under his breath, knowing that actually expressing dissatisfaction would only result in unrelenting amounts of teasing from all three of them for the rest of the week. It was just easier to accept his fate as the Mom of the group. His usual armory of
snacks and band-aids definitely didn’t help him shake the label.

“Hey Tweek.” Craig called coolly from across the table.

*Thump thump. “Hey.” Thump thump.*

“Did you guys hear what happened at North Park’s football game on Friday? There was this cheerleader, right? And she was totally hot! and…”

The sounds of Clyde gossiping were drowned out in Tweek’s head by his own loud thoughts. He could feel his heartbeat in his chest, but he tried not to let it worry him. It could just be the coffee, after all. *(Should that worry him more?)*

“…and she puked like all over the field! It was so gross!”

“Great story, Clyde.” Craig drawled unenthusiastically.

“I know!” Clyde beamed, clearly not picking up on Craig’s tone of voice. Practically everyone rolled their eyes.

“But anyway, she was so hot! I bet if I had asked her for her number she totally would have given it to me.”

“Gross, Clyde! She was wasted, have some dignity,” Craig scolded. “besides, realistically, if you had asked her she probably would have said ‘no’, skipped over you and went straight for Stan Marsh instead.”

“Ugh! As if!” There it was*. Perfect impression.

“Clyde, it’s remarks like that that make me think you’re gayer than Tweek.”

“Hey!” Clyde and Tweek reprimanded simultaneously. Craig’s smile widened as he winked at Tweek. ‘*My body just went numb, I can’t feel my feet.*’ Tweek smiled nonchalantly and tried to hide any outwards evidence of his pounding heart.

“Oh! Did you guys hear?” Token’s voice brought Tweek back to reality and sped time back up to normal speed  “They might not continue the art and music classes next year, they need to see more involvement this year to legitimize keeping them around. Budget cuts and stuff.” Token took another bite of his apple, happy that he had something to contribute to the conversation, besides drunk cheerleaders at football games.

“Noooo! That’s not fair! You guys have to join music with me!” Clyde pleaded with the table.

“I’m already in art.” Tweek protested as he tried to come up with an excuse not to join music.


“Have you ever played anything?” Token asked in shock.

“No.”

“What would you do in music?”

“I like to sing.”
“You sing? I’ve never heard you sing?”

“Well I don’t let you shower with me either, so maybe that’s why.” Craig suppressed a chuckle as he sass Token.

“You don’t have to play anything yet! You can learn! There’s the choir class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the free ensemble band class on Wednesdays and Fridays! There’s also the orchestra or jazz band the same time as those classes, but that’s for people who are, like, actually good, come join me pleeeeease?! We could be in the same group for our final! It’s so cool! We just dick around for an hour jamming whatever songs we feel like, and we only have to perform like twice a semester — do it with me! Pleeeeease?”

“Clyde, I said I would, you don’t have to keep convincing me.”

“YAY!” Clyde wrapped his arms around his friend’s neck and rocked him like a baby as he cheered, ignoring his protests. “This will be so FUN! We’ll go to the counselor at lunch and switch you from study hall, this is so cool! What about you guys? Token? Support the arts man, they may not be here much longer…”?

“I’ll think about it.” Token reasoned with Clyde.

That seemed to pacify him because he clapped like a happy video game character and went back to focusing on second-breakfast. Only Tweek caught Token’s defeated sigh at the mention of electives he knew he didn’t have the time to take.

“Cool beans!”

“Don’t say ‘cool beans’” Tweek and Craig muttered at the same time. “JINX YOU OWE ME A SODA!” Tweek screamed before Craig could. Craig looked defeated with his mouth open, just about to say the word ‘soda’. “Gotta be quicker than that, Craig!” Tweek made a smug face at him, which was returned with a shrug and a lopsided smile.

Oof!

Tweek’s hand shot up to his hair but he caught himself. Instead he tucked some flyaways behind his ear and quickly lowered his hand.

The first bell rang, and the group shuffled their way to the lockers.

Once they got there, Clyde brought up the topic that had clearly been plaguing his thoughts for the whole two minutes it took to walk to their destination.

“I’m smart, right guys?” He looked at their blank faces in expectation.

“You,” Token grabbed Clyde’s face, “are the pretty one of the group.”

“Aw,” Clyde smiled, not hearing the diss in the compliment, “No, that’s you, Token!”

“Um no, I’m the smart one.” Token released his hands from Clyde’s face and walked away towards his own locker.
“Which one am I?” Tweek chirped up.

“Over-caffinated.” Craig quipped slyly over his shoulder. Tweek tried not to smile as he pretended to look offended. Craig burst out laughing, “Or bad at acting!”

“Ohh, definitely that one!” Clyde piped up.

Craig bit his lip to stifle his smile.  *Omg Staaaahp.*

“Huh-fag!” Eric Cartman coughed as he passed by the blushing Tweek and now fuming Craig. If Kyle Broflovski hadn’t violently shoved the fat ass into the lockers for ‘being a dick’ Tweek was sure Craig was about to do way worse.

“Come on, let’s go.” Tweek gave Cartman a death glare as he rounded up his gang and walked to class. Token ‘tsk’-ed, Clyde mumbled and name-called, and Craig gave a very pointed stare and two predictable middle fingers towards the piece-of-shit: Eric Cartman.

As they walked to class, Tweek felt Craig slip his fingers around his and give him a squeeze. “Let ‘em talk,” Craig shrugged and smiled at Tweek as they walked the halls, them against the world.

Tweek still wasn’t sure exactly ‘what’ they were yet, but for now he liked it. The danger would come later down the line, when he knew he would want more. But for now, he smiled back at Craig, gave his shoulder a playful nudge, suppressed a twitch, and ran a nervous hand through his hair.
The Raven and the Redhead

Chapter Summary

Sorry for the tone, Kyle is not feeling very optimistic right now. I don't blame him. This is the last POV I needed for this morning's events, I promise we will actually move through time after this lol Ft. a Bunny cameo!

POV - Kyle

“Kyyyyyle” he heard from the other side of his open locker.

“What.” He tried to hide his smile as he answered shortly.

“School suuuuucks. Why won’t you ditch with me?”

“Because school is important.”

“Why would we spend our day here when we could spend all day in my room!?” The raven haired boy proposed with a sing-songy tune.

Kyle frowned dramatically, “So you want to get out of this building, where we would spend all day inside… staring at the front of the room and doing nothing… so that we could go to your house, where we would spend all day inside… staring at the front of the room and doing nothing?”

“Playing video games and watching TV, yes.” Stan clarified with a smile.

The facade cracked. With a twitch of his mouth, Kyle was suddenly laughing, “You’re hopeless, dude.”

Stan smiled bashfully as he chuckled with Kyle. His eyes darted somewhere behind Kyle’s head and he looked worriedly at someone he found there.

“Crap! It’s Mrs. ‘Joykill’” He whispered in a rush as he tried to keep eyes on her while not letting her see him.

“It’s Ms.” Kyle corrected.

“That… makes sense.” Stan chuckled as he watched her. She was a nasty old thing, in her late 60s/early 70s, with short, artificial black hair and tits to the floor. She reminded Kyle of their old teacher Ms. Choksondik.

“Why are you hiding from her?” Kyle half asked, half scolded.

“Because!” Stan stepped closer to Kyle in order to keep his voice down, “Dude, her class is so boring I’ve skipped it pretty much every day this whole week of school.”
“What?” Kyle hissed, they were only 8 days into the school year! “You need to be present in class, dude, its called ‘attendance’”

Stan rolled his eyes, “It’s called being bored out of my mind.”

“You need to pass this class, Stan.”

“But it’s boooooriiiiing…”

“Stan Marsh?!’ Ms. ‘Joykill’ barked from across the hallway where she stood scowling in annoyance, squinting over her beaded glasses and pointing a bony finger in Stan’s direction.

“Hide me!” Stan grabbed Kyle by the shoulders and shoved the tall redhead in front of him.

“Stan we’re practically the same size.”

“I’m crouching down, did she see me?”

“Um…”

Stan peeked his eyes over Kyle’s shoulder, so only raven locks, piercing blue eyes, and a red and blue beanie could be seen. Long fingers sneakily crawling their way up Kyle’s shoulders so he could more easily peer over to the old witch staring directly at him.

“I see you, Stan Marsh! Detention today if you ditch my class one more time!”

“Ugh,” Stan groaned as he buried his face in Kyle’s back.

“Uh, h-he’ll be there Ms. Joyk— I MEAN Joyville!”

“Hm.” Ms. ‘Joykill’ huffed as she turned up her nose and walked down the hallway, victorious.

Stan groaned as he dragged his chin up Kyle’s back to rest lazily against his shoulder. Kyle had to focus to keep his knees steady at the feeling of Stan Marsh’s hot breath against his skin.

“Ugh. Fuck. Me. Dude.” Stan grumbled grumpily, accidentally doing so directly in Kyle’s ear. Kyle swallowed thickly. He pushed intrusive thoughts out of his mind with a chuckle, returning to re-organizing his locker for a distraction.

“You should have gone to class dude!”

“Yeah, whatever. Off the record? I kinda hope she gets hit by a bus.”

“Stan, that’s awful!”

“Ow!” Kyle had playfully bumped Stan in the chest.

Kyle repressed a smile, “Well, you shouldn’t say things like that. You can go to jail just for saying that you know.”

“No way, dude. It’s not like I’d ever actually push her or anything.”

“No one would know,” Kyle flashed a smile, “they’d just know you threatened her one time, in 11th grade, in the hallways at school. Let the record show that Stan Marsh—"
Stan covered Kyle’s mouth with his hand. “Yeah yeah, get out of here with that bullcrap.” They both smiled as Kyle brushed him away.

“Go to class dude.”

“Unless I take U.S. History next year…”

“You have to take government next year.”

“Hey guys, what’s happening?” The blinding smile of Kenny McCormick outshined even the shitty florescent lights of the high school hallway. Someone had woken up on the right side of the bed.

“The old ball-n-chain is making me go to class,” Stan joked, jerking a thumb in Kyle’s direction.

Kenny laughed, “Stan, I’m not on your side on this one, you need to go to class!”

Stan clicked his tongue in disappointment, “Aw, you’re never on my side.”

“Good morning, Kenny?” Kyle asked him knowingly.

Kenny’s eyes lit up and his smile stretched.

“Yeah, just had a good breakfast of the finest school-supplied PB&J, said ‘hi’ to a few people… today’s been good.” Kyle tried not to laugh at how easy Kenny was to read.

“Day’s still not over.” Stan quipped.

Kenny chuckled, “Ouch, cynical much?”

“Do you ever think before you speak?” Kyle hissed at Stan. “I’m seriously asking.”

“No.” Stan answered honestly. Kyle couldn’t fight his slow growing smile. Stan could be adorably dumb sometimes.

“I swear football has knocked all of your brain cells right out of your head.”

Stan smiled sheepishly at his friend.

“How are things with the missus? And I don’t mean Kyle,” Kenny clarified.

“Ok I guess. She’s kinda been a bitch lately because of something stupid I did last weekend that I don’t remember.”

Kyle frowned, Stan had a tendency to drink too much too often, and Kyle didn’t appreciate who it turned him into.

“What did you do?” Kyle asked accusingly.

“…Drive home.” Kenny and Kyle’s groans and scoldings could be heard down the hallway.

“Stan you could have killed someone!”

Stan shrugged defiantly, “Well I didn’t!”

“You could have been arrested!”

“Well I wasn’t!”
Kenny warned, “She’s gonna leave you, dude.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time.”

“I’ll be sure to tell her you feel that way.” Kyle retorted darkly.

“Do it. She’s getting on my nerves.”

“So leave her, dude!” Kyle threw his hands up in frustration.

“Maybe I will.”

“Promise?” Kenny muttered giving Kyle an annoyed glance out of the corner of his eye.

There was a moment of silence when none of the three knew what to say anymore. The current topic was… complicated.

“Don’t actually tell her, please?” Stan quietly begged Kyle.

Feeling himself soften at the roundness of those icy blue eyes, Kyle sighed.

“Thanks dude,” Stan ran his hand down Kyle’s arm. Kenny frowned as he watched it trail off.

Kyle’s arm sparked with electricity. His skin tingled where Stan had touched him. He brushed the spot on his arm with his fingertips absently as he listened to Stan chatter about something or other.

“You’re going this Friday, right?” Stan’s puppy dog eyes gave Sparky a run for his money. He already knew the answer. As much as Kyle hated sports, he would go for Stan.

Stan was his oldest best friend, they grew up together. Stan was there for all of Kyle’s poetry slams, and debate team championships — not to mention the unfortunate but brief period of mathletes competitions, before Kyle decided it was ‘social suicide’. Thanks, Tina Fey.

Stan always supported Kyle, and Kyle would always support Stan. “Of course I’m going!”

Stan cheered excitedly, “My favorite cheerleader!”

Kyle chuckled shyly, catching Kenny’s eyes as he smirked at him. Kyle tried his best to make rolling his eyes look more convincing.

Ever since he had finally admitted his feelings to himself, Kyle had to endure little mini heartbreaks multiple times a day. He would get hopeful, clinging to something the other boy may have implied, only to find himself barely standing up against the heavy punch to the gut he felt whenever he saw him with her. He sometimes read too much into the things Stan would say to him, but the small moments of hope kept his fluttering heart from turning heavy and aching, rotting away in his chest. Was it sad? Yes. But was it necessary? Absolutely. Especially since the reappearance of—

“Hey babe!” That.

Wendy Testaburger. Stan’s on-again off-again girlfriend since grade school. She was his first love, she was his first kiss, and she was his first… you know.

“Hey baby.” Stan hummed to Wendy before wrapping his arms around her waist and pulling her
into a passionate kiss.

Kyle felt like he had been kicked in the chest. All the breath had left his body. All the feeling had left his brain. Kyle turned numb in an instant. His mind went quiet but, instinctually everything hurt — pained with frayed nerves that were always too raw to protect.

Kyle clenched his jaw and flexed his hands, not sure what to do with himself and not wanting to keep staring at the hormonal display of PDA in front of him.

“Hey Kyle?” He felt himself shudder out the breadth he was holding as Kenny pulled his attention. “I can’t seem to find Stan, is he behind this hideous monster of teenage puberty?” Kenny shoved Kyle playfully as Stan (unmoving from Wendy) gave him the finger.

Kenny positioned his open locker as a kind of shield between Kyle and the make-out party and whispered quietly “Hey, are you ok?”

Kyle had confided in Kenny about his developing sexuality, as well as his feelings towards Stan, this summer when Kenny opened up to Kyle about some personal secrets of his own. They really bonded over it.

Not wanting to get into how not ok he was, Kyle just nodded, not looking up from the floor. Kenny placed a knowing hand on Kyle’s arm to comfort him.

“Ok break it up!” He jokingly laughed while squeezing his way between the couple. That was the thing about Kenny: no one could ever really get mad at him, you always just ended up loving the guy. Kyle wished he had the same effect on people…

“’Sup douches, bitch.” Eric Cartman belched as he strutted up to the group.

“Are you gonna let him talk to me like that?” Wendy slapped Stan across his bicep.

“Dude, don’t call my girlfriend a bitch.” He chastised half-heartedly while rubbing his arm absently.

Instantly Wendy launched into a tirade that turned into an all-out fight with Cartman.

“So… what’d you guys do last weekend?” Stan wondered, officially splitting the group into two.

Their conversation was cut short when another shrill Marsh voice pierced the air around them.

“McCormick!” Shelly Marsh’s voice boomed over everything else and the hallway fell silent. She marched over to where the group was standing, knocking unsuspecting freshmen over in the process. Kyle promptly jumped out of her way, while the other four stood their ground. Well, Stan may have backed up just a little bit, too, and he didn’t blame him. Just because she was the older sister of his Super Best Friend did not make her any less scary to Kyle.

“What’s shakin’ Shelly?” Eric Cartman quipped disinterestedly as he picked at his nails. Kyle had a feeling Fat-Ass knew that getting a rise out of her now would only make it worse for Kenny later.

And she was ma-a-ad. Shelly’s face was red, her fists were shaking, and she had tears glistening over her eyes. She looked wildly between Kenny (her target) and Cartman (the pest).

Kenny didn’t even flinch when she got right up in his face, “YOUR SISTER IS A TURD!” She
screamed at him.

Then she shoved him into the lockers with all of her might. The sound reverberated throughout the hallway. Kenny looked stunned, he winced as his head connected with the wall of metal behind him.

“What the fuck, Shelly?!” Stan reprimanded (albeit a little weaker than was probably intended).

Everyone turned and stared as Shelly — angry beyond the point of comprehension anymore — just screamed and stalked her way out the back entrance of the school. Kyle doubted she would walk back through these doors anytime today.

“Are you ok dude?” Stan asked worriedly.

“Who put sand in her vagina?”

“Cartman!” Kyle warned, as Wendy went off on him yet again. Her berating lecture escalating into a full-blown argument. One that Cartman was never going to win, but he just kept opening his fat mouth anyway.

“It’s not my fault Shelly has sand in her vagina!…”. Kyle mentally blocked out the feud as he checked on his friend.

“Kenny, are you ok?”

“Yeah, man. Damn. I guess I’m lighter than I think.” He tried to laugh while rubbing the back of his head.

“Or Shelly is just that monstrous.” Stan suggested gravely.

“Kenny!” Suddenly, all traces of pain on Kenny’s face had disappeared. His wincing expression had melted instantly into what had to be the dopiest smile Kyle had ever seen.

Butters Stotch shuffled his way over to Kenny as fast as he could, shoes scuffling on the linoleum floors.

“Kenny! Are you ok? I saw what that mean old Shelly did! Are you hurt?” Butters ran his hands all over Kenny, never really stopping anywhere as he checked on his patient.

“I’m fine Butters, really!” Kenny grabbed Butters’ hands, where they rested against his chest.

Butters fingers curled around Kenny’s as they stood there staring at each other.

“A-are ya sure?” Butters bounced around on his tiptoes as he looked up at Kenny.

“Leo,” Kenny purred quietly “I’m ok, really.”

“Ok.” Butters smiled.

Kenny leaned forward slightly, but thought better of it and reversed the subtle motion.

Butters looked conflicted too, biting his lip and looking up at Kenny apologetically. “Well,” he looked down as he rubbed his knuckled together, “I’ll see you in Spanish then.”

“Adiós!” Kenny yelled stifly as he stepped back and waved at Butters. Kyle was sure it was
supposed to be nonchalant, but he imagined Kenny’s throat was damn near closing up with the way Butters was looking at him so alluringly. The thought made Kyle shudder.

Kyle glanced quickly at Stan, who was watching the exchange with as much shock and surprise as Kyle had the first time he learned about Kenny and Butters.

Well, what there was to tell. Kyle was the only one who knew that Kenny had always had a crush on Butters and he was also the first to know that that Kenny had finally stepped up and asked Butters out on a date. Apparently Butters technically initiated it, making moves and dropping hints everywhere, but Kenny ended up being the one to take the leap. They had to keep it top secret though, even from strangers in the town. Butters’ Dad had friends everywhere…

“Oh my God, Karen!” Kenny muttered to himself now that his blue-eyed distraction was away from him. He gathered his things and walked out the front door where he saw Shelly enter from before.

“I gotta go too.” Stan told Kyle apologetically.

“Ok babe, see you at lunch!” Wendy called over from where she was still getting in Cartman’s face about one thing or another.

The first bell rang. “Don’t be late!” Kyle called after him.

“I won’t!” he responded.

Kyle watched the Raven haired athlete jog through the open doors after Kenny. He sighed to himself and gathered his books to make the dreaded walk to first period without Stan. Oh goody.

“We will talk about this later!” Wendy hissed in Cartman’s face. If she meant it to be threatening, it wasn’t. Cartman and Kyle both rolled their eyes as they watched her swing her purse over her shoulder and march off to class in a huff.

“Women.” Cartman exclaimed, without any real point.

Kyle walked his least favorite friend to the class they shared together in silence, thinking about everything that had just transpired.

Walking down the hall, Kyle noticed Tweek standing fairly close to Craig, biting his lip much like Butters had been doing moments ago with Kenny. Kyle sighed. Why couldn’t he have that? Was it so hard to find a single guy, who was interested in guys, who also wasn’t his Super Best Friend?

Yes, Kyle decided, that seemed impossible.

“Huh-fag!” Kyle turned his red hot gaze on Cartman as he shoved him into the hallway lockers with all his might. He was surprised he was able to get him to actually crash into them.

“Shut up Cartman! Stop being a DICK!” Kyle scolded as he shoved past him and walked to class without him. He didn’t want to be associated with such hateful trash.

Kyle heard the fat boy panting behind him as he jogged to keep up with Kyle.

“Oh look! A jew fleeing the scene of a crime, that’s new!” Cartman huffed angrily as he caught up beside him.
Don’t engage, Kyle thought to himself as he pulled open the door, making it a point to let it swing closed on Cartman behind him.

“‘Eh!’” He heard from behind him as he marched to their usual seats.

Cartman took his usual seat in front of Kyle and turned around.

“You’re lucky you sit behind me, Jew, because I would put so much shit in your Jewy hair otherwise!”

“Great.” Kyle stated noncommittally. The more he stared at the board instead of Cartman, the quicker he’d turn around. On cue, Cartman mumbled something to himself and turned to face the front of the class.

A few minutes after the second bell, Stan came waltzing in like he owned the place. As the star of the football team, he practically did.

“What did I miss?” He smiled at Kyle as he made his way around to the chair next to his.

*Maybe a brain, some social awareness, general everyday deductive reasoning and logic?* Kyle snarked in his head as he felt his face heat up. How could Stan be so blind?
From Costa Rica to Colorado

Chapter Summary

Alrighty! We have now officially introduced everyone who matters! (Sorry Jimmy, you’ll get your cameo).

This Bebe chapter is incredibly short, but I wanted to introduce her a little before I gave a lot of her story away.

POV - Bebe

“Hey babe!” Bebe Stevens peeked out over the side of her locker to see her girlfriend Red, standing there with a smile and half a breakfast sandwich in her hand.

She held it out to Bebe, “Happy first day back!”

Bebe had missed the first week of school because she had been in Costa Rica with her parents. The trip had been planned long before she started dating Red over the summer, so she had to reluctantly leave her girlfriend behind, to hang out with her Mom and Dad and all the other old people at the resort with them. Boring company aside, however, she had a great time!

Now it was time to get back to reality. Jump right back into the shark tank that was South Park High School, where being a pretty blonde girl with big boobs was equivalent to wearing a diving suit made of chum. Bebe would rather swim with great whites.

Red thrust the sandwich into Bebe’s hands as she kissed her on the cheek. Red was one of the good ones. She was sweet and thoughtful, and always made sure everybody else was taken care of. Don’t let her nurturing soul fool you though, she’d beat the shit out of anyone who’d harmed the people she cared about. Red was a fierce mama lion, and Bebe felt safe with her. It was nice to feel safe.

“Thanks babe.” Bebe wrapped an arm around Red’s neck and returned her thanks with a kiss on her soft lips, ignoring the hooting and hollering from disgusting assholes walking by. Men were pigs.

When she was done glaring at the jerks who had cat-called them, Red turned her attention back to Bebe and laughed. “Lipstick,” She’d clarified with a giggle.

“Oh.” Red’s signature red lipstick must have rubbed off on Bebe’s lips. Probably comically unevenly, considering Red’s plump lips overshot the size of Bebe’s small, bow-shaped mouth by about double.

Bebe opened her locker to access her mirror. It was wonky and cheap, but it did the job. She laughed a little when she looked at herself; she did kind of look like a birthday party clown. Either that or a really patient baby sitter who let a child play makeovers. Bebe found the faint traces of red and wiped them away. She glanced at the rest of her face in the plasticy-glass, feeling more like the observer and less like the owner of her reflection.
She had stopped wearing makeup over the summer, just something she had given up on. Her blue eyes looked more piercing than ever, set in a pale and colorless face and rimmed with dark purple bags above her high cheekbones. Her favorite tiny mole above her lip was more prominent than ever without makeup on it, and her lips looked pale and dry. The only reason she didn’t look dead was because she had gotten some sun when she wasn’t spending her vacation hiding out and reading books in her hotel room. Bebe didn’t care. She looked fine enough. Her pale lashes were coated in some leftover mascara from the weekend, and the light freckles on her nose stood out as pale reminders of a summer away from this shitty town.

She brushed one side of her hair behind her ear, and left the other side to fall in front of her face. She could see some cleavage peeking out over the top of her sweatshirt and zipped it up.

Satisfied and ready to go, Bebe closed her locker. She immediately jumped and stood frozen. Down the hallway, she thought she saw something. She thought she saw someone. Her face paled and she suddenly felt dizzy.

“Babe? Are you ok?” Red’s voice puller her out of her head.

When she looked back in the direction she was looking before, the person she thought she recognized had morphed back into a stranger. Lately everybody seemed like a stranger.

Bebe sighed, relieved that reality was more reliable than her exhausted brain. “Just dizzy.”

“Well, go ahead and eat. If you want more I can get you something else.”

Bebe smiled at her girlfriend lovingly. Taking the sandwich out of her hand, she gave her a kiss, thanking her again for the breakfast.

They walked to class together hand-in-hand. Bebe shot a nod at Craig Tucker (fingers interlaced with Tweek Tweak’s) who returned the nod with the tiniest of smiles. Craig had become a good friend of Bebe’s recently. They had things in common, and they confided in each other. Glancing at Tweek, Bebe gave him a small wave, which was returned with a sweet smile and a tiny ‘hi’. Tweek was cute. Craig must’ve thought so too because he gave him a small peck against his temple, making Tweek blush deeply.

As Bebe walked down the hall eating her breakfast, she decided today was going to be a good day. And if it wasn’t, she would focus on the positives.

Life is too short to dwell on the past.
I decided to split the Henrietta chapter into two because it was so long. As you know, Karen spends the afternoon at Henrietta’s house. But first, who’s ready for lunch?

POV - Henrietta

At lunchtime the goths sat at their usual table, adorned with the usual black table cloth and fake candles. If they were a punch of pussies like the Vamp Kids they could be considered an easy target, with such a flamboyant display. But Henrietta figured since it was actually kinda cool, no one bothered to pick on them. It was either that, or the fact that they scared the shit out of everybody they ever met. Eh, probably that one.

Henrietta saw Karen walk slowly across the cafeteria. She waved at an orange-clad boy, and grabbed the elbow of her other friend — who was leaning against the wall and staring absently into the center of the cafeteria, where the popular girls usually sat (Wendy and the rest of the pretty girls in their whole clique). Henrietta’s clique was better, but she was always a little bitter that she was never invited into theirs.

She looked back at the two freshmen. They were walking over to the goth table together. Great.

Karen bounced over to their seats. “Hey guys! Um… this is my best friend, Ruby! I usually sit with her so I brought her along.” Henrietta looked up at the new addition’s new addition.

Ruby’s name matched her aesthetic, with long, flowing red hair falling just past her elbows. She tucked her hair behind her ears as she waved at the group, politely — if not also a little disinterestedly. This girl may get along here just fine after all.

Henrietta glanced down. Ruby had black sparkly nail polish adorning her chewed nails. “Badass.” Henrietta complimented with a nod.

“Thanks. I like yours.” Ruby complimented Henrietta’s purple acrylics as they sat down.

Image was really important to Henrietta, hell, it was important to the whole world. If the goth kids were ‘conforming’ to any one societal rule, it was that your image mattered. The way Henrietta presented herself to the world warded off many potentially harmful interactions. Her makeup was a shield; Henrietta liked to use it to scare away dirty teenagers and creepy old men. She took a look at the freshman girls sitting next to her.

These new additions to the group didn’t look very goth; Karen was wearing dark demin skinny jeans with a green army jacket and some giant men’s t-shirt; while Ruby was wearing a red beanie and a buttoned-up, mint green flannel with tiny, red shorts that showed off her legs-for-days. Both had pretty cool sneakers on though, and Ruby’s ripped tights were pretty edgy.
‘Eh, grunge is lose enough to goth’, Henrietta decided, ‘at least she’s not a Vamp Kid’ and went back to her lunch.

Henrietta looked across the table to where Firkle was eyeing them suspiciously. His gaze kept shifting from Henrietta, to Karen, then lingering on Ruby. When her green eyes met his, he slouched and focused his attention on his sandwich.

Innnnterestingga.

“So Ruby,” Henrietta started, “I don’t believe you’ve been introduced to everyone. This is Michael,” Henrietta kissed the boyfriend sitting next to her, “off limits. And that’s Pete over there,” Pete waved noncommittally and Ruby shot him a nod. “And you’re sitting right in front of Firkle. He’s your age. And he’s in a band, really dark and brooding soul.” Henrietta winked at Firkle, who’s stunned face looked back at her blankly.

“Oh, that’s cool! Our brothers were thinking of starting a band this year, too. What’s your band like?” Ruby’s perfect smile seemed to stun Firkle. Pete kicked him under the table.

“Good.” He said shortly.

“…Care to elaborate?” Henrietta encouraged after a painful silence.

“…It’s just music… I mean, obviously it’s ‘music’ but I mean like real music… Not the shitty shit everybody our age listens to. Our peers are just a bunch of Nazi conformist cheerleaders marching to their deaths, listening to pop music and watching Riverdale on their fucking iPhone X’s — Not insinuating that you listen to shit, you seem different — No offense, it’s a good thing! There also isn’t anything wrong with that if you like that stuff— because you seem cool, anyway — I write the songs — for the band, I mean, but I don’t sing them. Michael sings them. It’s all our band actually, I just started it — I don’t know why Henrietta keeps acting like it’s my thing, it’s all our thing! I mean it’s a huge outlet for me, you should come to a rehearsal sometime…” The words kept tumbling out of Firkle’s mouth, getting faster the more he talked. Damn, who knew Firkle even knew this many words?

‘Henrietta to the rescue, I guess’. “Yeah! And we’re all in it, but it’s Firkle’s baby so, he’s the tortured artist. Right Firkle?”

“I… I guess.” He deflated. Poor, awkward thing.

“We’re called ‘Nevermore’.” Michael told them. That piqued both their interests.

“Oh, like ‘The Raven’?”

“Edgar Allan Poe!”

Firkle looked rapidly between the two girls. “Yes.” He cut off the conversation by pulling out his phone.

“Well… That’s Firkle…” Henrietta chuckled.

“Um, Karen?” The table turned to glare at the new voice. Who was this kid?

“Hey, Ike. What’s up?” Karen smiled. Henrietta glared daggers at this new boy wearing a douche-y pale blue button down shirt and tan khaki shorts. Henrietta looked at the rest of the table, they all seemed fairly confused and on guard as well.
“I know you’re busy right now, but u-um…” he was stuttering now. Cute. “I was wondering if… tomorrow… maybe you’d like to have lunch with me? I just don’t feel like I know anyone here and it’d be nice to see a friendly face.” He turned to look back towards a table of boys pretending like they weren’t just staring at him awkwardly ask this girl to lunch. One of them was the boy Karen had waved to earlier. “It’s just kind of getting awkward only eating lunch with my brother, is all…” He shrugged. He was blushing now, right up to the tips of his ears. Verrry interesting…

“Ike’s brother is a friend of my brother’s,” Karen explained, “he doesn’t know anyone here because he didn’t go to middle school with the rest of us. Why don’t you sit with us, Ike? That’s ok, right guys?” The whole table of goths just stared at Karen with dead expressions. They didn’t know this new boy. “It’s cool, Ike.” Karen glared at the teens, “sit.” Well damn, she’s bossy. Good for Karen McCormick.

“Hi, I’m Ike Broflovski—”

“Don’t touch me.” Firkle snapped as he recoiled away from Ike’s extended hand. He settled on just waving at everyone from afar as Karen introduced them.

“So Ike, why don’t you know anyone? You some kind of pariah or something?” Henrietta half-joked, half-taunted.

Ike laughed nervously, “Well, I’m originally from Canada — that’s where my family adopted me from—”

“Oh.” Pete perked up, listening now.

“Yeah, so my parents—”

“Did you ever meet your birth parents?”

Henrietta kicked him under the table and threw a piece of bread at him, “Excuse him, he’s kind of a dick.”

Ike looked around the table with wide eyes, “No, that’s ok. Um, no I never have. I hope to one day, though!” Ike beamed hopefully

“Hm.” Pete grunted in response.

“Pete was adopted too.” Michael clarified.

“Oh, we have something in common!” Ike grinned.

“We’re nothing alike.” Pete interrupted bluntly, eyes straight ahead, beyond Henrietta’s shoulder.

“Oh… ok… anyway… Yeah, so in 4th grade I decided I wanted to go back. I begged my parents for an entire year and by the time 6th grade came around, I was shipped off to Montreal.” Even though nobody but Karen was listening (and she had already heard this story before), Ike was still politely telling his story to the whole table. Maybe he’s not such a bad kid after all, even if he seems like a conformist. If nothing else, he’s polite.

“Poor little rich kid got to go to boarding school… for middle school…” Michael drawled under his breath to Henrietta. She snickered.

Karen smiled excitedly at the noirette and grabbed his hand “You never told me those stories, Ike! We have to catch up!”
“Yeah, absolutely.” Ike chuckled breathlessly, face going red and smile spreading self-consciously across his face. ‘It seems our young Karen has a secret admirer. Poor thing is so blind’.

They finished up their lunches, gradually breaking down the invisible barrier dividing the table. Pete and Ike did eventually find out they had something in common, when Ike started talking about H.P. Lovecraft. Turns out Broflovski has an entire works’ collector’s edition in his room at home, so he was immediately, tentatively welcomed to the clique. Karen kept being her sweet and charming self and Ruby stayed stoically quiet. She kept catching Firkle staring at her, but said nothing about it.

As the bell rang and they all shuffled out of the cafeteria, Michael nudged Henrietta in the elbow.

“Nice job sheltering the strays.” He joked with her.

“I do what I can.” Henrietta wrapped an arm around her boyfriend’s waist and walked him to class.
Chapter Summary

Henrietta takes Karen and Ruby to her house for makeovers. Karen wonders if she’s actually pretty, or just the dumb, ugly kid she feels like.

POV - Henrietta

As the last bell rang, Henrietta was already outside. She’d ditched. English was boring. Why did she have to take a class in a language she already spoke? She liked her poetry elective, but that was only because she got to slay her innermost demons in the most beautiful and raw way possible: nakedly vulnerable in front of everyone. It was cathartic. And a little erotic. At least the way she did it.

She took a long drag of her cigarette and shotgunned the wind, watching it drift off and disappear like a beautiful whisper. Henrietta made it a point to recognize everyday poetic beauty, you know, since the world and the people in it were so ugly and fucked.

She took blew a smoky breath and took in the quiet around her. She’d already taken off her platform shoes, and the grass felt nice underneath her toes.

She felt a wool-clad arm wrap around her torso and warm lips smirk against her neck.

“If that’s Michael, he should know better than to sneak up on me.” Henrietta chided gently.

“Oh, then it’s not.” Michael chuckled against her skin. Henrietta elbowed him in the ribs (as lightly as possible) and turned around to face him.

“Hey.” She smirked.

“Hey.” He purred softly, tucking a lock of stray hair behind her ear. He grabbed her face gently and kissed her sweetly. “Come over today?” Of course, he was horny. Damn bastard.

“No,” She pushed him away coldly, “I’m busy.”

“Ok.” He accepted as he took a cigarette out of his pocket. Henrietta held out her lighter and watched the end of his cancer stick spark to life as he inhaled. He sighed smoke towards the sky like this was the first clear breath he’d taken all day.

“Rough day?” She asked him.

He shook his head. “Just tired.”

She passed her cigarette holder to him, and he took it without question. His body relaxed against hers as she wrapped her arms around him and rested her head against his shoulder. He tipped his head instinctually and she breathed in his scent of smoke and lavender essential oils. He says it keeps him calm, but she thinks he knows it’s her favorite flower. She kissed his hairline, grabbed her smoke, and leaned against the wall to face him again.
“Did you ditch English?” He asked her.

She winked at him mid-toke.

“Delinquent.” He growled at her.

“Hey, when you guys are done eye-fucking each other I’d like a smoke please, I finished my pack this morning.”

“Fuck off, buy your own shit.” Michael deadpanned.

“Come on!” Pete demanded, “What’s one cigarette, like 25 cents? I’ll pay you! Come on!”

Michael flipped him off as he inhaled slowly from his own, rubbing it in Pete’s face.

It took them a while to notice that Firkle had wordlessly joined the group and was now standing right behind Pete — who jumped when he finally realized.

“Do you have any smokes, dude?” He asked the little one.

“No, I can get you some later.”

“Firkle…” Henrietta warned.

He blinked a few times with his big eyes, “I can buy you some later.”

“Proud of you.” She called to him. She's much rather the youngest of her boys pay some rando outside the 7/11 to buy them cigarettes, than watch him get in trouble for shoplifting from something as tricky as a locked cabinet behind the counter. Not that he hadn't successfully done it once before, but there's only so many heart attacks a healthy teenage boy can fake before gullible cashiers stop running to the back to call 911.

Firkle rolled his eyes and sat on the grass to get started on his homework.

“Who are you waiting for?” Pete asked the other two, who remained standing.

“Karen.” Henrietta stated. Pete nodded his approval. Not that she needed it. She’d hang out with whoever the fuck she wanted.

“Speak of the devil.” Michael tipped his head in the direction of the front of the building.

“More like ‘angel.’” Firkle piped up from the grass.

“Shut up, Firkle.” She muttered as she put her shoes back on.

“It’s a compliment!” He defended himself.

“Hey guys!” Karen bounced towards the group.

“Ready to go?” Henrietta asked, taking one last drag of her cigarette.

“Yep!” Karen replied excitedly, but fidgeted nervously. She was a sweet girl, but she seemed small. Like she desperately needs a group; someone to protect her at all times. Eh, what’s one more to the brood?

Henrietta passed her mostly finished cigarette to Pete, and lovingly smoothed Firkle’s hair down.
She grabbed Michael by his shirt collar and caught his mouth in a passionate, tongue-y kiss. The positioning was a little awkward today because she was wearing her giant spiked heels and had to crane her neck down a little to reach him. She was used to always being much shorter than him.

She smacked his ass, and turned to walk towards her car without another word.

Without looking back, “Come on!” She called to Karen, who awkwardly still hadn’t moved.

“Bye, guys!” She heard Karen squeak hastily as she ran to catch up with Henrietta.

As they walked towards the parking lot they heard Ruby jogging up behind them.

“Karen! Wait!” Ruby caught up to her friend “I thought you were coming to my house after school?”

“Shit! I’m sorry! I’m supposed to go to Henrietta’s house…” Karen apologized sadly.

“Oh ok,” Ruby murmured.

Henrietta was bored; she started walking to her car.

“Wait!” Karen called after her, “Can Ruby come?” Karen was pleading with her with wide eyes, clearly not wanting to leave her friend behind.

Henrietta looked the redhead up and down. “Tag along, shorty.”

With that, Ruby (who was actually ironically tall) smiled and followed her oldest friend and their new friend to Henrietta’s black Jeep.

“There… done!” Henrietta gave Karen one more look-over “hm… maybe the lips are too much.” Henrietta grabbed a makeup wipe from her stash on the vanity and carefully wiped purple lipstick from Karen’s lips.

“There! Now you look more approachable, but still badass. You seem like you like people, so…”. Henrietta joked as she tossed the wipes in the trash. “Plus, as hypocritical as it may seem, I think a young face such as yourself should showcase natural beauty rather than cover it up. I’m the exception… I’m too cool.” Henrietta took a drag from her fancy cigarette holder and swiveled the chair around so Karen could look at herself in the mirror.

She didn’t do half bad. The kid actually looked pretty cool now. She had a swipe of black eyeliner accenting her top lid, coming to a point at the tip of a sharp wing. Henrietta also filled in her eyebrows more, which no longer looked patchy, and actually made her look grown-up.

On her own bottom lashes, Henrietta preferred the drama of a thick mass of light gray shadow framing her thick cat eyeliner. But on such a small face like Karen’s, she opted for a thin line of light brown shadow instead. Her lashes were coated in a thin layer of mascara, and voilà!

Though she’d deny it, and probably punch anyone in the tit who dared call Henrietta a ‘makeup guru’, she kinda was. She had always loved makeup and was really good at it. She was considering going to beauty school after high school, but that was a secret she’d take to the grave if she never actually went through with it. We’ll see.

“What do you think?” Henrietta drawled, accenting her guarded attitude with another puff of her
Karen stared at herself scrutinizingly, then admiringly, like she was looking at art. Thanks to Henrietta, she pretty much was.

“Wow.” She whispered as she brought a hand up to her face. She gently rested her slender fingers against her cheek and tilted her head, taking in the change from all angles.

“Good, right?” Henrietta smirked. Karen looked like she didn’t believe what she was seeing.

“I look… cool.”

“Yeah you do, kid. You are cool. Let your face be the window to your soul.” Henrietta made a dramatic sweeping motion with her hands as she spoke.

“Wow, Karen! You look totally hot!” Ruby exclaimed from where she was eating chips, sprawled out on Henrietta’s black and purple draped bed behind them.

Karen looked at her face one more time, then looked above her shoulder to Henrietta’s reflection.

“Thank you. I do look…”

“Badass?”

“Like total ‘babe’ material?”

Karen didn’t answer. She looked at herself sadly.

“What’s the matter half-pint? You don’t like it?” Henrietta wondered.

“No! No, that’s not it at all, I love it! It’s just…” Karen grabbed the little handheld mirror from the desk of the vanity and held it up to her face. “Am I pretty? Like honestly, not ‘do you think I’m pretty’, but… am I pretty?”

Henrietta frowned. “Beauty is a social construct, even the beautiful people will never obtain the media’s definition of ‘beautiful’. It’s just a long-abused scheme to keep women hating themselves until they sleep with men or fasting until they’ve killed themselves.”

“You are beautiful, Karen!” Ruby piped up, clearly missing the point of Henrietta’s rant.

“Not without all… this” Karen whispered sadly, gesturing to her makeover-ed face. Henrietta frowned. This made her deeply upset. As someone who has dealt with similar issues her whole life, she hated to see such a sweet girl like Karen McCormick beat herself down so badly.

“Look at your face,” Henrietta ordered. “Give me one positive.”

Karen looked at her hands before looking back up in the mirror.

“Your eyes are pretty!” Ruby piped up from behind them.

“What do you like about your nose?” Henrietta pushed.

“I don’t know, it’s a nose.”

Henrietta rolled her eyes and cocked her hip, “I can stay here all day until you tell me something positive. Go.” Henrietta knew how to be bossy when she needed to be.
Karen took a deep breath. “My nose is cute. I like the freckle I have right next to my ugly scar.”

“No, try again.”

“My scar isn’t that noticeable.”

“I’ll take it.” One step at a time, Henrietta reminded herself.

Karen sighed.

“Honey,” Henrietta soothed as she placed a hand on Karen’s thin shoulder, “you look gorgeous with or without makeup. This just gives it that extra little ‘umph’. Trust me, you’ll turn heads if you come to school like this. Besides,” Henrietta slung an arm around Karen and stared at her reflection in the mirror with a smirk and a raised eyebrow, “this may help you attract the attention of a specific little raven haired boy we were sitting with at lunch.”

“Iiiiiiiiiiiike!” Ruby sing-songed.

“You guys!” Karen blushed as she hid her face with her hands.

“Relax, ‘Baby McCormick’, we’re just teasing you.”

“You really do look pretty, Karen.”

Karen tucked a piece of hair behind her ears, pulled some front pieces out and looked at herself scrutinizingly.

Henrietta rolled her eyes, “In a society that profits from your self doubt, loving yourself is a rebellious act.” Ruby looked at her incredulously. Henrietta took a self-conscious drag of her cigarette. “What?” She snapped.

“That is… SO fucking right! BAD-ASS! I love it! Who said that?”

Henrietta smirked, “some conformist.” Really she’d seen the unnamed quote on the Instagram account she’d never admit she has. But it sparked a fire in her, and she knew how much it had helped her on her own journey to love herself. She just wanted to spread the message to a small and broken girl who reminded Henrietta so much of the fragile thing she used to be. But that was a long time ago…

Karen straightened her shoulders and looked at herself bravely. “Ok.” She conceded. “Ok.”

“If you want to take that eyeliner you can, I’ve got, like, six of that exact same kind in that exact same color. Firkle went through a shoplifting phase a few years ago, but he’s sweet so he’d always only get stuff for other people.” Henrietta glanced at Ruby as she took a slow drag on her cigarette and blew the smoke out the open window.


“You’re welcome, now get out of my chair.” Karen happily jumped up with her new present and practically skipped over to the bed to take over hoarding the bag of chips.

“My turn!” Ruby jumped up.

“What do you want?” Henrietta asked coolly.
“Make me look glamorous. Like a trashy celebrity on a night out.”

“Mission accepted,” Henrietta nodded and put out her cigarette. She cracked her knuckles and got to work whoring-up Ruby.

Henrietta had never had this much fun with other female classmates before. Usually she automatically put herself in a separate category and that was it. Walls went up, and nobody could get in, even if they wanted to. Even though she was only protecting herself, she couldn’t help wonder what it was like to have a real sleepover. Don’t get her wrong, she never wished she wasn’t friends with Michael, Pete, and Firkle. She would never trade her boys for anything in the world, but it was nice to have some girl time.

It was nice to have friends.
Chapter Summary

I’m tired of ‘nice’, let’s ‘mean’ this thing up a bit, shall we?
(Eric Cartman).

Due to the more ‘realistic’-teen-drama nature of this fic, Cartman is not responsible for the illegal and downright evil things his cartoon counterpart has done. He’s just a dick.

TW: for eating disorders.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

POV - Cartman/Eric

“Shut up, FATASS! You’re NOT right!” ‘The Jew’ was chewing him out over something or other, sometimes Cartman just stopped listening… and now was one of those times.

He’d forgotten what he’d even said that was so wrong, but now he was being yelled at so nothing but white hot anger occupied his mind.

“SHUT UP, KAHL, I DON’T NEED YOU TO TELL ME WHEN I AM AND AM NOT RIGHT!”

“Guys, let’s just drop it, ok?” Stan Marsh, always the voice of reason.

“He can’t get away with saying that! The Government did not cause 9/11!” Kyle was pissed, man. Get over it.

“Keyel, get over it, you’re wrong, the end”.

“I’m not wrong!” Kyle hissed, red-faced. He was shaking with fury when Stan placed a hand on his shoulder. He whispered something in his ear which seemed to calm the redhead down.

“See you later, Cartman.” Stan churned out ungracefully as he basically ignored both of them and steered Kyle away towards the parking lot.

Cartman tried to ignore the weird sting present deep within his gut. This always happened: he would say something true, that in hindsight may have been stupid, and ended up full-on fighting with someone over something he didn’t even care or sometimes remember, just because he refused to let things go.

Cracking his neck and rolling his shoulders, Cartman attempted to take a clear breath and walk to his mom’s car. ‘Damn Kyle getting everybody all riled up.’

Eric Cartman walked towards the carpool line with a quickened pace. He always tried to do this as
quickly as possible, not wanting his other classmates to stumble upon ammunition to tease him with later. He didn’t mind fighting so much, but he hated being teased. And the simple fact was: Cartman’s mom was too poor to afford to get him a car. It was either drive around with her or lose some of his necessities and luxuries, so he tried not to fight it.

He power walked his way through the crowd with his head down, making a bee-line for the bee-yellow sedan that Liane drove.

“Hello, poopykins.” She sang.

“Hi, Mommy.” Cartman offered noncommittally as he focused on buckling his seatbelt.

“Good day at school?” ‘Deep breath, Cartman, she’s just trying to be nice’.

“What do you fucking think, Mom, it’s fucking school?” He snapped at her instead.

“Oh.” She recoiled sadly. Cartman sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“I’m so-rry.” He sing-songed, without much sincerity.

“Oh, that’s ok sweetheart. Ready to go? Remember you have Dr. Mendoza today.”

“Fuuuuuuuck.” Cartman groaned as he kicked the seat. “I fucking hate Dr. Mendoza!” That wasn’t necessarily true…

“Until she stops helping you, you are going, mister! End of discussion!” Liane weakly demanded as she tried to be authoritative.

Cartman grumbled to himself and cranked the radio, closing his eyes and losing his thoughts in the berating music. The sheer volume of it seemed to clear his conscience and absolve him of any guilt from the day for at least the 30 mins it took to drive to Dr. Mendoza. He tucked his heels up on the seat with him and leaned his head against the window.

“Wake up, sweetie, we’re here.” Liane chimed in her airy, little voice.

Cartman groaned and sat up in his seat, wiping his mouth as he did so.

He stared up at the corporate building in front of him and glared. Huffing and mumbling to himself as he took his sweet time unbuckling his seatbelt and getting out of the car. He dragged his feet and groaned as he tipped his head back, dramatically taking in every last ounce of sunlight before he was locked in that musty building for an hour.

“Come on,” Liane grabbed his elbow and lightly pulled him along. Inside, she gave their names to reception and they took their seats in the waiting room. Eric never suspected that he would run into someone he knew here, but he always tipped the rim of his yellow an blue baseball hat down over his eyes, and tried to hide his face with his jacked nonetheless.

“Eric! Nice to see you, shall we get started?” Dr. Mendoza’s voice pierced the silence and snapped him to attention as he looked around the room paranoid for a second, to see if anyone he may know had heard him addressed by name. Phew. All good.

“Alright let’s do this.” Cartman stood up and stretched his back.
“Right this way.” Her syrupy-sweet and slightly raspy voice was kinda sexy, which was a lot of the whole reason Cartman liked to listen to her talk (that, and the fact that she was one of the only people in his life that truly called him out on his shit). As Dr. Mendoza ushered another little boy out of her office and ushered Eric in, the two caught each other’s gazes. Cartman never knew the name of this boy, and he didn’t care. He always, without fail, sent him a paralyzing death stare as they passed each other… just in case.

Dr. Mendoza turned around to shut her door and Eric had exactly 2.5 seconds to admire her tight ass. She was wearing a pencil skirt that was snug tight against her hips, and clung to her slim frame all the way down to her knees, where there was a slutty little slit up the back.

Eric smirked to himself wolfishly as he stared, softening his face into an innocent expression the moment she turned around.

“How are you doing today?” She asked nicely as she gathered all her notes from their last session.

“Hm. Good.” He stated flatly. It always took him a few minutes to gather his wits, so she never expected anything but short answers from him right away. They made a good team, Dr. Mendoza and he. Though he’d never admit it, he enjoyed their time together. If nothing else, he could listen to her artificial waterfall and smell her spiced apple air freshener until he calmed himself down. Eric was used to taking care of himself.

“How are you, Dr. Mendoza?” He offered unenthusiastically. Eric always at least tried to make it a point to be polite to adults. His mom tended to be the exception; no matter how badly Cartman felt after yelling at her, she really grated his nerves.

“I’m quite fine, a little exhausted at the end of the day. Thank you for asking.” He nodded gruffly.

“Ok… so Eric. Let’s start with how your day was at school, any improvements? Slip-ups? How did you get along with everyone?”

“Just peachy, doc.” Cartman crossed his leg over his knee and slouched in his chair, raising his arms in a shrug. “Don’t you know everyone fucking loves me?” He flirted sarcastically with a crooked smile and a wink. Dr. Mendoza was not amused.

“Stop deflecting.” She demanded. Eric sat up straighter and gathered himself, mentally willing his ego to take a break. He promised he would open himself up enough for Dr. Mendoza to at least see over his walls, if not break them down entirely. “Now I’ll ask you again,” she stared at him pointedly, “how were your interactions with your peers today?”

Cartman scoffed. “Well the first person to piss me off today was Wendy Testaburger, she got in my face about something or other (I don’t even remember what), that bitchy whore—”

“No.” She cut him off. “Cut-it out, Eric. Remember, when you here you are not gonna call people names.” He groaned. “You’ll never make progress if I keep enabling you, and then why am I here? Do you want to improve?” She asked him matter-of-factly. He knew she was right.

“…yes…” He admitted with a small voice.

“Good. Continue.” She demanded with authority.

He sighed. “So Wendy yelled at me—”
“Do you remember why?”

Cartman paused, eyes blinking wide like a deer caught in headlights. Oh yeah, he remembered why. “Why… did she yell at me?” He wondered innocently.

“Yes.” She knew he was stalling.

“Well… I did call her a ‘bitch’… And then later again because I said Shelly Marsh had sand in her vagina, which she did!” Cartman tried to defend himself, though he knew he really wasn’t helping his case.

Dr. Mendoza gave him a look, as she pursed her lips and cocked her brow.

“What else?” She encouraged.

Cartman continued, “Then Kahl pushed me because these two gaywads— I mean, kids — were practically making out in the hallway.”

“How would that make Kyle push you?”

He paused. Deciding whether or not to tell the truth. He decided he should. “Because I called them fags.”

Dr. Mendoza groaned.

“Well it's just a word!” Cartman argued, “Do you see a pattern here, Eric?” She drawled with a sigh.

“… the other kids at my school are totally lame and sensitive?” Eric offered innocently.

“No, Eric, remember what we said? ‘Victim mentality…’” She trailed off, asking him to complete the phrase.

“Ugh, ’Perpetuates the problem’” He finished for her.

“Good. Now think about it another way and answer the question again. What do you see as the common factor?”

“… I don’t know.” He smiled sweetly.

“You, Eric. You seem to seek out these fights daily, you use hateful language just for the shock value and attention, and you always claim you feel badly afterwards, but I never hear of any changed behavior.”

“I do feel bad!” He insisted.

“Bullshit.” She stated plainly. “Wishing it hadn’t ruined your morning or spoiled your joke is one thing, but if you were really sorry, and you really felt bad you would make at least some effort to change it.”

Eric shot out of his seat, “Well how the fuck am I supposed to calm the fuck down when everyone keeps YELLING AT ME!”

“Lower your tone, Eric Cartman, or I will end our session right here.” She threatened very plainly.
He bit his tongue and sat back down.

“Thank you, I appreciate your effort.” She acknowledged. That small recognition genuinely made him feel a little better. Cartman thrived on praise.

“So you got in some minor fights at school, anything else?”

He thought for a minute. “No.”

“What about your anger, how have you succeeded or failed in controlling your rage when it bubbles up?”

“I…” He really didn’t know how to answer that, “I don’t know.”

“Explain.” She offered gently.

Eric started thinking, hard. And he hated it when he starting thinking too hard. He kept swallowing gulps of air as he warred with himself about whether or not it was okay to be honest with the doctor.

“Can I get some water?” He pleaded gently.

“Sure.” Getting her up out of her seat had only been a bonus; Eric really did need the water. He stared at her ass again as she poured him some water from her desk. “Here you go,” She soothed.

“Thanks.” He muttered as he took a few large gulps, and then many small sips, buying his time.

“So, Eric, tell me about how you’ve been feeling on the daily.” She poised her pen, ready to take more notes.

He paused.

Should he be honest? Should he lie? Eric decided to tell the truth, again.

“Well,” he began, “in a word: shitty. I wake up fucking pissed off, I go to bed fucking pissed off, and I spend my whole God damn day fucking pissed off.”

“And what would you say are some factors that contribute to your… bad moods?” Dr. Mendoza censored.

“Well, for starters, whenever I go downstairs and see another disgusting creep eating breakfast with my mom, I want to throw them through a wall. Then I want to throw her through the wall — but I’d never do that! I swear.” Dr. Mendoza nodded and encouraged Eric to continue.

“And she keeps talking about finding my fucking deadbeat Dad, and it’s like, who the fuck cares? He abandoned us, doesn’t she get that?” He hissed, “He left us!” Eric could feel himself getting heated, “and she keeps bringing up DNA kits, and Ancestry programs that I could try to find him with but I don’t fucking care! And I hate that she cares! He breaks her fucking heart every single day and he has the luxury of never actually having to see it. He doesn’t even know us anymore!” He tried to ignore the crack in his voice. “It makes me so angry I think if I ever did meet him I’d just kill him… metaphorically of course…” He added for clarity.

Dr. Mendoza nodded, “I understand your frustration, hell, I’d be angry too if I had reminders of
that pain every day.”

“You don’t know the half of it, sister.” Cartman chuckled darkly.

“Then tell me. If nothing else, it’ll make you feel better to get it off your chest.” She encouraged with a smile.

Eric took a deep breath. “I just…” he trailed off. This felt stupid. He felt stupid.

“Go on…” She urged.

“I just… I wonder why… I wonder why he left and I wonder why we weren’t good enough. I mean, I know I’m a piece of shit—”

“No you’re not.”

“—but how would he know? I wasn’t even born yet! And… and I wonder why she won’t accept that her life is perfectly fine the way it is… aren’t I enough? Isn’t loving a son enough, why am I never enough?” Eric looked out the window as he felt the familiar black hole in his chest expand, like it would swallow him whole. “Why does she need to keep putting up with douchebag after douchebag, who treats us like shit? It makes me so mad at her, and then I treat her like shit and… and.. I hate it, ok? I hate it! I know I talk a tough game but I hate to make my mother upset, there I said it. Eric Cartman has feelings.”

“Of course you do, everyone has feelings,” the doctor flatly assured him as she finished taking some notes. “I think this is amazing progress, I think the more we uncover the root of the problem, the easier it will be to rip it out to foster new growth.” She crossed her legs and pondered with her chin resting against her palm, “Why did you say you were — in your words — a ‘piece of shit’?”

Eric scoffed. “Well, aren’t I? Everybody seems to hate me, and I don’t always really know why, so there must be something wrong with me… It sure feels that way… Sometimes when I get… the way I do… I black out and I straight up can’t remember what the fuck I’ve said or done to people. It’s like some monstrous darkness takes over my whole body and I have no idea how to get rid of it. So… everybody hates me… and I don’t blame them.”

“I don’t hate you Eric, I’m quite fond of you actually.” The good doctor insisted.

Eric frowned. “Well, aren’t I? Everybody seems to hate me, and I don’t always really know why, so there must be something wrong with me… It sure feels that way… Sometimes when I get… the way I do… I black out and I straight up can’t remember what the fuck I’ve said or done to people. It’s like some monstrous darkness takes over my whole body and I have no idea how to get rid of it. So… everybody hates me… and I don’t blame them.”

“Yeah,” he smiled fondly. His smile faded as darkness overtook his thoughts. “Then you should especially know: I’m not worth the fucking shit on the bottom of your fucking shoe.” She didn’t say anything, so he got angry. “And why not, are you some kinda stupid or something?” He knew she wasn’t.

“Because I know your heart Eric. I think that’s the problem with your friends, you box them out, say hurtful things because it keeps everyone at bay, and then they never know you’re hurting inside. You should open up to them more”
“Well what FUCKING good would that do?” Cartman spat angrily as tears obscured his vision, “I should… open up to fucking Kyle?… and Stan? So that I can get laughed at and made fun of for the rest of my life?” Eric threw his hands up in frustration and roughly wiped tears from his face with shaking hands.

Dr. Mendoza passed Eric a box of tissues which he snatched out of her hands violently. “No, so you can all start to heal… I think your friends would love to hear some apologies from you, and I think you will feel better afterwards yourself.”

Cartman scoffed, “Apologize? Like a fucking pussy?”

“No,” she corrected, “Like a human being.” Dr. Mendoza stared into Cartman’s eyes, strong and unmoving, until he looked away, ashamed he was being outsmarted. By a chick, no less.

He took in a shaky breath “I don’t know…”.

“One step at a time.” She reminded him.

“Ok.” He conceded.

“What about the rest? Do you have anything else to report back to me?” She switched topics like a pro.

His face went white, “I don’t know what you’re referring to.” He lied.


“I don’t want to talk about it.” He answered hastily.

“That’s fine, we don’t have to dwell on it, but will you at least tell me whether or not you’ve eaten something today?”

“I said I don’t want to talk about it!” Eric was starting to feel like a caged animal; trapped in a conversation he didn’t want to be having.

“Oh, I’m gonna take that as a ‘no’, is that safe to assume?” Dr. Mendoza was a very good wild animal tamer. ‘But’, Eric thought, ‘she seemed to be no good with monsters.’

He didn’t say anything, he was past the point of rage, he had starting going into shut-down mode. His hands and feet tingled as he danced dangerously on the ledge between fight and flight.

She pulled him out of his thoughts, “Eric,” he snapped his head up, “it’s ok. You don’t need to be embarrassed.”

“Oh,” he clapped sarcastically, “thanks Doctor Mendoza, I’m SOOOO glad that I don’t ‘have’ to be embarrassed! I’ll just choose to feel like trash then, because I’ve developed a fucking eating disorder like some fat chick!” The only reason she even knew about that is because his mom had ratted him out some time over the summer. The bitch couldn’t just let him slowly kill himself in peace.

“It’s ok, Eric, that’s why you’re here. To get help.”

“Well I’m done wanting help!” His voice cracked and the floodgates opened, “I… just… want to… be… better! I’m… SICK… of being sick… and I… just want… to be… normal!” Eric
sobbed, bringing his knees up to his chest and covering his face with his hands. “Why am I like this? TELL ME WHY I’M LIKE THIS!” He screamed as he pleaded with the worried looking woman in front of him. “FIX ME!” He begged the doctor.

She looked at him sadly, “Eric, I’m here to help you. I don’t want to say ‘fix’ because I don’t believe you’re broken right now, but” Eric let out a sob. “You feel out of control — of your life, of your emotions — and that is all perfectly understandable. I’m here to help you come up with healthy ways of coping so you can get better. And once we’re finished seeing each other, you’ll feel proud of yourself that YOU were the one able to pull yourself out. YOU are going to be your best ally.” She promised him.

He chuckled cockily and spread his arms over the armrest, overcompensating for the wet tears still glistening on his face, “You mean I don’t get to see that sweet ass every Monday for the rest of my life?” Cartman joked crassly.

“No, Eric, the goal is to leave, and actually move on.” She strategically ignored the backwards compliment. “So like right now, you’re clearly upset.” Eric made an embarrassed noise. “do you remember the exercises I taught you last time?”

Eric closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He counted the seconds as he slowed his breathing and quieted his mind. 4 seconds… 5 seconds… 6… 7… 8…

“How do you feel now?” The doctor’s voice pierced his thoughts and he opened his eyes. He felt like he’d just woken up from a trance.


“Good.” She replied. She flipped to a clean sheet of her notebook. “We’re about out of time today, but do you want to go over your goals for this week?” He nodded. “Ok, I would say number one would be to remember your breathing. Number two will be apologize, when necessary.” Cartman rolled his eyes as he groaned, “You don’t have to go on making amends with enemies just yet, but just apologize, in the moment, when you know you’ve done wrong.”

He sighed in agreement, “Ok, next.”

“I would say evaluate the situations in front of you with more objectivity before you lash out.”

“Evaluate before you retaliate!” He joked sarcastically.

“Yes! That’s very clever! Hey, I’m gonna steal that!” She giggled musically at him. Cartman tried to hang on to the small sense of pride he felt at the recognition. “And…” She looked at him sternly. “Eat at least one solid meal a day.”

Cartman fidgeted uncomfortably. They had gotten deep into his eating disorder over the summer, talking about how he felt worthless and unloved, and how restricting made him feel numb and sometimes giddy with exhaustion. He didn’t want to relieve those sessions. He nodded silently.

“I’m serious, Eric,” She warned, “if this dangerous behavior doesn’t improve, and I can’t help you anymore, I will be forced to refer you to a clinic that is full of doctors who specialize in this disease.”

“I know.” He whispered defeatedly.

“Good.” She ripped the page from her notepad and handed it to him. “I’m very impressed with

...
you Eric, it’s like I see a new, more mature young man in front of me every time you make a breakthrough.” He tried to hide his smile.

“I didn’t do any good today though, doc.” He admitted with a sad laugh.

“You did, Eric. You came in. And you opened your mouth. That’s more than I got our first few sessions.” She winked at him as he chuckedled at the memory. “Ok! Very good, I will see you next week, and we will talk about improvements you’ve made from now until then. Keep making me proud, Eric.” She rubbed his arm gently as she escorted him out of the office.

“All done, love-muffin?” Liane questioned with her airy voice and distant eyes.

“All done.” He declared. Mrs. Cartman gave a check to the receptionist, and Eric tried not to look at how much it was.

They walked to the car in silence. It gave Eric some time to reflect on what was said in the session. ‘Breathe, Apologize, Evaluate, Eat,’ he reminded himself.

“Mom?” He stopped right beside their car.

“What is it boogey-boy?” He jerked a small step towards her, feeling the overwhelming urge to give his mom a hug. He needed to give his mom a hug.

…But when she looked at him expectantly, suddenly his ego wouldn’t let him acknowledge his weak knees, and he opened his car door instead.

“Can we get ‘Colonel’ on the way home?” He fudged poorly.

“Of course, poopykins!”

“Great.” He damn-near slammed his head through the glass as he rested his forehead against it. She must have sensed his distress, because she grabbed his hand and squeezed it. He didn’t even look at her. It would have made him feel too guilty. He snatched his hand back, and drifted off to sleep; hating himself for everything he was.

As they entered the dark house, the meowing sounds of a hungry Mr. Kitty greeted them. He walked up to Eric’s leg, and gave him a light scratch. Stupid thing.

“Go away, Mr. Kittay.” Cartman grumbled as he kicked the cat off of his leg and sat down at the table.

He sighed and rested his head in his hands as he closed his eyes and attempted to decompress from his draining afternoon. He focused on the sounds of his mom feeding Mr. Kitty, and gathering plates for dinner. The smell of the fried chicken was making his stomach growl, and he was glad — for the first time in a while — that he was able to eat guilt free, if only for his complete exhaustion and palpable hunger.

He looked down at his fat stomach. Eh. He’d worry about pounds tomorrow, today he would focus on completing #4 on his list. The pride that comes with feelings of impending accomplishment made him smile.
As mother and son sat down to eat in silence, they heard keys jingle in the door. Oh no. In walked Mom’s Boyfriend #645. A bleached asshole named ‘Tony’, with orange-tanned skin and bulging muscles that made him look like a tool. The guy literally looked like a lumpy piece of shit, but it seemed like nobody but Eric could see that he was disgusting.

“Hey, hey, family!” He called from the front door.

“Mom, what is he doing here?” Cartman hissed.

“Oh, well I thought we could all eat dinner together.” She hummed in her spacey lilt.

“You gave him a key?” He whispered viciously.

“How’s my favorite family?”

“You’re not. Part of our family.” The teenager barked. Looking hurt, Tony waltzed over to Liane and gave her a kiss on the head. Cartman twitched and winced. He grit his teeth to keep himself from lashing out (#3, he reminded himself).

“Ugh, fried food?” Tony complained.

“Then don’t. eat. it.” Cartman droned through a clenched jaw.

“Eric, Tony can have some. Tony, I can make you something else if you want to?”

Eric slammed his fists on the table. “God dammit, no you won’t, Mom! You will not lift a God damnfinger for this asshole!”

“Eric!”

“Son,—”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. I am NOT your fucking son!” Breath burned like fire in his lungs. His voice was scratchy against his throat.

Tony laughed meanly, “I know that, you ungrateful shit. And believe me, no one’s happier than me. But as long as I am the authority figure in this house, you will talk to me with respect!”

“Fuck you!” Eric spat as Tony lifted up a fist threateningly. Liane screamed and grabbed onto her boyfriend’s elbow, wanting desperately to protect her son.

“Tony, please! Let’s just all sit down and eat in peace!” The two men in the room glared at each other as they sat at the table wearily.

Tony reached for Cartman’s favorite piece of chicken, “Don’t you have a protein shake or something shitty you can eat instead? You didn’t pay for this food, quit mooching off my mom!”

“She’s my girlfriend I can do whatever I want!” Tony shot back angrily, “And besides,” he laughed, “it’s not like you’re gonna miss out on the extra calories from one extra piece of chicken.” Tony chuckled as he picked off the skin and glared disapprovingly at the stripped meat he was looking at. He shrugged and dumped it on his plate, clearly not even going to eat it!

Cartman’s jaw dropped. Tears filled his eyes. He looked at the once comforting food that was his saving grace moments ago, now ugly and full of fat he didn’t want. He looked down at his fat chest, his fat thighs and his bubbling stomach. Some good fasting has done for him, he still looked like a fat tub of lard.
It was hopeless. He looked at his mom pleadingly.

“Why don’t you take some chicken upstairs to your room?” She suggested.

He couldn’t believe the way he was feeling. Everything was spiraling. His head went dizzy, his ears rang and his vision tunneled. She was doing it again. She was doing it again! She was picking someone else over him, just like she did every time! He wasn’t enough, he was never enough! He’d never be enough, and nobody would ever love him. Not when there were walking fucktoys that took priority over him, even to his own mother. He was a burden to his family, he just got in the way.

Standing on shaky legs (partially from the fasting, partially from the panic) he picked up his plate. He took one look at the food in front of him and felt his stomach twist in guilt and pain. He looked back at his mom, begging her to ask him to sit down, to ask that asshole to leave, so do something! She just looked at him blankly like she didn’t know what was wrong. She didn’t know what was wrong.

Cartman chucked his plate against the wall and watched it shatter to a million pieces. He ignored the shouting as he stalked his way up to his room, and slammed the door.

He slid the latch on the handmade lock he’d made as a kid — he never really knew who his mom would bring home.

Backing away from the door shakily, he panted wildly until he couldn’t even stand anymore. Something crinkled in his jacket pocket as he collapsed against his bed frame. He pulled it out.

It was the list, now crumpled and broken. Never to be pristine and unmarred again. Eric read it over 50 times until he’d memorized it with tears blurring his vision, making it impossible to see.

Weekly Goals:

1. **Remember your breathing**
2. **Apologize when appropriate**
3. **“Evaluate before you retaliate” — Good one! :)**
4. **Eat one solid meal a day**

*Good Luck, you can do it!*

As hatred rose inside of him, he shook wildly like an addict. His throat closed up, his head hurt, and his chest felt like it was about to burst open. With a choke and a sob, Eric ripped up the doctor’s list and watched the shredded pieces fall to the floor.

Suddenly feeling very guilty, he wailed sadly as he crumpled up the pieces into smaller bits so he wouldn’t have to read the hopeful words written there. He tossed the remains in the trash and slammed off his light.

He flopped onto his bed, jacket and shoes still on, and squeezed his eyes tight until he’d finally calmed down. His eyes were sore, and he’d never felt more alone, but at least he was starting to drift off now, as he silently cried himself to sleep.
He'd ditched school the next day. Practically locked in his room the whole time, only stepping out once for a glass of water and to make himself a healthy lunch. He ate (most of it) it outside, taking in the fresh air and clearing his mind.

When his mom came home he collapsed against her and sobbed into her chest. She wrapped her arms around him and promised him things will get better. That night when Tony came around, Eric marched himself up to his room right away and avoided all contact with that douche. By the time he flopped against his bed at the end of the night, he had smiled at the realization that he'd completed everything on his list.

He got out of bed, and made a new list; one with a warning on the top: 'Do Not Rip'. He placed it against his nightstand and turned off the light.

'O one step at a time', he reminded himself.

Chapter End Notes

Oof, this one was dark. It was kinda hard to get through.
I had to stop and take breaks a few times writing it to calm down. Fucking Tony... fuck him. Don't worry, he'll be gone soon.
Shut up, turds! It's Shelly's chapter!

Shelly meets Kevin McCormick.

(Also, P.S. Get psyched, because right at the top of my drafts I have an outline for a karaoke chapter for either Butters' or Craig's birthday that makes me so happy every time I look it, so watch out for that one later on! ;D)

POV - Shelly

"Oh Shelly," The beautifully dreamy voice of Tom Selleck drifted into Shelly's ears and cloaked her in a smooth blanket of velvet.

"Yesth Ththom Sthelleckkk?" She spat. Ugh, even in her dreams her stupid headgear got in her way.

"Run away with me, Shelly!" He picked her up and dipped her like one of those classic romance movies they were always watching in film class. "Run away with me and never look back!"

"I will Thhhom Thelleckh" Shelly drooled as she ripped her headgear out of her mouth and swallowed her spit.

"Mmmm, nice," Tom Selleck hummed as Shelly threw her headgear on the white sandy beach and stared into his eyes as they sparkled against the sunset. His magnificent mustache was glistening with sea water and his open Hawaiian shirt was billowing in the wind, revealing a tanned and oiled dad-bod that was also somehow very muscular.

"You're the most beautiful woman I've ever met, so much hotter than Jaqueline Ray, and she's a supermodel!"

"Wow, thankths Tom… and… I'm hotter than Courtney Cox?" She fluttered her lashes.

"Baby," Tom Selleck dramatically lifted Shelly up and flipped her around, dipping her with his other arm. "She can't hold a candle to you!" He declared boldly.

"Wow, and she's engaged to Johnny McDaid."

"You bet your ass, she is." Tom Selleck kissed Shelly dramatically and looked deep into her eyes. "Shelly…"

"Yes?"

"Oh, Shelly!"

"Yess?"
"I… aaaaa aaaaa aaaaa aaaaa!"

AAAA AAAAA AAAAA AAAAA. Shelly slammed her hand down on her alarm clock and threw it across the room for interrupting her right when she was about to run away with Tom Selleck.

"Breakfast is in 30 minutes!" Her mom's voice floated up from the kitchen.

"Thanks, Sharon!" Shelly called, pissed off that she didn't even have time to get back to her sexy beach dream.

She stumbled out of bed and rubbed her eyes as she took her headgear out of her mouth. Luckily she only needed to wear it at night these days, but she had literally had it since sixth grade, and she was starting to think the whole thing was just a scam to get her parents to pay for the orthodontist's boat house in Miami.

"Move, twerp!" She shoved her brother, Stan, out of the way just as he was walking into the bathroom with his towel.

"Ugh, bitch." She heard him mutter as she passed him.

"What did you say?" She dared him to repeat himself.

"Hurry up… please." He 'repeated'. Shelly smiled to herself wickedly.

"That's what I thought you said." She shoved him back and slammed the door in his face. Shelly still took great pride in the fact that she could still control her little brother, who was actually more like her big brother, if you factored in height.

Shelly took a look at herself in the mirror.

She looked fine. Nothing special, nothing to scoff at. She brushed her mousey hair and washed her face, then penciled in her usual smudged eyeliner until it looked mean. She brushed her teeth and washed up, made sure she smelled ok, and turned to leave. But first… Shelly covered Stan's toothbrush in shaving cream. She threw the door open and sauntered back to her room to change.

"All yours." She declared.

Stan glared at her as he stood up from the hallway floor and shuffled into the bathroom "Oh, come on!" She heard him yell. Shelly snickered as she heard him run his toothbrush under the sink, and then gag when he attempted to put it back in his mouth too soon.

Shelly was already sitting at the breakfast table, enjoying her pancakes, when Stan stomped down the stairs and tattled on her.

"Mom! Shelly covered my toothbrush in shaving cream, it couldn't even use it!"

"Randy!" Sharon turned towards her husband, who was scrolling through news on his computer and sipping some coffee.

He paused, looking around like he didn't know what to do. "Yes, Sharon?"

"Discipline your daughter!" She demanded. This should be good.

Shelly turned towards her dad and folded her hands, waiting for her 'discipline'.
Randy Marsh cleared his throat and closed his computer. He gently set down his coffee to the right of his computer, picked it up, took another sip, then placed it on the left side. He then picked it up one more time to move it to the right again. Shelly arched her eyebrows as he cleared his throat.


"Would you please just tell her this was wrong?! Shelly, this was very bad, you are not to cover Stan's toothbrush in shaving cream again!" Sharon yelled from where she stood watching incredulously from the stove.

"Young lady!" Randy added sternly for effect.

"Nice, Randy." Sharon rolled her eyes and handed Stan a pile of pancakes on a paper plate. "We'll get you a new toothbrush after school."

"Mom! You're just enabling her! Punish her!" Stan whined as he took his breakfast.

"Or what?" Shelly threatened. Stan narrowed his eyes and snatched his backpack from the banister.

"Whatever, I'm going to school."

"If you'd just wait five minutes I'll be ready to drive you!" Shelly snapped.

"I'D RATHER WALK!" Stan yelled as he slammed the front door.

Later on, as she was driving the slushy roads to school, Shelly spotted her brother. He was walking with his breakfast plate folded in his hands, he must've finished it. So, no harm done if that plate got a little wet, right?

Shelly rolled down her window and screamed "Hi, twerp!" Out her passenger window. As Stan turned around, Shelly gunned the engine towards the sidewalk, and splashed up all the slushy rain that was pooling in the gutters. Stan was soaked from his shoes to his hat, and it was the funniest thing Shelly had seen all day! She drove away laughing as he wiped his face and pulled out his phone, no doubt to tell on her. Little dweeb.

At the lunch line at school, Shelly was eyeing the last vanilla pudding when it was swiped by the asshole in front of her in line, the cripple: Jimmy Valmer.

"Hey I was watching that!" She yelled at him as he placed the pudding gingerly on his lunch tray.

"Well, g-gee, Sh-Shelly, I'm sorry b-but I was in l-li-line b-be-fore you so this p-pudding cup is rightfully m-m-mi-miiiiiiiine." Shelly was getting angry just listening to the loser fail to put a sentence together. He punctuated his way-too-long-sentence with a cocky smile a tilt of his head. Is this asshole serious right now?

"Hand it over, or I'll take it from you." Shelly lowered her voice threateningly.

"Well, you-u see, th-that's not really f-f-fair, you see, because a-as I said: I was here f-first, Sh-Shelly, and I w-would like to k-keep this pudding cup that I got-t t-to first, very much."

"Are you shittin' me, twerp? I swear I'll take it and you won't like how, now give it to me!" She
warned.

He opened his mouth in a shit-eating grin, "Over… my… d-dead… b-body."

The next thing Shelly knew she had kicked Jimmy's crutches out from under him and he was hitting the floor, hard. Screams and cries of fellow classmates filled the air around her and made her feel suffocated.

"What the f-fuck, bitch?" He must've hit his face on the railings on the way down because his lip was bleeding heavily. Shelly didn't care. She'd gotten her feelings out.

Tweek Tweak, of all fucking people, shoved her violently against the cafeteria railings. "Are you out of your goddamned mind?" He screamed at her as his friends helped dust Jimmy off and walk him to the nurse's office.

"Back off, psycho, or I will get you in a lot more trouble than you will me!" She retaliated.

"No you won't." The giant, Craig Tucker, stepped in between them, daring her make a move.

"Are you threatening me, freak?" She raised up her tippytoes to square up to his height — she still didn't make it to his eye level.

He just stood there silently as his twitchy boyfriend grabbed onto the back of his sleeve, face still furious and demeanor no more scared of Shelly than the deadpan Godzilla in front of her.

Craig Tucker was probably the only kid in the school who did scare Shelly.

"Shelly Marsh!" 'Fuck' Shelly groaned. "Come to the principal's office immediately!" One of the lunch ladies must have called for backup. A bunch of assholes clapped as shelly was carted off to seal her fate.

"Shelly Marsh, we're ready for you now." Shelly groaned as she stood up from the hallway chairs and dragged her feet into the principal's office, where her parents were already waiting for her.

"Sit." The principal demanded.

"Shelly, what has gotten into you?" Her mother hissed from the chair next to her.

"Attacking a cripple?" Her father chided from his seat.

"Excuse me, Mr. Marsh, but we like to use different terminology at this school." Principal Strong Woman requested.

"I'm sorry, 'assaulting' a cripple, Shelly?" Everyone rolled their eyes.

"This is a very serious offense, young lady, you are in so much trouble when you get home!" Her mother scolded.

"It is very serious, in fact with all the strikes on your record we have grounds to expel you, Shelly."

All three Marshes blanched and stared at Principal Woman.

"But… the only other school in the district is private… we can't afford that…"
"I know, Mrs. Marsh, that's why I'm doing everything I can to help keep Shelly in school. It's about time she graduates," Shelly clicked her tongue and ignored the shove her mother gave her to keep her in line. "So that's why I am proposing in-school suspension for the next three weeks. Now according to the board that's not enough, but three weeks is the maximum sentence to fit the crime, seeing as it wasn't a full on fight." Nothing this bitch said made any sense; what's the big deal, just send her to detention already! "So I have come up with a solution and it has already been approved." Principal Woman looked expectantly between the two parents. "It's a little unorthodox but… If Shelly is able to successfully complete the Anger Management course at the local Community Center, then she can return to school in either three weeks, or when she has completed the course, whichever comes first."

Shelly's parent's sighed in relief but Shelly dropped her jaw in disbelief. "Anger Management?"

"Yes, Shelly, this is a very good deal. I suggest you take it."

That was it, end of discussion. Shelly's parents begged with her until she agreed to take the deal, and she was carted off to an unoccupied room where she would hide out the rest of the afternoon for her in-school suspension. 'This blows'.

After school, Shelly was escorted from her classroom prison straight to her father's car.

"Hello, Shelly. Ready to go?" He greeted her.

"Bite me!" She responded.

"Okie dokie." He turned around and reversed out of the parking lot.

Randy tapped his fingers in the wheel awkwardly as Shelly fumed next to him.

He reached his hand toward the dial, "Would you like some radio?"

"No!" She snapped.

"Ok then." Randy Marsh recoiled his hand and they drove to the Community Center in silence.

"I'm not going in there," She demanded.

Randy rubbed his temples in frustration. "You have to, honey, if you don't go you will get suspended and then you'll never graduate high school."

She crossed her arms across her chest, "I'll get my GED." She reasoned.

He sneered, "No one with a decent job has a GED."

Shelly scoffed, "that's SO not true dad, that's such an old misconception."

He paused. "Go in the building, Shelly."

"No."

"Sheeeeeelly."
"Nooooooo."

"Shelly!"

"No!"

Next thing she knew her father was wrestling her out of her seatbelt and dragging her out of the car, kicking and screaming the whole way into the building.

She stopped throwing her tantrum when she realized she was now at the head of a giant group of people all staring at her.

"Hello, I'm here to drop off my daughter, Shelly, for Anger Management." Randy chirped happily, arms still holding Shelly up by the armpits.

"Please… have a seat." The perplexed group leader pointed to an open chair in the circle.

Shelly dead-weighted, forcing her dad to literally drag her to her seat, ignoring his protests of 'No, Shelly, Sheeeeeelly,' the whole way there.

Once she was in her seat, her dad waved to the group. "Bye guys, I'll pick you up later sweetie," and clumsily jogged away, embarrassed. She'd never seen him run that fast in his life.

The group leader blinked at the retreating figure for a moment, before introducing himself. "Ok… Well to all the new members, I'm Eugene, but you cal call me Gene. I'm actually a veteran of the program, so that's how I know it works. If you'll just give it time I promise you'll see results. Now, let's go around the room and introduce ourselves." The sound of heavy metal handles slamming into the nearby walls reverberated throughout the tiny building.

All eyes darted to the entrance of the building, where the doors had swung open to reveal a tall, finely chiseled boy in studded black boots, ripped black jeans, and a black denim vest draped casually over his maroon and black t-shirt. He stomped lazily over to the group as he ran his fingers through his slicked backed hair, shaved up one side with long pieces of bangs falling in front of his smoldering eyes. He looked like he'd just stepped out of a Johnny Depp wet-dream. Chains clinked gently against his hip as he strolled to the complimentary buffet and went straight for the coffee.

"Ah, Kevin, I was hoping we'd see you today." 'Kevin'. Mid sip of coffee, the teen boy swirled around smoothly, and gave a dramatic bow, crossing his ankles and outstretching his arm. Shelly noticed a small tattoo in the inner part of his bicep, but she wasn't sure what it said.

"Please, take a seat, we're about to get started." Kevin strolled over to an empty seat, stopped, and make a bee-line for the empty seat next to Shelly instead. Damn, this boy seemed more coolly-unhinged than Craig Tucker.

Shelly felt Kevin slouch back into the seat next to her and begin to tap his foot like a jackhammer. She tried to ignore the tingling feeling of electricity shooting through her body at his close proximity to her. He reminded her so much of someone, but she couldn't quite put the pieces together just yet. She felt irresistible urge, a need to look at him, she was almost convinced he had magnets in the back of his eyes.

She slowly turned her head to glance at him only to realize that he was already staring at her, head tilted and brow cocked. She stared back at him, eyes wide and lips slacked. He raised his coffee cup to cover his smirk, but Shelly could clearly see it dancing behind his eyes.

The moderator's voice pulled her attention and she looked away from this new mysterious boy...
sitting next to her.

He nudged her uncrossed leg, accidentally knocking her off balance. She turned to glare at him, only to see him smiling at her.

"Welcome to the group," he winked. Shelly sat paralyzed, as confusion and buzzing filled her head. He chuckled as he brought the coffee cup to his lips again and faced the front of the room, leaving Shelly to inwardly obsess about the strange boy next to her. She did not pay one second of attention to Anger Management.

As the meeting wrapped up, Shelly stood to gather her things. She had just finished shrugging her coat on when she heard a small clicking/whistling sound to her left. Kevin was holding her purse out for her, along with what appeared to be his cell phone number written on a napkin. When did he write this? Did he just carry these around in his pocket with him?

She stared at him skeptically as she took her purse and slung it over her shoulder. "Thanks, I guess." He nodded and walked towards the doors, leaving her behind. She was about to call him a jerk when she realized — way at the other end of the building — he was holding the door open for everyone, and waiting for her.

She looked around at the quickly emptying room to see if he could possibly be waiting for anybody else. "Marsh!" He called to her turned back. Her eyes went wide. How did he know her name? She whipped around to find him lazily waving her over. She took small but quick steps towards him, giving him a questioning look the whole way.

"What's the deal?" She asked when she reached him, still unsure what to make of this whole interaction.

"I wanted to walk you out." He smiled charmingly and gestured for her to leave through the doors. She didn't. More people filtered between them but Shelly stayed planted in the doorway. He frowned at her but stubbornly said nothing.

"Nice to see you, Kevin." Gene clapped him on the shoulder as he passed, turning off the lights and waiting for Shelly to exit so he could lock the doors.

"Well you can't stand there all night." Kevin mused with a lopsided smirk that made Shelly feel off-balance.

She wordlessly crossed the threshold to meet Kevin in the hallway. She trailed a little ways behind him as they walked out of the building towards the parking lot.

"You got a ride?" He wondered, finishing off the rest of his coffee from the meeting.

"My dad's coming to get me, she admitted." He nodded understandingly and tossed his cup in the trash.

He leaned against a nearby pillar to look at her, and she rested her weight against the opposite pillar she already had pressed against her back. He crossed his legs at the ankle and folded his arms across his chest.

"You've changed." He mused, looking her up and down. Shelly felt confusion and anger rising crimson up her neck.
"How do I know you?" She snapped defensively.

Kevin gestured to himself disbelievingly, "Wait, you really don't recognize me? I mean I know it's been a few years..." Wait.

"Mc-McCormick?" She couldn't believe it.

He smiled and spread his arms wide "In the flesh." Man, he'd *matured*. She did not even *recognize* him. Shelly and Kevin had practically grown up together. They'd had a small secret fling together when she was in 7th grade and he was in 8th. She still remembers their first kiss, when his braces got tangled up in her headgear. It ended up being quite painful. That was 7 years ago. Then he went off to high school, and the following year Shelly had to repeat 8th grade, and then by his Junior year he had dropped out and she'd never seen or heard from him again. The memories of that first day Freshman year, wandering the school yard looking for him made her chest hurt.

"Wow." She looked him up and down with a grin, biting the corner of her lip nervously.

He tipped his head in a chuckle as soft locks of hair fell in front of his sharp face "Same old Shelly", he mused.

He fished in his vest pocket for a pack of cigarettes. He pulled a pinched-off, half-smoked one out of the box and attempted to re-light it. He nodded jerkily towards Shelly with eyebrows raised. "Want one?" He mumbled, teeth clenched around the cigarette as smoke poured out of the corner of his mouth. He tossed her the pack.

Damn. It had been a long time since she'd smoked a cigarette.

She opened the pack. They smelled like him. He'd still smoked the same brand he used to steal from his mother in 8th grade — and he clearly chewed the same cinnamon gum as well since the whole pack smelled faintly of Big Red.

She stared at him as she took one out. She stared at him as she walked up to him. She watched him deliberately, half-sure that he would disappear again. This was somehow a new and dangerous boy, but also the same old Kevin McCormick she used to know. It was exciting.

He pushed off the pillar and took a step closer to her, lighting her cigarette in one swift motion. He stared down into her eyes intensely, and Shelly felt hypnotized as she took a sharp inhale. In inexperience, she immediately lost herself in a coughing fit, and she could hear Kevin cracking up in front of her.

He wiped imaginary tears from his eyes *'always with the theatrics, this one'* and breathed deeply, lips lazily wrapped around his cigarette.

"Been a while?" He teased her.

"Yeah, 7 years."

She stared at him pointedly as she took a smaller drag, only coughing a little bit this time.

His smile started to drop off his face, but then he brought it back with a snicker. "Man, if I knew you were still rocking the metal I would have put on my old braces back on too." He smirked.

She shoved him in the arm, "Fucking dick." She muttered. "'Same old Kevin' I guess." She taunted.
"I guess." He admitted.

They stood in silence for a while.

"Are you sure your dad is coming?" He asked her.

"Yes." She replied shortly.

"Ok." He paused to smoke a little.

"...So..." inhale "...Shelly Marsh..." He gave her a slow, deliberate once-over. Her heart fluttered dangerously under his wolfish gaze. He grinned. Exhale. "...what are you in for?"

Shelly gulped, "What?"

"The Anger Management? Why are you here?" He asked her innocently.

She rolled her eyes, embarrassed, "My school made me come."

"You still go to school?" He questioned.

"Yes!" She shot back.

"No, I think that's cool! I wish I'd had the guts to stick it out." He looked like he was being honest.

"Oh." She spoke softly. "Well, thanks I guess." He nodded and inhaled more of his poison. She did the same "Well, what about you?" She questioned. "What are you... you know, 'in for'?"

He exhaled. "Court-ordered," he admitted flatly.

"Oh."

"Yeah."

They smoked in silence.

"Hey, minnow?" He offered gently.

Her heart skipped. Kevin's voice rang in her head: 'Because your headgear makes you look like a shark.'

"What, shark?" 'But I want to be the shark.'

"I don't think you're dad's coming—"

"He's coming!" She cut him off.

Kevin walked over to the ledge of the concrete stairs and jumped up to sit on the edge. Shelly walked over as if there was an invisible string tethering him to herself. She didn't want to get too far away from him again.

"Hey," he called to her when she got close to him again. "Let's go out again sometime," he suggested nonchalantly, "catch up, hook up, whatever."

"Is that a joke?" She scoffed.

"Did I stutter?" He held her gaze sternly. Eyes and lips unmoving as his fingers curled nervously
against the ledge. He puffed smoke out of his nose, and inhaled again through his mouth.

Shelly's cell phone dinged. It was a message from her dad:

*From Dad: So sorry, Shelly, the game was on so I couldn't leave. You have bus fare, right honey?*

Shelly whimpered angrily at her screen. "My dad's not coming." She admitted.

"I'll take you home." Kevin offered.

"Is there a bus around here?" She wondered.

"I'll take you home, Shelly." He sighed.

"I'm fine, really, I'll just find out where the closest bus stop it is—"

"Marsh!" Shelly looked up and lost herself in his crooked smile. Kevin took his finished cigarette out of his mouth and stomped it against the concrete with the heel of his hand. "It's ok. I'll take you home, it's no big deal, honest."

Shelly looked at him apologetically, "Are you sure?" She bit her lip and stared up into warm hazel eyes.

"My 8th grade self would be so jealous if he could see me right now." Kevin joked.

Shelly bit her lip to hide her laugh. "Whatever."

"Do you want to get going?" He offered half-heartedly.

"No." She admitted honestly. She took another drag of her cigarette and shivered.

"Oh! Hold on!" He called as he ran to his car. "Hold on!"

"Where are you going?" She asked him. He went into the back of his car, and pulled out a black sweatshirt. He inspected it, dusted something off of it, and jogged it over to her.

"If we're sticking around..." He draped the warm jacket over her shoulders. His breath was so close to her ear and his voice was so much lower than she remembered. God help Shelly if Kevin said anything nice to her right now. He smiled at her, "...I don't want you to be cold." Her knees almost gave out. She smiled shyly at him. Kevin's hand was still lingering on Shelly's shoulder. It really felt like they went back in time. Apparently that wasn't such a good thing.

Kevin cleared his throat and took a step back from Shelly, and just like that their time machine had malfunctioned. He took a new cigarette from his pocket, and placed it between his teeth as he fished for his lighter.

"Why are you being so nice to me?" Shelly wondered out loud.

Kevin froze, lighter flame inches away from the end of his cigarette as he stared into her eyes. He seemed to be searching for something but she wasn't sure what. After a beat of hesitation he clumsily chewed out "You've got huge tits."
...Shelly widened her eyes in shock. After a moment, Kevin's mask fell, and his awkward smile erupted into laughter. That jerk!

Then Shelly started laughing hysterically. "I'm sorry!" He laughed, "I'm sorry, it was a joke! Don't hate me, Shelly, please?" She punched him in the elbow and he only laughed harder.

"You, asshole." She muttered.

"Yeah." He agreed. "They are..." he bit his lip "not half bad though." He leaned forward with his elbows resting against his knees as he stared down at her smugly. She rolled her eyes.

Shelly stepped closer, until she was standing mere inches away from him. His body stiffened. She reached around to the outer edge of his thigh and tapped her cigarette against the concrete. She pinched the ends together, and held it out in front of him. "Just take me home." She demanded.

He took the cigarette from her and put it back inside his pack. He saved his own mostly-new cigarette and put that one away too. Kevin McCormick was never one to waste things.

They walked to the car, and Shelly hung back a little bit. "Hey, McCormick." She called. He turned around. "Where did you go?" He looked confused as he tried to come up with a fitting answer.

"I've been right here the whole time."

"No." She corrected. "Where did you go?"

Kevin sighed and walked up to her. He wrapped an arm around around her tentatively and pulled her into an awkward hug. Shelly's arms twitched where they lay at her sides. Cautiously, she lifted them up and curled them underneath his broad shoulder blades. "I know," He whispered into her hair, "I know, I'm sorry." It was like they had transported through time and were right back to that night before high school; when they had made empty promises to each other underneath the stars. The night they decided to be friends... until they'd meet again.

The drive home was fairly quiet, Shelly kept Kevin's sweatshirt on as they drove through town with the windows down. At a stop light, he offered her a stick of Big Red. It felt just like old times.

When they pulled up in front of her house they turned to face each other.

"Well," he shrugged. "Here we are."

"Thanks for driving me home." She made started to shrug of the sweatshirt.

He put a hand on her shoulder to stop the movement. "Keep it," He told her. She stared at him. It had been a long time since they'd last even seen each other, let alone touched or kissed or held each other again. Kevin's thumb was rubbing against the thick fabric of his sweatshirt absently. "If you want it, I mean."

"Oh, I want it," Shelly purred as she leaned in and planted a small kiss to his mouth. He kissed her back tentatively, sweetly, innocently. Shelly pulled back just as he started to get heated, and she felt her gaze burning into him, "and I always get what I want." His jaw dropped. She winked at him slyly as she slinked out of his car. Shelly turned and looked at him one last time with her hands clasped together under her chin. Kevin McCormick — all grown up. She flipped him the double
birds, and smirked as she bent them into the shape of a heart with her thumbs. Kevin's eyes sparkled as he laughed at the familiar gesture, and he playfully mirrored it back to her, in the reverse.

She waved goodbye to him as he drove off, fingers clutching tightly to the pen-stained napkin in her pocket.
Gooooooood Morning, South Park!

Chapter Summary

I decided to write a small little Wednesday morning text thread just to spice up Style’s story line a little bit.

Next will be Bunny, and then a rollercoaster of a Creek thread.

*If anyone’s interested, I wrote this chapter listening to my favorite cynical song, “No Children” by the Mountain Goats! :D

POV - Stan

“Gooooooood Morning, South Park!” The radio announcers shrill voices assaulted Stan’s ears at 7:00am. It was too early. “It’s ‘Mayhem in the Morning’ with the 7:00 show, up next we’ve got Ariana Grande with her new song—”

Stan shut off his alarm clock and sat up in bed. He was sweating like a pig, cold and shaky. ‘This is gonna be a shitty day,’ he thought to himself. In preparation for his shitty day, Stan took the small bottle of Blackberry Brandy from his nightstand (something he’d swiped from a party a few weekends ago) and took a sip. If nothing else, it would numb his pounding head. Plus it tasted delicious. Stan told himself that was the real reason he kept it around. He wouldn’t tell himself any differently.

He opened his phone to text Kyle to let him know he was sick, but saw that Kyle had beat him to it.

From Kyle: Hey Dude! Ready for a Shelly-free day? Followed by an emoji of ‘rock-and-roll-hands’, a winking face with it’s tongue out, and then a middle finger emoji.

‘Oh yeah!’ Stan thought to himself, ‘Shelly will be locked up in in-school suspension all day!’ Suddenly spending the day at home didn’t sound as fun as being at school, with his Super Best Friend, making fun of his sister in her misery.

To Kyle: Yeah Dude! I can’t believe she beat up Jimmy. He’s the nicest guy in our class!

From Kyle: Yeah
From Kyle: I’m sorry she made your morning shitty yesterday

To Kyle: Shelly always makes my mornings shitty

From Kyle: I’ll walk with you today if you want

To Kyle: Yes please

From Kyle: Kyle had send a GIF of Michelle from Full House, holding up her little thumbs and saying ‘You Got It Dude!’ Kyle was so dumb…

Stan’s smile morphed into a frown as his phone gave another ‘ding!’

From Wendy: Hey babe! Don’t forget, we have a debate team dinner after school.

Stan rolled his eyes. He hated going to things with Wendy. It was always ‘debate team this’ and ‘student body president that’, and never anything Stan wanted to do.

She’d never even stayed for an entire football game of his.

From Wendy: Wear something nice.

Stan groaned.

To Wendy: Do I have to go? It’s just a stupid student-run dinner party at Bebe’s house, it’s not even official school business.

Wendy was typing.

To Wendy: It’s not even on a weekend!

Well, that was it I guess. Stan's head was still pounding but he was starting to feel better. He must've just been tired. He took one more swig from his bottle and put it away again.

At least school wasn't going to suck as much.
Is it Fair to Say "I'll Miss You"?

Chapter Summary

Fucking RIP MY HEART OUT, it’s a Bunny Chapter!

Woof, it's a lot.

-Shout-out to daisies symbolizing “innocent death” (don’t worry, Kenny is safe with me, I just thought it was fitting given his cartoon counterpart’s death record… and that time he got high off flowers… anyway…)

**credit for the small moment of lyrics I have goes to Paul Simon and Art Garkfunkel, I do not own those lyrics.*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

POV - Kenny

“You can’t laugh at me!” Karen pleaded.

“I won’t, unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

…

Kenny could feel the burning glare, even with Karen turned around. “Come on, this is silly.” He told her.

Karen had come out of her room, and refused to let Kenny see her face. She told him it was embarrassing, but that this was her new look now, and he just had to get used to it — like he would even care about what his baby sister wants to put on her face. It’s her face! Only she wouldn’t even let him see it. He was honestly expecting clown makeup, the way she was overdramatizing it.


Karen turned around slowly. She looked like she had been made up by Henrietta all right, but it didn’t look bad, it wasn’t even too much. Karen always made such a big deal out of everything.

“What’s with the makeup?” Kenny asked her jokingly. Bad move.

She crossed her arms, “I like it, and I’m wearing it!” Karen demanded defensively. Kenny knew if he even so much as made a face in jest she would march right back inside and wash it off. So he smiled.

“I like it too, it looks cool! Like you could kick someone’s ass and still be sweet about it.” Karen
rolled her eyes. “Or that, that looks pretty cool rimmed in black too.” She threw a couch pillow at him as she passed it on her way to the kitchen.

They sat down to share a packet of Pop Tarts as Kevin walked in from his room down the hall.

“You’re up early.” Kenny commented. “Reasonable night in?”

“I couldn’t sleep.” He mumbled, a smile dancing on the corner of his lips. “I’m gonna go to bed after coffee.” Weird, but not necessarily unusual for sober Kevin.

‘At least he’s not hungover.’ Kenny thought to himself.

“What’s with the grin? What’d you do last night?” Kenny questioned suggestively as he bit into his Pop Tart.

“I went to… ‘class,’” Kevin always referred to his Anger Management course as some kind of a ‘class’ in front of Karen, as if she didn’t already know everything about this family. She may be the baby, but she is hands down the smartest one.

Kevin continued, “and it actually went pretty well. I ran into someone I hadn’t seen in a long time. We talked and—” Kevin took one look at Karen and paused, cigarette poised in his mouth.

“Why does she look like that?” He chewed around his disgusting habit.

“Don’t smoke in the house.” Kenny growled as he ripped the vile thing from Kevin’s mouth.

Kevin narrowed his eyes dubiously and gestured to all the cigarette butts and discarded beer cans lying around their crappy house. ‘Well, he doesn’t have to contribute.’

Karen looked down self-consciously, “Does it look bad?” Her small voice filled the room.

“No.” Kenny told her, probably too quickly.

“I’m asking Kevin.” She snapped as she glared at him. Kenny looked at his brother and mentally begged him to not be a jerk.

Kevin stared at her critically, then at Kenny, then back to Karen. “No.” He told her simply.

“Are you sure?” She asked him again.

“Yeah.” He grinned the signature McCormick grin. “Looks cute.” He ruffled her hair on his way out of the kitchen. Kenny was just thankful Kevin was actually in a good mood this morning.

He turned to Karen smugly, “See?” He told her.

“Whatever.” She tried to hide her smile as she stood up from the table.

“Mom?” Kenny knocked as he nudged his parents’ bedroom door open. He noticed his mother still in bed. She stirred when he entered the room.

“Hey, baby.” She greeted him with a smile.

“We’re leaving for school.” He sat on the edge of her bed. “You gonna try and look for a job today?” He asked her pointedly.
“Yes, sweetie, your father and I will both go look today.” Kenny hoped he was mishearing things.

“You and who?”

Just then, his father walked out of the bathroom. “Hey, son!” He slurred. “Off to school?”

“Yes.” Kenny clenched his teeth. “Off to get a job, I hear?” He tried to control his tone but it was really hard.

“Yeah, I was fired from my last job ‘cause my boss had a stick up his ass f’r me takin’ too many sick days ‘r somethin’, but I’m gonna go out ‘n’ find a good one today, I promise!” That was Stuart: always somebody else to blame, always empty promises to make.

Kenny wanted to scream, he wanted to throw things, he wanted to shake some sense into his fucking parents. Instead, he took a deep breath; he did what he knew was the best for the situation.

“Well, good luck today. I hope you find something.” He bid shortly and closed the door.

“Do I really look ok?” Karen fidgeted with her hair as Kenny walked her to school.

“For the millionth time, yes, you look beautiful.” Kenny tried to convince her.

She scoffed and rolled her eyes, “You have to say that” she retorted.

“Why are you so stressed? Chill out.” Kenny offered. It was probably the wrong choice.

“We can’t all be so happy to be wearing the same bright orange…fashion… train wreck day-in, day-out,” she hissed quietly. It was as mean as she would ever be, sweet thing.

“You look perfect, leave it alone or it will frizz out.” He told her.

That stopped her in her tracks. Karen put her phone away and stopped looking into its camera. She tucked one side behind her ear, pulled some front pieces out.

“Good, now let’s go.”

They’d just gotten to the front lawn of the school when Ike Broflovski stopped them in their tracks.

“Hi, Karen.” He looked at her nervously, like she was something daunting and intimidating. ‘But why, it’s Karen?’

She smiled, “Hi, Ike!” Karen hugged him warmly, while he blushed like a maniac. Do maniacs blush? Anyway, Ike blushed a lot.

“You look nice.” Ike offered over stumbled words and over-confident airs. Karen looked down as she brushed the rest of her hair behind her ear.

“Thanks.” She smiled at him shyly. He grinned at her stupidly.

“Oh! Hi, Kenny,” he was offered, as an afterthought.

“Nice to see you Ike,” Kenny laughed. “Where’s Kyle?”
“Oh he’s over there with Stan.” Ike pointed.

“Cool. Later!” He gave Karen a quick pat on the shoulder and made his way over to the front steps of the school.

“Hey dude,” Kenny nudged Kyle, “I think your brother is into my sister.”

“I’m sorry for your sister.” Kyle chuckled sarcastically. It was half-hearted. Kyle was never much good at hiding his emotions.

“You ok, man?” Kenny asked lightly. Kyle nodded towards where Stan was fighting with Wendy. Of course.

“He should break up with her.” Kyle stated sadly.

“He should.” Kenny agreed.

“And go out with me, instead.” Kyle added quietly.

“One thing at a time, buddy.” Kenny patted Kyle’s back affectionately.

“Heya fellas!” Butters bounced up to Kyle and Kenny, brushing Kenny’s shoulder lightly as he passed him. Kenny could almost feel butterflies rising up from his stomach and escaping through the gap in his teeth.

“Heya, Butters!” Kenny stiffened, “Where’s your dad?”

Butters faked a smile, as he plastered on a show-y voice, “Right behind you, you betcha! I’m lookin’ at him right now!” Butters waved.

Kenny frowned. “Great,” He said flatly. Butters stared up at him apologetically.

Kenny didn’t know what to say. There wasn’t much he could say with Butters’ dad watching from just a few feet away. He wanted so badly to reach for him, to run his fingers through his hair or wrap him in an embrace, to touch him somehow—

“Hey, is that a new watch?” Kenny pointed at Butters’ wrist.

“Why, no, Kenny!” He exclaimed, with all the grace of a bad actor, “It’s the same one I always wear. You’ve never noticed it? Why don’tcha check it out?” Butters shoved his hand towards Kenny, who took it gently. He tried not to be obvious as he softly traced his fingers over the back of Butters’ hand. Butters sighed shakily as his eyebrows knitted together in conflict. He refused to meet Kenny’s eyes.

“It’s cool,” Kenny said thickly. He felt a thumb run along the inside of his wrist.

Butters nodded nervously, “Yep! It’s digital and everything!” he wrapped his tiny fingers around Kenny’s and squeezed, eyes never leaving his dad’s open passenger window.

Kenny leaned in sightly, “Want to come over after school?” He murmured gently.

Butters stepped closer to Kenny and spoke under his breath, “My dad is taking the late shift tonight, so he’ll be there after school. You can come over to my house.” He paused before looking up at him and smiling slyly, “When he leaves we can have the whole place to ourselves.”

Kenny’s heart skipped a beat. He knew the real reason they had to go to Butters’ was because his
stupid father kept tabs on his 16 year old son like he was under house arrest. But having the whole house, alone, all night, with his secret boyfriend… that was certainly reason enough in itself.

Butters, still smiling, looked back over the taller boy’s shoulder. His smile faded instantly as his face paled. He cleared his throat nervously.

Kenny stepped away from Butters and straightened his back. “Kyle, look at Butters’ watch please.” He begged quietly, eyes never leaving Butters’ absent face.

“Oh…” Kyle grabbed Butters’ hand the way Kenny did. “Um… it’s cool… I like the colors.” Kyle suggested clumsily.

“Thanks Kyle, you’re a real pal.” Butters’ voice was blank, eyes still trained on his father’s car. Kenny caught Butters’ hand again, giving his palm light squeeze, silently pleading, ‘look at me!’, but he only shook his head: ‘no.’

Kenny dropped Butters’ hand and sighed.

“I know.” He heard the lighter-blond murmur gently, mouth barely moving.

But when Kenny looked up he saw nothing but a stone cold statue.

They stood in silence for a moment, before Butters’ shoulders relaxed and his gaze softened as his eyes followed the green car out of the parking lot. He sighed in relief, “I believe I forgot to formally say ‘hello’ to you gentlemen this morning,” Butters observed casually.

Desperately, Kenny grabbed Butters and instantly pulled him in, wrapping both arms tightly around the smaller boy. Kenny himself was only 5’5”, and had always been the runt of the group. But little Butters, who was only about 5’2”/5’3” or so, was even tinier, and a million times more fragile. Leo was breakable. Kenny vowed a long time ago that he would never break this smaller boy’s heart. And though he knew this morning had done a number on him, there was nothing more he could do to make it better. In a way, he felt that was worse.

Kenny felt delicate hands tangling themselves in his messy hair. “I miss you,” Butters whispered against his chest, in a voice that was barely audible, and completely earth shattering.

Kenny’s heart sunk. He rested his cheek against Butter’s soft hair and squeezed his eyes shut. “Me too.” He admitted vulnerably. He wanted so badly to whisk him away, to hold him and keep him safe somewhere where he could never be hurt or worried again.

Butters’ squeezed him tightly. “I’m sorry.” He choked out.

“Don’t be.” Kenny said simply. He couldn’t say anything more. He didn’t trust himself to say anything more… because…

…They were still at school…

Kenny opened his eyes, the spell was broken. Kids were shuffling by, cars were cycling through the parking lot, and Kyle was still standing awkwardly off to the side with a sympathetic look on his face. Time hadn’t stopped and the sky hadn’t fallen.

Kenny sighed in defeat and put his hands on Butters’ shoulders to gently push him back. He had to give it a few tries before Butters finally let go.

“I’ll see you in Spanish.” He said sadly as he walked away. Kenny said nothing as he felt Butters’
hand slip from his own.

Kenny stared after him, face twisted into what he was sure looked like a toss up between anguish, pain, and nausea.

Kenny felt Kyle rub his shoulder sympathetically.

Kenny sighed as he tried to clear his head. He didn’t like the way Kyle was looking at him: like someone had died. It wasn’t that serious.

Kenny shook off the darkness and plastered a smile on his face.

“I’m fine Kyle, really.” He tried to be convincing.

Kyle frowned and looked at him skeptically. “Are you sure?”

Of course he was fine, “Yep!” Kenny always was.

At that moment, Stan walked over to the group loosening his tie and muttering to himself. Wendy must’ve really gotten under his skin this time.

He grumbled, “Hey guys,” and threw his tie on the floor.

“Hey— wow! You like nice, Stan, what’s the occasion?” Kenny mused as Kyle bent down to retrieve Stan’s discarded tie.

Stan spoke as Kyle wordlessly placed it back around the brunette’s collar and straightened it out. “Thanks, Kyle — Ugh, Wendy is being such a bitch! We have this stupid, stupid student-run, no-faculty, basically-just-an-excuse-to-play-dinner-party ‘debate team’ dinner tonight — on a Wednesday night! — and she’s making me go, and did I mention it was stupid?!” Kenny tried not to laugh at the domestic scene in front of him. “She texted me before school, ‘wear something nice!’—”

“Wendy’s voice isn’t that screechy.” Kenny snickered at Stan’s impression.

“—and when I got here, she told me I wore the wrong color! Like, what does she want from me? I wore a stupid dress shirt, and I wore a stupid tie, does it really matter if it’s blue!? Now she ‘can’t wear’ her purple dress because it won’t match and ‘we have to match, Stan!’ ‘Impressions matter, Stan!’” Kenny and Kyle were both chuckling under their breath at this point. Stan’s voice-cracking, falsetto, hacking, nails-on-a-chalkboard Wendy impression was (aside from the voice) way too accurate, cocked hip and everything. Kenny supposed if anyone knew exactly what Wendy was like when she was mad, it was Stan.

“And she’s all, ‘you never listen to me, Stan! This is Sophomore Homecoming all over again!’ ‘How are people supposed to take us seriously as a couple when you undermine everything that I do?’ Like she doesn’t do that to me way more often…”

“Not helping your case bro.” Kenny laughed.


“You probably asked nicely.” Kenny chuckled and braced himself for the shove that followed.

“Shelly alert.” Kyle changed the subject. Just as well, the redhead was starting to blush now anyway.
The three boys turned and watched Shelly Marsh stomp from her car inside the building, where she was picked up by a school counselor and most likely walked to her suspension room.

“What’s she wearing?” Stan wondered out loud. Kenny felt like he’d seen that ugly, black, oversized, and hole-riddled sweatshirt before, but he couldn’t really think of where.

“That’s clearly a men’s sweatshirt.” Kyle observed.

“Hm. Looks like Shelly hooked up with someone last night.” Kenny joked.

“At Anger Management?” Stan chuckled disbelievingly.

“Anger Management?” Kyle and Kenny both questioned, jaws hitting the floor.

“Yeah, the school made her go, it was like her fifth strike or something like that and it was either that or expulsion so…” Stan trailed off.

“Anger management…” Kyle repeated incredulously.

Oh. My. God.

Kenny burst out laughing.

Stan looked at him quizzically, “What?”

“That’s Kevin’s sweatshirt, dude!” He laughed.

“Nuh-uh.” Stan looked shocked.

“She ran into Kevin at fucking Anger Management, and how she has his sweatshirt!” Kenny guffawed.

“Ew, Kenny, I don’t like what you’re insinuating.” Stan looked like he wanted to puke.

“No wonder he looked so fucking smug this morning!” Kenny was practically doubled over laughing by the time Kyle broke the tension and spoke up.

“Come on Stan,” he tried to comfort him, “that’s a good thing!” He snickered, “Maybe if Shelly gets laid, she’ll chill the fuck out!” Kenny and Kyle were both howling and slapping each other by the time Eric Cartman walked up to the group.

“Hey dudes, what’s going on?” He asked with a smirk.

“Shelly’s shacking up with Kevin.” Kenny answered, wiping tears from his eyes.

“She’s not ‘shacking up with him’, Stan argued. “And ‘ew’, I don’t want to think about this, it’s gross.”

“Yeah, she is pretty gross.” Cartman agreed, clearly not reading the room.

Kyle rolled his eyes. Kenny facepalmed. Stan shot Cartman the ugliest death glare you’ve ever seen.

It was the last straw.

“I meant the situation, fat-ass, not my sister.” Stan clarified angrily.
To Kenny’s — and probably everyone’s — surprise, Cartman didn’t retaliate, he didn’t even yell; he took a deep breath, closed his eyes and spoke calmly, if not also a little condescendingly: “Please do-not call me fat, you whipped — I mean Stan — it-hurts-my-feelings. It’s not my fault I am not a mind reader, and I thought you agreed that your bitch sister is gross because you are not fucking blind. I… I apologize if I hurt your feelings in-an-y-way.” Cartman raised his eyebrows and looked at Stan expectantly, like he was waiting for something.

“I… accept your apology?” Stan asked more than answered.

“Great, now if you’ll excuse me I’m going to head off to class before one of you losers makes me lose my cool again. Later, nerds!” Cartman called as he walked away.

Wow.

“That was new.” Stan commented.

“That was pretty cool.” Kyle agreed.

The first bell rang and the trio made their way into the building for their first classes.

By the end of the day, Kenny practically ran to his last class, Spanish, excited to sit next to his ‘good pal’, Butters.

“Leo,” he drawled as he slumped into his chair. “Man, it has been a day! I’m so ready for it to be over!”

Butters blushed lightly at the mention of his real name. “Me too, Kenny, can’t wait for you to come over to my house later.”

Kenny winked at him and the blush only deepened.

Kenny loved making Butters shy.

“Ready to go?” Butters was practically bouncing on his toes as he was waiting for Kenny to pack up his things for the end of the day.

“Just about.” Kenny laughed.

“How long has it been?” Butters asked eagerly.

Kenny didn’t even need to count.

“Three weeks.”

It had been three weeks since they’d last been alone together, if you don’t count stolen kisses when Kenny’s million family members’ backs were turned or the small moments they were spared supervision at Butters’ house. Or Monday morning under the stairwell, but that was just stupid and risky. It was Kenny’s favorite…

Kenny loved Butters. Like full-on, never felt this way, never needed to again, never need another man or woman, wholly satisfied kind of love. He didn’t want to get ahead of himself, but his most shameless fantasy involved packing up and moving Butters to a different town, or a different state
even, and marrying him right then and there the minute they both turned eighteen. Kenny would work tirelessly to give his husband the education he deserved, Butters would become successful, and return the favor so Kenny could eventually get a proper job of his own. They’d start small and save money along the way, but eventually they would be able to afford a house with extra rooms and a swing set in the back. And once they had a ‘stable home’ with two full-time working parents, they would adopt a little blond kid of their own, that most likely, coincidentally looked like the spitting image of Butters as a baby. The baby’s Aunt Karen would move into town and practically live at their house, and when friends came to visit they would stay for weeks because of how freaking adorable their life together is.

He knew this was a very specific type of dream, and he knew it was a long shot; you can’t control things that are so far ahead in the future. But it was fun to think about while he was laying in bed at night and wishing he had a small warm body to hold on to and sing to sleep. As long as Kenny spent every last moment alive with Leopold Stotch, he didn’t care what the future held for him.

"Lead the way."

As they walked to Butters’ house they passed a lot of people they knew. They kept it casual and talked about the cover story they would use when Stephen interrogated Kenny later.

Eventually though, they turned down a sparsely populated street and were finally somewhat alone. Butters reached out with a tentative hand, and entwined their fingers together carefully. Kenny smiled. He tried not to worry about how impulsive it was to be holding hands a block away from Butters’ house. All thoughts left his head completely when Butters started tracing his thumb up and down along Kenny’s hand. Well, not all thoughts; some very dirty thoughts still remained.

“My dad leaves at four.” Butters was saying. “His shift technically starts at five but he likes to get there early for some reason so he leaves at four.”

“Sounds good.”

Nobody talked about Butters’ mom. About a year ago she was admitted to the hospital on mental health watch and never came out. Rumors had it that Stephen was bribing the Hells Pass staff to keep her in there, but Kenny suspected the truth was that she just wasn’t doing so well. Butters had been the one to call the police when she was in the middle of an episode; she had been painting over all of the family pictures as well as all over herself. She was even eating some of it and had to have her stomach pumped. That was a hard day for Butters… Stephen was sitting in the kitchen reading the paper not 20 ft away from it all and doing absolutely nothing.

Kenny was snapped out of his thoughts by Butters pulling him in another direction.

“Whoa, where are we going?” He questioned with a laugh.

“You’ll see.” Butters giggled playfully.

They came upon a field, part of a public park, that was chock full of wild growing daisies in full bloom. Spring in South Park never usually came until at least July.

“Let’s stall a little.” Butters smirked coyly over his shoulder. Kenny agreed, grin widening with each step as Butters pulled him along.

They walked to the middle of the field and sat down.
“Is it like this every year?” Kenny asked looking around.

“Sometimes, it depends on the weather and stuff. But I always like to hang out here for a little while when the flowers do bloom because it’s so pretty.” As Butters spoke, he picked little flowers out of the ground and placed them gingerly in Kenny’s hair.

Butters smiled affectionately, his fingertips lingering softly against Kenny’s temple. The taller blond’s eyes fluttered closed as warm fingers gently tapped their way down across his jawline, the ghost of a caress from behind closed doors. Kenny lifted a hand to tenderly capture the one now counting freckles along his cheekbone. He wrapped his long, slender fingers around Butters’ small hand and turned his head to place a gentle kiss in his palm.

They stared at each other as a crunching sound behind Kenny made them jump.

“Oh,” Kenny breathed, relieved, “it’s just a dog.” The owner rounded the corner and stared at them critically.

“Hi Mrs. Wilcox!” Grouchy old ladies seem to always be named that. “How are you today?” Butters spoke quickly as he picked all the flowers from Kenny’s hair.

“Hello, Leopold. Leopold’s friend…” Kenny didn’t like the way this lady was looking at him, with narrowed eyes and a permanent scowl as if she didn’t approve of the perfect, innocent ‘Leopold’ hanging around such obvious white trash. Either that, or she didn’t approve of what Kenny hoped she’d be too nearsighted to actually see…

“We were just leaving! Kenny, come on!” Butters pulled Kenny to his feet and dragged him away from the daisies.

They ran all the way back to Butters’ house. Stopping only a few times so Butters could catch his breath before he hyperventilated.

“She saw us!” He worried out loud. “She’ll tell on me, and I’ll be sent away again, I can’t do that again, Kenny, I can’t!” He screamed. Kenny reached forward to wrap his arms around the trembling blond in front of him, but given the current circumstances, he was (understandably) pushed away.

“It’s ok, Leo, breathe,” He reminded him. “She’s an old lady, she probably didn’t see anything, and even if she did, what we were doing was perfectly innocent.” He tried to speak logically and reasonably, the only language Panicked-Butters understood. “Her eyesight is probably shit, but she probably only saw us sitting together anyway because her old lady limbs don’t let her walk as fast as that slobbering dog she was with. We didn’t do anything wrong, you’re not gonna get in trouble, and if you did I would protect you, I promise.”

“Don’t make promises you wouldn’t be in control of keeping.” Butters pointed out with an edge.

Kenny felt a pang of powerlessness reverberate through his chest. “…I would make it my life’s mission to protect you, I promise.” And he would. Kenny would never stop fighting for Butters, he would put his life on the line if that meant he could save him. He only hoped the trembling boy in front of him believed as much.

Butters stared at his orange-clad angel wearily, before nodding slowly. “Ok.” Butters agreed.

“Breathe.” Kenny reminded him.
He did.

“I’m sorry.” Butters laughed embarrassedly. “You’re probably right, there’s nothing to worry about yet. Let’s just enjoy tonight.”

Something about Butters’ choice of words sent a chill up Kenny’s spine. But he shook it off as they crossed the threshold into the Stotch house.

“Heya, Dad!” Butters called sunnily from where the two boys were taking off their shoes and coats at the front door.

“Butters, it’s 3:40. It only takes 10 minutes to walk from school. What were you doing?” Stephen barked as he began the interrogation.

His son shrugged cooly and answered quickly. “We had to stop at Kenny’s house to get his book because he forgot it at home.” Butters lied like shit to everyone else except his dad. It probably had to do with the fact that he had no respect for the man. Kenny didn’t either.

“Kenny’s house is 20 mins away, it would be 3:50 if that were the case.” Stephen always thought he was so intimidating, the way he lowered his voice and crouched down to get in his son’s face. Really he just looked like a coward who wasn’t man enough to speak to his own kid like an adult.

“We walked fast.” Butters offered with a shrug. Damn he was convincing.

Stephen stared into Butters’ eyes for a solid 45 seconds and Butters stared right back. It was incredibly awkward for Kenny, who was just standing there silently and trying to pretend like he didn’t exist.

“Oh, w-we’re just gonna do—”

“I’m asking Kenny.” He sneered, thinking he’d caught them now. Stephen never trusted the McCormick boy, and Butters was never allowed to have him over without asking permission first. So at lunch, when Stephen’s son had called him to ask if Kenny could come over for a Spanish project, he had made Butters recite every inch of the project to compare with what Kenny would say later.

Luckily Kenny was right there listening in on the conversation and taking notes. “We have a Spanish project to do, it’s due on Friday. We had to pair up and create a conversation using the new vocab words we just learned — touristy things like ‘bus’, ‘restaurant’, that sort of thing — and pay attention to proper grammar and conjugations and all that. Then we have to rehearse and memorize it and perform it in front of the class for a grade. We also have to hand in a hard copy of our transcript so the teacher can make sure we conjugated everything correctly. Shouldn’t take us no more than 3, 4 hours tops,” Kenny recited beautifully.

“Well, it’s not an English project, sir.” Stephen corrected.

Kenny blinked at him. “What?”

“Shouldn’t take us any more than 3, 4 hours tops.” Stephen crossed his arms smugly.

“Any.” Stephen corrected.

Kenny blinked at him. “What?”

“‘Shouldn’t take us any more than 3, 4 hours tops.’” Stephen crossed his arms smugly.
Kenny tried to hide his grin as Mr. Stotch’s face smoothed back down into his usual stern demeanor.

“Get to work, boys.” He ordered as he walked back into his bedroom to get ready for work.

Kenny looked at Butters, who was snickering, hand over mouth, to try and hide his smile from his dad. “‘It’s not an English project, sir.’” He mimicked with a giggle as he passed Kenny to get to the kitchen. “Do you want a soda?”

“Sure.” Kenny grinned.

The boys gathered their drinks and set their homework out on the table. They made sure to speak really loudly every now and then, in case a certain shifty adult in the house was listening in.

“It’s 4:15, is he leaving or what?” Kenny whispered. “¡Hola! Me…me llamo Kenny.” He added clumsily as he pretended to shuffle papers.

“He’s probably leaving any second… Uh— ¡Hola! Kenny… me llamo Butters.”

“Wow, this is the worst Spanish project ever…” Kenny joked under his breath. Butters giggled as he shushed him. “I want him to leave,” Kenny admitted as he stared at the boy sitting three feet away from him. It felt like a mile. “I want to kiss you.” He cupped Butters’ cheek as he stared at him longingly.

“He’ll probably leave any second.” Butters whispered in a trance as he scooted closer to Kenny. Butters was looking at him with that magnetizing expression, and Kenny couldn’t resist as he leaned in. He could feel his heartbeat in his ears, it reverberated through his chest and pounded in his head. Butters didn’t stop him, he inched closer. They were just about to lock lips when they heard the master bedroom door click closed.

Butters gasped and pushed against Kenny’s chest, hard.

Kenny fell backwards out of his chair and hit the floor with a thud.

Fuck!” Butters yelped quietly as he scrambled to help Kenny get off the floor.

“Boys, what was that noise?” Mr. Stotch asked as he came stalking into the kitchen.

“I dropped my textbook!” Butters yelled as he held up the one in his hand for proof.

“Why is Kenny on my floor?” Stephen grumbled nastily.

“He-he-he got it for me!” Butters was stumbling over his words, never a good sign.

Stephen narrowed his eyes and glared between the two boys. “Alright, don’t scuff up my floor, kids, or Butters will be grounded.” He promised.

“Ok.” Both boys agreed hastily as Kenny scrambled into his seat.

“Good. Well, I’m off to Tweak Bros. See you later, boys!” Stephen waved politely as he exited the house. Butters quickly got up to go stand by the window and watch him leave.

Kenny followed in a daze.
“I think he’s gone.” Butters announced. By the time he turned around, Kenny was already tangling his slender fingers into sunshine hair, and tipping Butters’ chin up to meet his mouth. Oh, it had been too long since Kenny had last felt these lips against his own. Butters melted against him as he backed himself up against the door and pulled Kenny close to him.

Kenny brushed his lips lightly against Butters’ jawline, and felt his small body tremble underneath him. Butters wrapped his arms around Kenny tightly and pressed his small frame up against Kenny’s skinny body.

Kenny pulled away just slightly to look Butters in the eyes. “Hey.” Kenny’s voice was rough.

“Hey.” Butters breathed.

Kenny leaned forward to lightly brush his nose up against Butters’. “I’ve missed you, Leo.” He purred.

“I’ve missed you too.” Butters practically groaned as he grabbed Kenny’s face again and brought it down to his own roughly.

Everything had been going great. A+. Kenny had pulled them over to the couch, where Butters now lay on top of him, his tongue slowly snaking it’s way into Kenny’s mouth. ‘This must be what heaven is like’, Kenny wondered absently, his brain now completely useless to everything except the way Butters looked, and smelled, and tasted. He could only comprehend the soft, sweet feeling of Butters on top of him, until… his stomach growled. Perfect. Way. To. Kill. The. Mood.

Butters chuckled, “You’re hungry.”

“No, I’m not.” Kenny insisted. “Hungry for your lips maybe.” He joked.

“That’s cheesy.” ‘Mmm, cheese’. Kenny’s stomach growled again. “That’s it, mister.” Butters stood up. “We’re making dinner.” Kenny groaned and grabbed Butters by the waist, making him lose his balance and fall right back into Kenny’s lap. Kenny immediately went for the collarbone, kissing and sucking and biting it gently while his fingernails scraped lightly against the nape of his slender neck. Butters shuddered and moaned.


“Oh, I’d much rather do this.” Kenny promised.

Butters giggled as he kissed him, “Great.”

It was about 6:15, and Kenny was sitting at the table, finishing some homework, while Butters got to work on boiling water.

After a few minutes the smaller blond started biting his nails, humming to himself apprehensively.

“What?” Kenny laughed.

“How… how do I know when it’s ready?” Butters asked nervously.
“Just taste it.” Kenny offered as he was packing up his backpack.

“It just tastes like macaroni.”

Kenny got up and walked over to the stove. Butters held out the spoon and blew on it before offering it to Kenny, who just ended up picking it up and eating it with his hands anyway. He couldn’t help but think about the classic Normal Rockwell painting they must look like. Or how much they probably looked like the exact antithesis of one.

The pasta was just about done. Kenny offered to drain it while Butters mixed the powered cheese. After **literally** 15 seconds, sounds of acute distress sang over from Butters’ side of the kitchen again.

“Um… how do I know if I did this right?” Butters held up the mixing fork, with an entire glob of powdery cheese ball stuck to the end of it. As if reading Kenny’s mind, Butters looked at the back of the box one more time and read it carefully. “Tablespoon, not teaspoon…” He muttered to himself as he measured out almost-a-tablespoon-minus-a-teaspoon’s worth of water to add to the mixture, tongue peeking out over his top lip in intense concentration as he made his precise measurements.

“You’re cute.” Kenny wrapped his arms around Butter’s waist and rested his chin on his slim shoulder. “I love playing house with you.” He joked (half seriously) into Butters’ ear. Butters laughed and shrugged Kenny off of him.

Then he did something unthinkable, unimaginable, unforgivable really: he reached up, with one orange and sticky hand, and smudged processed cheese right down the center of Kenny’s nose.

“Blech.” Kenny turned that right around and wiped it off on Butters’ cheek, who squealed in disgust.

“Fucking gross.” He grumbled.

“You started it.” Kenny pointed out.

“You’re not seven.” Butters sass’d.

“I’m six.” He held up his hands in incorrect numbers “this many.” Butters pretended not to be amused.

“Whatsoever, set the table.”

“Fancy or casual?”

“Always fancy.”

Fancy it is. Kenny grabbed the porcelain plates, cutlery, and napkins (which he had folded into pretty swans). They lit a tiny tea candle from Butters’ room and drank water out of wine glasses. They’d have to make sure to clean those later and put them back before Butters’ dad even knew they were missing. Kenny dimmed the lights and put on music. Nothing romantic, that shit bothered both of them. Tonight he put on the ‘Soundtrack from the Motion Picture Almost Famous’, one of their favorite movies to watch together.

As the first few notes of ‘America’ by Simon and Garfunkel floated into the room, Butters hummed approvingly.
“Good choice. Wanna watch this after dinner?”

“You bet.” They could read each other’s minds.

Butters walked over balancing two plates of macaroni and a bowl of grapes for the table.

“Let us be lovers, we’ll marry our fortunes together…” He sang quietly over Kenny’s shoulder as he placed his plate in front of him.

They ate dinner like normal, ‘adult’ human beings, only occasionally stopping to see how many grapes they could throw into each other’s mouths (Kenny beat Butters by 2 points). Then they settled on the couch to watch their movie.

“Ok,” Butters looked at his watch, “the movie is approximately 2 hours long, and my dad gets home in three. That should give us plenty of time to straighten up and get you home before then.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Kenny agreed as he laid out blankets and rearranged the throw pillows.

“Hey, Leo.” He stopped.

“What?”

Kenny loved the way Butters always blushed like that when he used his real name.

He smirked, “Your birthday’s coming up.” Butters looked at the ground sheepishly. “What do you want to do?”

“I don’t know,” he shrugged, “anything really. I don’t know…” Butters was never one to make a fuss of his own birthday.

Luckily, Kenny was not having it. “Well we have to do something special! It’s the most important day of the year!” He nudged Butters with his shoulder as he sat down.

“9/11?” Butters retaliated with detached skepticism and raised eyebrows.

“Well… no,” Kenny admitted, “the part where it’s also Leopold Stotch’s 17th birthday is more what I’m referring too.” He quipped cheerfully.

“I don’t know. I mean, there’s nothing really that I can think of that would really be special. If you have any ideas—” Oh, he had ideas. Kenny had been thinking about this since Butters’ last birthday (ironically, the first time Kenny had chickened out of asking him out on a real date). The sandy-blond clapped with dramatic regality.

“Say no more, I’ll take care of it!” He declared with enthusiasm and a cheshire grin.

Butters smiled radiantly, “Ok.” Then after a second thought, “Nothing dirty or inappropriate. And tell everyone they don’t need to bring presents. Don’t invite Eric Cartman. Or Stan if that means Wendy is gonna come, they’ll just fight all night. Invite Tweek, we have art together and he’s pretty cool. His friends are pretty cool too. And I don’t really like cake. No drugs, drinking is ok, and if we go somewhere public it needs to be out of town. Otherwise someone’s house but it cannot be mine. I don’t want my dad fucking up my birthday. Not when it’s ‘the most important day of the year’.” Butters teased as he pressed play on their movie.
“Yes, princess.” Kenny bowed dramatically.

“I was a paladin, you were the princess.” Butters reminded him. When they were younger, the whole neighborhood of kids used to dress up and play a Lord of The Rings style role playing game, with weapons, magic, alliances and betrayal. It was taken pretty seriously. Anyway, Kenny had decided to be a badass princess because he wanted to feel pretty and worshipped for once. The only one who really fell for his princess act was Butters, who was always either saving the princess or being saved by the princess. Cartman had called them out on not even playing the same game as everyone anymore. They didn’t care, they liked their version better.

As the opening title sequence filled the screen, Kenny snuggled up next to a lounging Butters. He sighed contentedly as he settled against the smaller one’s chest, draping a bracelet-clad arm over his soft middle. He chuckled as Butters snapped the turquoise braided elastic he’d given Kenny over the summer (‘so that even when we’re were apart, you’ll never forget how much you mean to me’). Butters rested one hand against Kenny’s messy mop of hair, and the other one rubbed his back absently. They laughed, they sang along, and they quoted their favorite lines (‘don’t you have any regular friends?’, ‘I’m on druugs!’, ‘what kind of beer?’). They stayed like this in their own private world, content with the fact that this moment would be one to hold on to until dreams could suspend reality once again.

…Kenny must have fallen asleep. They both must have, because at 10pm, they were woken up by Stephen Stotch slamming the front door and flipping on all the lights in the house.

Butters jumped awake and shoved Kenny off of him, sending him tumbling to the floor for the second time that night.

“Kenny.” Stephen towered over both of them. “Go home.” Kenny wasted no time scrambling to his feet and grabbing his book bag on his way out the door. He couldn’t even look at Butters. He felt like a wimp for not being able to stand up to his boyfriend’s dad, he felt like a wuss for not being able to even admit that Butters was his boyfriend, he felt small for not being able to tell Stephen that there’s nothing he could do about it, and he felt like a traitor for abandoning Butters, leaving him alone in the house with that homophobic douchebag. Kenny stayed and listened against the door for any sounds of distress. The only thing he heard was the lock as it clicked into place.

Kenny walked home in a daze. How could a moment so beautiful and calm be so literally ripped from his arms in a matter of seconds. It was dizzying, it was sickening. Most of all, it stirred a panic in his soul.

Kenny looked at his phone again. He tried to convince himself that it was no big deal, that Butters couldn’t text him because he was probably receiving a talking-to, an insulting lecture brought on by self-righteousness and arrogance. He’d probably be grounded, and nothing more. Kenny tried to push down the anxiety rising up in his chest. He looked at his screen again, not knowing what he expected, but receiving no luck regardless. He turned the volume up on his ringer and shoved it back in his pocket.

Once he got home, Kenny texted Butters.`
To Butters: Hey man, just got home. I had a quick question about our presentation on Friday, but if I don’t hear from you I’ll just ask you at school tomorrow.

It was always safer to text in code when it came to the Stotch household. Butters never knew who was snooping on his phone.

11:58 and still no message from Butters. ‘Fuck’. Kenny decided to put his phone away and not touch it until he had finished at least one episode of The Office.

He made it half-way through one episode. ‘Stupid Jim and Pam and their adorable, forbidden relationship…’

To Butters: Hey dude, just checking in, I wanted to make sure everything was ok… with our project I mean. Let me know.

Kenny threw his phone against his pillow and slumped face first into the bed. What had Stephen seen? And what did that mean for Butters? ...What did that mean for their relationship? A myriad of unsettling questions worried Kenny all night, plaguing him like an endless nightmare.

At 1:45, he finally decided to just go to bed. He turned his ringer volume all the way up and placed it under his pillow delicately, guarding it like a talisman. He breathed a small wish as his eyes finally fluttered closed. ‘Be ok.’

At 3:05 his phone finally dinged.

From Butters: Kenny, my dad didn’t see anything, he just was mad that we watched a movie on a school night instead of doing our project and he was mad that you were still over so late. I got grounded for both of those things and he took away my phone. Everything is good, everything is fine, I promise. You can breathe now, I can practically feel you holding your breath through the phone. (he was). Anyway, he stashed my phone in his closet, and I snuck in to send you this message. Do not respond. I’ll be deleting it as soon as it’s sent. I’ll delete both of yours too if he hasn’t seen them yet. Tonight was fun. Get some sleep, I’ll see you tomorrow.

From Butters: I really did have a great time tonight… Looks like it’ll be a while before our next one.

From Butters: I’ll miss you.
Kenny didn’t know whether to sigh in relief or clench his teeth in frustration. It was all so confusing and unfair.

He stared at his messages from Butters all night (or morning, as it were). Tears stung the corners of his eyes as he read and re-read the message over and over until his vision went blurry. It was almost 4:00 when he finally couldn’t memorize it anymore, and regretfully pressed delete over the night’s conversation thread.

His head was throbbing. Kenny closed his eyes and tried to get some sleep, without much luck. By the time he needed to get up for school, Kenny felt like he hadn’t slept in days. He suspected Butters must be feeling about the same way right now. Poor Butters. Poor Kenny. *Pobrecito.*

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so I do have a Tumblr, but it’s basically nothing yet. I only created it so I can stare at and show love for the amazing South Park accounts out there that are too freaking cute. I literally think I’ve only ever reblogged like 3 things so my account looks like someone actually uses it.

That being said, if there are any artists here: If any scenes from this fic inspire you, and you feel like sharing your work with me, go for it… I’d love it! I don’t have to post it publicly if you just felt like pm-ing me, but I absolutely will spread the love if you want me to.

You can ask me questions, or just say hi!

Just thought I’d throw that out there if anybody was interested!

https://www.tumblr.com/blog/croissantconnoisseurdinosaur
I'm Ruby Tucker and You're Watching Disney Channel

Chapter Summary

I love these chapters because they’re so wholesome.

Karen gets ready.

POV - Karen

“Ugh, dammit! They don’t match!” Karen threw her eyeliner pen against her carpet in frustration and watched the shiny, black ink tattoo the dingy, white nylon. It didn’t matter, it would just join all the other tarnished stains that the McCormicks could never seem to get out of their house.

Karen sighed and picked it back up. She tried once again to attempt to add a not-lumpy wing, to at least give the illusion of smoothing out this morning’s lazy line job.

She glared at Ruby through the mirror, who seemed to be doing just fine filling in her water line since she’d smartly abandoned the cat-eye look completely and focused on rounding out her bottom lashes instead. Karen wished she had big, blue, baby-doll eyes like Ruby. Instead she had smaller, almond-shaped, hazel eyes that were really nothing special. Her mother always told her she had the prettiest eyes in the family, but Karen never believed it. Maybe if she could get this fucking eyeliner right…

And it looks like a croissant. Good. That’s sexy. Men prefer lumpy croissant eyes to sharp and dangerous cat eyes any day.

“Where’s Henrietta when you need her?” Karen grumbled as she grabbed a makeup wipe to start again.

“I think she’s with the boys tonight,” Ruby drawled lazily from Karen’s right, as they sat crisscrossed on the floor in front of the full-length, closet mirror.

Karen’s line came out rounded again. She grunted in frustration. “Ugh! Why is this so hard? Am I just retarded?”

“I hate that word.” Ruby corrected sternly, if not also a little distractedly.

“I’m sorry.” Karen genuinely was. She hated making anybody upset. She was just so nervous!

Before school today, Ike had walked up to her and told her she looked pretty. Actually, what he really said was she looked ‘nice’, but it was still a compliment nonetheless, and not necessarily one she was expecting, nor one she felt deserving of.

Then at lunch, the goths left to smoke, leaving just the three of them at the table. Then Ruby left to go to the bathroom and that left Karen and Ike alone to stare at each other awkwardly. ‘Uh,
Karen? He’d cleared his throat and sat up straightly, like what he was about to say was the most important thing anybody’s ever said. ‘Will you want to come to the debate team dinner with me tonight?’ It wasn’t the most structurally sound sentence in the world, but it was sweet nonetheless. Karen had answered coolly and casually, not even comprehending the conversation she’d just had. Ike had been nervous, because he knew he meant it as a real date… and it was that realization that would later melt Karen down into her own puddle of nervous wreck — now with only 30 minutes to spare before Craig came to pick them up for Bebe’s house!

“Ah! I hate this!” Karen laughed disbelievingly, as she reached for her most recently discarded makeup wipe to make use of an unsullied corner.

“Just take the other one off.” Ruby suggested as she applied lip gloss and gave herself an approving wink in the mirror.

“I like the other one, it’s just this eye that’s a problem.” Karen took a comical deep breath and chanted positive mantras about straight lines and no streaks — much to Ruby’s uproarious amusement — as she prepared to tackle winged eyeliner once again.

“Then just use your other hand.” She suggested innocently. Karen stared at Ruby like she’d just grown three heads. “Or I’ll do it.” She laughed.

Karen handed the pen over to Ruby and turned to face her. She wasn’t usually so uptight about things, especially not the way she looked. But this was technically her first real date. Not only that, but it was happening in a room full of people who were also all bringing dates to the same event. It was nerve-racking! She couldn’t even begin to fathom the amount of stress she was already stressing about before anything stressful had even stressed her out yet!

You can’t blame her, Karen had never gotten attention from a boy before, let alone one she had always considered as a friend. She wasn’t tall and slender, with Rapunzel hair and tan skin like Ruby was. She’d never gotten half as much attention as Ruby had in her life! And yet, somehow, she had actually charmed Ike. He’d apparently had a crush on her all these years! She must have accidentally put him under a spell of some kind and forgotten about it. Yeah. That seemed to be the most reasonable explanation to Karen.

“There! That looks acceptable!” Ruby cheered.

“That looks good! My eyes match!” She laughed lightly.

“That’s because I’m left-handed.” Ruby sang as she waved the eyeliner like a magic wand.

“That’s the trick then: from now on, we finish each other’s cat eyes.” Karen declared with a smile. She held out her pinky for their secret handshake.

“Deal.” Ruby agreed. She wrapped her pinky around Karen’s, and they made three circles with their joined hands, then slapped the backs of their hands together. It was a silly thing they’d made up when they were five, but it had never failed to make each of them smile.

“Come on, Craig’s gonna be here in 20 minutes and I still don’t know what I want to wear.” Ruby jumped up and strolled over to her duffle bag, stuffed to the brim with at least seven possible outfit options for both Karen and herself to choose from.

Ruby ended up going with a black, t-shirt dress and a long pendant necklace. She had lent Karen a pretty, taupe wrap-dress with a ribbon-cinched waist and short, ribbon-trimmed sleeves. Ruby
brought out a couple of bobby pins to tuck some of Karen’s hair back away from her eyes. She, quote: ‘*didn’t want [her] flawless eyeliner work hidden by enormous curtains of hair.*’ Karen had disagreed at first, but they’d compromised by pulling two slender tendrils of hair above her ears out from in front of the half-up look.

The girls checked themselves in the mirror before they left.

Karen thought Ruby looked like a bombshell, with long legs on display and her long hair parted off to the side to show off her slender neck. The high top sneakers she was wearing only served to make her outfit look cooler.

And Karen… whoa. She barely recognized herself! For a rare moment in her life, Karen actually thought she looked … beautiful. Her smile only grew larger the longer she scrutinized her polished reflection.

“Craig’s here.” Ruby called as she grabbed her purse from her duffle bag and headed out the door.

“Oh, wait!” Karen spun around, about to leave, when she remembered something.

Karen got down on her hands and knees, and dug in the back of her closet for a tiny, white capped Tic-Tacs box, with flower doodles penned into the top. She opened the top and carefully tipped two, petite emerald earrings into her palm. She smiled down at them, replaying precious memories of that special birthday behind her shining eyes.

She kissed the earrings in her palm, then worked quickly to switch out the cheap metal Kenny had pierced her with, to replace it with the sparkling sentiment. She squeezed the backs of each one carefully, making sure they were tight.

“We’re leaving!” Karen called to no one in particular. Kenny was gone, Kevin was nowhere to be found, and her dad was (hopefully) at his new job.

“Wait! Wait! Let me see!” Carol’s voice fluttered over from the kitchen as she threw down her dish rag and quickly glided over to her daughter. The graceful movement only further reminded Karen of the person her mother must have left behind to become the trash of the town she was known as now. She’d heard stories — of how Carol had turned her back on her family and walked away from her old life of privilege and desire for an existence of want and necessity. She’d also heard that it was more like committing to Stewart out of convenience and laziness for an addiction and a baby bump. It depended on who you asked.

Carol grabbed Karen’s hands and looked her over. “Gorgeous.” She praised. Karen blushed and tried to shake off her mom.

“I have to go.” She whined as she turned to leave.

“Oh!” Carol gasped. Karen turned around to see her mother’s shaking hand covering her sadly smiling mouth. Tears filled her eyes as she pointed to Karen’s ears. “The earrings.” She tilted her head, lost in thought and memories of a time that never existed. “You’re wearing the earrings.”

Karen smiled. “Yes, mom. Thank you, I’m… I’m wearing the earrings.”

“Beautiful.” Carol admired as she grabbed Karen’s face to plant a kiss on her forehead. “Now, go get him.” She winked.

“Mom,” Karen feigned annoyance, while simultaneously trying to hide her blush, “I’m just going
“I know.” Carol tipped her chin up and smiled playfully at her daughter, “go get him.”

Karen rolled her eyes and pretended she wasn’t smiling, herself. “Bye, Mom.” Carol nodded and waved on her way back into the kitchen. She was wearing what appeared to be an Olive Garden t-shirt. Karen hoped it represented some kind of a new job she had been to earlier that day.

Karen glanced at herself one more time in the yard-sale mirror by the door, and shrugged at herself. ‘Go get him’, she thought as she piled into the back of Craig’s van.
On The Way

Chapter Summary

But first, we gotta get there.

Enjoy a tense car ride.

Flip those birds, here’s Craig.

POV - Craig

“Fucking be nice today, Karen is nervous.” Ruby scolded before she’d even set both feet inside the car.

Craig chomped around his breath mint. “Hello. When am I ever not nice to Karen?”

“Just be nice.” She warned.

“Ok.”

They waited a good minute or three before they saw Karen’s tiny person bob her way down the front steps and up to the curb. She waved at Craig as she half-jogged the two steps it took to grab the door handle. She was a funny little nervous thing. Craig decided he liked her.

She opened the back door to sit with Ruby. “Fun, Taxi driver.” Craig commented sarcastically to the lack of person in his passenger seat.

“Be nice.” Ruby hissed.

“I am.” Craig shot back.

“Hi Craig!” Karen called excitedly from the back.

“Hey.” He half-smiled and nodded towards her reflection in the rearview mirror. He figured that was nice enough. He threw the car in drive and set on course for Bebe’s house.

As they drove along, Craig half listened to the girls chattering on about boys — Kyle’s brother and some other kid whose name he didn’t recognize — and half listened to Jimmy Eat World lightly blaring through the speakers at the front of the car.

“Don’t say that, why would you freak me out like that!” The little one took a deep breath to calm herself down. “No, Ike definitely said people were supposed to bring ‘dates’, so I doubt he doesn’t think this is supposed to be a date. Don’t jinx it!” She hissed as she smacked Ruby in the arm. She may be tightly wound, but baby McCormick is a feisty one, that’s for sure.

“Wait— Craig? Why are you bringing your sister if it’s supposed to be dates?” Ruby whined as if he had done something to embarrass her for all eternity. Teenage Drama Queen…
“I wouldn’t subject anybody to this kind of torture.” He answered honestly. “No offense.” He added at the end.

“Taken.” She deadpanned noncommittally.

“Why didn’t you ask Tweek?” Karen piped up innocently from the back.

Craig wrung his hands over the steering wheel in apprehension.

It was always uncomfortable when he dissected his relationship with Tweek, but it was even more uncomfortable when someone else did it. To the public eye, they had a perfectly normal, uncomfortably awkward, baby-steps type of relationship. A real one. To inside eyes like Token and Clyde, their relationship was undefined, stagnant, and riddled with unanswered questions. Behind a certain pair of icy blue eyes, or a certain ocean green, it was complicated. Confusing. It almost felt fraudulent.

Sure, they loved to touch and joke and hold each other, but nothing had ever been defined. They’d never even kissed each other in any sort of proper way; that breathtaking way you see in the movies. As Anne Hathaway would say, ‘a real foot-poppin’ kiss’. Ugh, Craig could just roll his eyes at himself for even thinking that. Maybe he really was gay... ok, nah, that’s an ignorant comparison. He just really, really loved ‘The Princess Diaries’, okay? Plus, maybe he was gay, and so what? He wasn’t really sure, and he’d never felt the need to define it. All he knew was, to others he was with Tweek. But to himself, he was sort of lonely.

He longed to hold someone, and kiss someone, and make them feel like they were his whole world. It just so happened that the very person he thought of every time those deep, gnawing desperations reared their ugly heads had never even wanted to go to first base with him. But that’s ok. Maybe Tweek just needed to wait. For now, Craig was just happy being his friend. His very-touchy friend. His very-touchy friend with a very-giant crush on the twitchy boy with an easy blush. Craig smiled to himself just thinking about him.

Ok, so it wasn’t the relationship everyone thought it was, but it was a start.

He suddenly realized, as Karen’s question hung in the air, that she was still waiting for him to answer.

"Earth to Craig!" Ruby called obnoxiously from the back.

"What."

"Karen asked you a question..."

"I... I was just wondering why Tweek isn't coming with us tonight..." Karen sounded incredibly uncomfortable, ‘rightfully so’, Craig agreed.

“Are you kidding?” He chuckled, lightening the tension, "Tweek hates these things".

Not debate, for clarification, just the schmoozing.

Tweek actually loved cheering Craig on whenever he got the chance. He’d come to competitions in the past, and he always got super pumped whenever Craig shot back with quick wit and a stream of smartly worded arguments. The first time his friends had come, Clyde and Tweek had embarrassingly brought signs that read ‘CRAIG TUCKER, DON’T DEBATE THAT FUCKER!’ They held them up and cheered silently anytime he took the podium, while Token slouched in his chair and pretended he didn’t know them. Eventually, they were asked to leave and Tweek flipped
off the opposing team as Clyde whooped and hollered ‘go South Park!’ the whole time they were being escorted out. It was epic.

It was more so the arrogance of the whole ‘debate team dinner’ scene that Tweek wasn’t a huge fan of. He hated acting stuck up for other people, but so did Craig. In fact, if he hadn’t been a part of the team, he would never come to one of these things in a million years. He was actually kind of disappointed Tweek wasn’t coming. Yeah he would have sulked and scoffed all night, but it wasn’t like that’s not exactly what Craig would be doing too. They could have done it together. Romance and stuff. Baby-steps...

He was brought out of his second Tweek-ward spiral by Karen acknowledging his earlier explanation. “Oh, ok.”

“Wendy’s gonna kill you.” Ruby mockingly sing-songed.

“That’s the fu-un.” He sang right back.

Craig didn’t know why he couldn’t get Tweek off his mind tonight, but his brain just kept jumping back to him. Stupid brain, cool off.

…Actually, speaking of Tweek…

Craig made an abrupt left turn after he almost missed the road that takes him to Tweak Bros.

“Where are we going?” Ruby questioned skeptically.

“I promised Tweek I’d drive him home.” Craig explained.

“So we’re gonna be late too?” She scoffed as she served him all the attitude she had in her giant, skinny body.

“Yep.”

“So Bebe is also gonna kill you?” She smiled as she folded her arms.

“Yes.”

“Ok then.” She smirked as she looked out the window.

“Why are we driving Tweek home?” Karen wondered.

“He doesn’t have a car.” Craig answered.

“Can’t he walk?” Ruby shot back.

“It’s dark.” Craig explained as he shot her a glare.

“So?” She whispered with an eye-roll.

“He gets nervous walking alone at night.” He smiled. “He could get kidnapped, he’s very pretty.”

“But he’s a boxer!” Ruby laughed, malice gone at the sight of her brother’s goofy grin.

“He’s a pacifist.” Craig explained, as if that made any sense.
They pulled up to Tweak Bros. and Craig honked obnoxiously, despite the fact the Tweek was already outside, and already pushing off the coffee shop’s wall to walk towards the car. He smacked the window lightly before pulling the door open.

“Is something wrong with you?!” He scolded as he slapped Craig’s hands off the still-beeping steering wheel. Craig could see a smile dancing behind his eyes and pulling at the corner of his lips. Craig felt his own face surrender to a smile as he threw the car in drive and peeled away from the curb.

“Hey guys!” Tweek smiled politely at the girls behind him as he buckled his seatbelt.

“Hi.” They greeted in unison, Karen a little more nicely than Ruby.

Tweek turned to look at Craig, in his navy blue slacks set that he’d just so happen to find in exactly his size at a thrift store near his house. His white shirt was accented with a white-spotted green tie and sort-of-matching plain green pocket square. Those he had to shop for, but it was worth it because he looked fucking sharp, and he knew it. Or, at least he hoped he knew it. He self-consciously ran a hand through his hatless hair and turned to look at Tweek.

“See something you like?” He joked. Tweek turned red and looked away from him.

“What’s wrong?”

“Why do you all look so nice?” Tweek addressed the whole car.

“We have the—"

“Oh my god.” Tweek interrupted Karen’s explanation as he turned to Craig accusingly. Whoops. “Why didn’t you tell me? I would have walked! The dinner is tonight? Oh— Am I making you guys late?” Karen said nothing as Ruby nodded, mischievous twinkle in her eye. Craig threw his arm back over the arm rest to smack the air around Ruby somewhere. “I’m sorry.” Tweek apologized.

“It’s no big deal, you were on the way.” He tried to assure the socially nervous blond in his passenger seat.

“Craig!” Tweek whined as he covered his face with his hands.

“It’s fine, we’re fine, right Ruby?” Karen growled at her friend with impressive threatening implication. Go Karen.

She blinked blankly at her a few times. “We probably won’t be very late.” Ruby reasoned emotionlessly.

“I’m sorry.” Tweek repeated again. Craig placed his hand on his knee as if to say ‘it’s ok, Tweek.’ Given the way he froze up, Craig instantly second guessed every millisecond his hand still remained against Tweek’s bony knee and withdrew it quickly. His heart pounded mercilessly as he mentally kicked himself for potentially crossing a line. Thump thump ‘fuck’ thump thump. He hated himself right now. He bit his lip for the rest of the drive — which was luckily only another minute or two.

As they pulled up in front of the Tweak house, Tweek warmly thanked Craig for the ride and wished the girls luck on ‘putting up with Wendy all night’. Craig snorted and Tweek giggled sweetly at the reaction. They exchanged a look that even Craig wasn’t sure how to read, and suddenly… he was gone.

watched, hypnotized, as Tweek rapidly left the car and jogged into his house without even so much as a brush to Craig’s shoulder. It ached where he’d imagined it. He sighed as he pulled away from Tweek’s house and rerouted to Bebe’s.

“Aren’t… you guys dating?” Karen asked carefully.

“It’s best not to ask.” Both siblings deadpanned simultaneously.
Chapter Summary

Ok. Listen, I know I promised Bunny would be followed by Creek, but there’s just a few things I need to take care of first…

~ Wednesday Night’s Debate Team Dinner Party ~

And don’t worry, just because a lot of the main characters are on the debate team does not mean that I will be writing what would most likely be a poorly written debate club scene, considering I’ve never even been to a match (meet? game? See, I don’t know).

POV - Craig

“Ugh, she’s gonna hate me. Let’s do this.” Ruby shook her shoulders and flipped her hair as she stomped up Bebe’s front steps ahead of Craig. She and Karen glared sympathetically at one another as Ruby grudgingly rang the doorbell. It opened in an instant.

“Wendy! Hi, good to see you!” Ruby cheered with fake enthusiasm as she went in for a hug and then pushed past her to get inside the house.

“Hi Wendy.” Karen waved and snuck past the judgmental glares Wendy was already shooting at her best friend.

Craig was about to follow his sister into the house when a cold vice of fingers gripped themselves around his elbow.

“Where’s Tweek?” Wendy inquired politely. Her smile looked fake and her head tilt looked hostile.

“Didn’t wanna come. Not his scene.” Her expression stilled. Craig hid the smile that crept up from his throat. He could tell every word out of his mouth was pushing Wendy’s buttons, in the most neurotic way.

“Your sister isn’t a date, Craig,” she whipped around to examine her surroundings and pulled Craig closer to her, “she’s wearing sneakers for Christ’s sake!” She whispered urgently.

“So am I.” Craig smirked. Wendy’s jaw dropped as she looked down and saw that yes, in fact Craig was wearing a very stylish pair of navy blue converse. He mockingly popped his mouth into a shocked ‘o’ as he flipped her off and backed away from the door.

He didn’t get completely out of her sight before in walked Kyle, in a really nice, light brown suit, with a dark green button up and a pair of trendy brown boat shoes. His curly red hair was bobby pinned down on the sides to give the illusion of an actual, good haircut. He didn’t look half bad. He was fussing with his bangs a little when Wendy ambushed him.

“And where is your date, Romeo?”
He looked at her disgustedly, “Wendy, who would I even bring?”

“Bring Annie!” She folded her arms defiantly across her chest. “She’s cute, she’s nice, and I suggested her to you when I told you to bring someone.”

“Sorry to burst your perfect bubble Wendy, but I don’t even know Annie. And I’m not gonna let you dictate whether I spend my night with my friends or with some girl who doesn’t even want to play this stuck-up charade.” ‘Ooh, poetic words from Kyle.’

“She would be lucky to get an invitation to one of my parties!” Wendy hissed, trying to keep her voice down.


Wendy was about to get in Kyle’s face when Token walked in the door.

“Hey guys! Sorry, Wendy, I came stag, hope that’s ok.”

It wasn’t.

“Does anybody understand what ‘formal dinner date’ means!” Wendy huffed as she threw her arms in the air and walked away, leaving Token to awkwardly close the door behind himself.

Craig pointed his thumb in her vanishing direction. “You guys, she’s such a bad host, she just walked away from her dinner guests…” Craig mused with a straight tone and a small smile. He hoped she was in earshot. She wasn’t, but at least it made the other two boys smile.

“That’s Wendy.” Token chuckled uncomfortably as he unwrapped his scarf and placed it in the closet with his London Fog peacoat. Token looked by far the most casual of the group, but his outfit was most likely the most expensive. He brushed his hands against his tailored dress jeans absently as he surveyed the room awkwardly. “Am I underdressed?” He asked, tugging at his wide-collar, black turtleneck sweater, folded down to reveal a white button down and a black tie underneath.

“I’m wearing sneakers.” Craig shrugged. He turned away from his perfectionist friend and wandered into the kitchen.

There were quite a bit of snacks lined up before the dinner would be served; various chips and dips, and a few cookies and brownies. Plus a virgin sangria, which had to be by far the most sad thing in the house.

“Hey.” Craig nudged Ruby who was staring off into space somewhere, and offered the glass of punch in his hand. “Drink every time Wendy does something to ruin her own party.”

“No.” She replied uninterestingly.

“No more fun for me.” He mused.

Craig took the time before the dinner-slash-beginning-of-the-year-stupid-fancy-meeting-time to survey the room.

Karen had found her way over to Ike — he must be her date — and was now talking with him excitedly about something. Token and Kyle were awkwardly bonding in the corner over being the only two guys who didn’t bring anyone. Wendy was walking away from Stan in annoyance and he
was rolling his eyes and strolling over to Kyle. There was some other awkward kid who Craig didn’t really know, who was wearing all black, with his hair slicked back and pulled away from his face. He seemed to be about as old as Ruby, but his face wasn’t really ringing any bells.

Craig wandered his way into the dining room.

There were place cards.

Oh my god, there were place cards at the table. Wendy took these things way too seriously… *Drink*. Craig took a moment to scan the table for his seat. He was sitting near the head of the table, next to Stan and across from Red. Bebe and Wendy sat the most to the front, with Wendy at the head, of course. He noticed all the ‘newcomers’ and ‘potential recruits’ (as they were literally labeled underneath their names) were all lumped together at the end.

Ike (newcomer) and Karen (guest) sat next to Kyle, while on the other side Ruby (guest) and Firkle (potential recruit) sat at the other end next to Token on Craig’s left. At least Craig wouldn’t have to watch Ruby roll her eyes all night.

Just for fun, Craig switched Wendy and Bebe’s place cards to see what would happen later. He’d have to remember to be the first into the dining room.

“Craig!” He spun around and was engulfed in the warm and friendly arms of Bebe Stevens. “Welcome to my house, glad you could make it! Did you get any snacks?”

Ah, Bebe. The mom of all social situations. She and Token should start a PTA.

“Yeah, I got this… punch thing.” He held up his biodegradable, paper cup.

Bebe rolled her eyes, “Yeah, Wendy insisted that there be no alcohol tonight, not when there’s important meetings to be had.” Craig nodded as took a sip of his *drink*.

“Where is the Stepford Wife now?” He asked loudly, to Bebe’s horror. Bebe looked around to see if anybody had heard him.

“Don’t call her that!” She whispered. “But I think she’s talking to the new recruit. When I came downstairs she yelled at me for leaving him alone, so talk to him if you can.”

“Firkle.” Craig kind of asked, what kind of a name is that?

“Yeah, I don’t think he’ll be much for sticking around, but — you know how Wendy is graduating early so she’s already in senior classes?”

“Oh yeah, I keep forgetting Wendy is half senior now.” Craig had no idea why anybody in the world would want to put that much pressure on themselves. The only other person he knew who was crazy enough to put themselves through that mess was Token, and he was barely holding it together these days.

“Well, Wendy said he’s already in Poli Sci elective as a freshman because he tested out of the senior government class. He’s like, wicked smart and apparently always arguing with the teacher and pulling up recent news articles and stuff so she invited him to come along. I’m surprised he showed, but hopefully we can inspire him to stay.”

“Then you better get him away from Wendy.” Craig pointed towards the doorway.

“Shit. You’re right.” Bebe spun around quickly and headed out the door. Craig followed her back
out into society.

Wendy was in the kitchen fussing over dinner — which was really just unpacking to-go boxes — and Firkle was talking to Ruby in the corner of the room.

Bebe straightened her back, flipped her hair behind her shoulders, and plastered on a genuine smile.

“Hi! I’m Bebe!” She waved happily as she introduced herself with sparkling eyes and bubbly personality. She nudged Craig with her elbow as the two walked up to the freshmen duo. “This is Craig.”

“Ruby’s my sister, she already knows me.” Craig commented as Bebe turned her breathtaking smile on Ruby. “You’re… Firkle, right?”

“Yeah.” The small boy answered, awkwardly gripping his punch cup tightly with both hands and looking between the older kids expectantly. “Yes.” He added seconds later, when the conversation hadn’t moved on.

“Well, welcome to my house you guys!” Bebe gestured around the room. “Wendy’s hosting so it’s really all her party, but those are my embarrassing baby pictures on the wall.” She joked with a toss of her curly hair.

“Oh.” Firkle offered with a bored expression. “Were you like an ugly baby or something?”

Craig stared at him, trying really hard not to laugh inappropriately. He and Ruby exchanged a silent look of amused shock.

Firkle looked around wide-eyed, like he didn’t know what to do.

“It… was… supposed to be a joke.” He admitted. Bebe looked perplexed, then burst out laughing.

“Well I did have a terrible awkward phase in middle school so in a way, yes.” She joked. Firkle cracked a small smile, but it was gone moments later. “So what do you think of the team so far? I know we haven’t discussed any details yet, but how are you liking the vibe?”

He shrugged. “It’s a little military meets cheerleader.” He answered honestly. That was actually a pretty good description.

“Oh, that’s Wendy’s fault.” Bebe explained. “If it were up to me it would be all military…” Firkle blinked at her blankly. “Kidding.” She offered. “That was my attempt at a joke.” She giggled embarrassedly.

Firkle smiled widely and tipped his head in a chuckle. “That’s a good one.” He muttered to himself.

“Hey guys!” Karen and Ike walked over and integrated themselves in the small group. “Firkle, I like your hair, you look really nice!” He awkwardly reached his hand up to touch it but said nothing to acknowledge her compliment.

“So Ruby,” Bebe turned to Craig’s sister, “I have to ask, where did you get that dress? It’s so cute!”

“Oh!” Ruby flipped her lengthy, strawberry-blonde hair over her shoulder and looked down at
herself. “I think I got it at H&M, actually.” She tipped her head in her best impression of a popular girl.

“I love the necklace with it, that’s so cool.” Ruby was pulled forward slightly as Bebe twirled the gold and turquoise pendant around in her palm. “Don’t tell Wendy, but I hate this dress she picked out for me. I’d much rather wear something fun and cute like what you and Karen are wearing.”

Ruby laughed nervously and swallowed anxiously. “Well, I like your dress. I wish I had the guts…” She admitted awkwardly. Girls are weird.

Bebe smoothed down her tight black dress with the criss-crossed, maroon, lace pattern on top as Karen agreed and commented how she only wished she could pull that off. The girls chattered on happily while Craig, Ike, and Firkle stood around looking at each other awkwardly.

…”Is that… new?” Craig attempted, pointing at Ike’s baby pink tie.

“No.” He looked down at it. He smoothed the silk down against his white, cotton button up. Awkward pause. “The pants are new,” Ike kicked a foot of tan slacks out in front of him to demonstrate.

“Cool.”

…

“Hey, do you dye your hair?” Firkle asked Craig blandly.

“Oh.”

…

Well, this was getting awkward fast...

Just then, Bebe was ambushed as Red snuck up behind her and wrapped her arms around Bebe’s soft waist. Bebe jumped and laughed out of surprise, claiming Red ‘scared the shit out of her’.

“Hey baby.” Red greeted as she planted a kiss on Bebe’s cheek. Bebe blushed and turned around to wrap Red in a hug.

“You made it!” She exclaimed before planting a quick kiss on her lips. “You know everybody over there, and this is Firkle, he’s a new recruit, we’re trying to get him to join.”

“Don’t!” Red warned with a put-on voice and a comical laugh. Firkle gave zero response to her bad joke.

“And this is Kyle’s brother, Ike, and Kenny’s sister, Karen.” Bebe gestured at the two and smiled at them adoringly. Red waved politely.

“And you know the Tuckers.”

“Hey Red.” Craig greeted her with a small hug. Red was cool enough, but a little annoying. Don’t get him wrong, Craig always ended up having fun with her, but she was one of those cousins that you always hoped wouldn’t show up to the family reunions. Considering her dad was their
dad’s only brother, it was a give-in that it wasn’t a reunion without her.

Ruby, on the other hand, really disliked their cousin. She wasn’t mean to her or anything, she was just kind of annoying and bossy. And being bossed around never goes over well with Ruby Tucker. Red was a little older than Craig, by a few months at most, and always used that as her excuse to boss them around. And since she was the boss, Ruby was always declared the prisoner, or the bartender, or some ancillary character in their games that didn’t require she really participate at all. Red was nice at her core, but just a nuisance to those who grew up with her.

“Craig Tucker without his hat! That’s a first,” Red mused, reaching forward to touch his exposed hair.

“Haha yep.” He laughed dryly as he dodged her hand. God she was annoying.

“What’s up toothpick?” She joked in Ruby’s direction. Ruby covered herself with her arms self consciously. Karen’s eyebrows knitted together, as if deciding she didn’t much approve of the annoying redhead making her best friend feel self conscious. Did Craig mention he liked Karen?

“Rebecca.” Ruby greeted, purposefully over-formal. Red hated her real name. The two rival Tuckers stared at each other judgmentally, no doubt tearing each other down separately, in their own heads.

Bebe, oblivious to the tension, looked around and began, “Well, we’ll probably be eating soon—”

“Oh, LEAVE ME ALONE, WENDY!”

Everything was disrupted as Kyle Broflovski’s voice pierced through the room. Everyone turned to see Wendy staring at him in shock and Stan masking a straight face. Token was wandering away from the tension, hoping to get as far from it as possible. He slid up next to Craig and folded his arms uncomfortably.

“What happened?” Craig asked him in a whisper.

“Wendy was bothering him about not bringing a date again, and then he got mad, and then she got mad, and then she asked him if he thought it hurt Stan’s public image always hanging around with someone who’s never had a girlfriend, ever.”

“Ouch.” Craig chuckled disbelievingly. “‘Way harsh, Tai.’”

“You hang out with Clyde too much.” Token chuckled.

“Shh, I’m watching the show.” Craig smirked. The two were both chuckling to themselves quietly when Craig felt Ruby smack him in the ribs, her eyes darting towards the argument, indicating ‘shut the fuck up, we’re trying to listen!’ *Drink*

“I’m just saying!” Wendy continued.

“Well DON’T say. I don’t care about anything Wendy Testaburger has to say about me.” She rolled he eyes. “You’re so lost in your own world you don’t live your life! You’re a miserable, plastic mannequin of a person, and you make everyone around you miserable too!” Kyle was very heated now. Craig looked over at Ike, who was shaking his head embarrassedly and rubbing his temples furiously.

“I am not!” Wendy defended. "I don’t do that, do I Stan?” All eyes shifted to the brunette, who’s bored face suddenly sprung to life in panic.
“I… I don’t wanna take sides.” He offered clumsily.

“It’s not taking sides, Stan,” Wendy cocked her hip and folded her arms, “Just tell the truth. I’m not some life sucking leach that makes people miserable, am I?” Stan looked around the room frantically, searching for any way out. Nobody could help him. Finally, he sighed.

“I don’t know what you want me to say, Wendy, you’re making everybody pretty miserable right now.”

A small chorus of ‘ooh’s simmered their way around the room. Craig had never seen so much joy on Firkle’s face in the whole hour he’s known the guy.

Kyle stared at Stan intensely, a small smile creeping over his lips. Stan tried to force his expression flat. Wendy was LIVID.

“FINE!” She screamed. “Then if you hate me sooooo much, why don’t you just leave? Cool off, Kyle! Maybe you should take a break from the team for a while.” Wendy arched her eyebrows victoriously, as if she had him right where she wanted him.

Kyle just laughed at her. “You think you’re threatening me? I would LOVE to get away from this Wendy-run cult. It stopped being about debate the minute you stepped up as captain!”

Her cockiness melted away, and was replaced with a shock and hurt. “I’m not—”

“I’m done here!” Wendy looked like she had just been slapped. Kyle threw his arms up in the air and shrugged. “I quit!” Kyle turned towards Bebe. “Thank you for hosting a wonderful party, I’m sorry I ruined it.”

Wendy stepped towards him. “Kyle—”

“And everybody else: it was fun hanging with you, maybe next year the team could be about debate again. I’ll see you then. And Ike,” Kyle’s brother looked miserable, red-faced and mortified, “I’ll see you at home.”

Firkle started clapping and whooping. Craig heard Ruby clapping behind him a little bit as well. Craig joined in with a few claps, earning him a disapproving head shake from Token.

“Kyle!” Everyone turned to see Stan Marsh standing in the middle of the room, halfway between his girlfriend and his best friend.

“Stan.” Kyle acknowledged politely. Waiting, but not necessarily expectantly.

“You’re not leaving, Stan!” Wendy called shrilly from behind him. He didn’t turn around. He didn’t even flinch. Instead, he sent Kyle a pleading look and shrugged his shoulders like there was nothing he could do.

Kyle nodded coldly, and turned to walk out of the house. “See you tomorrow, Stan.” He muttered under his breath as the door closed behind him.

The air was unmoving, the house was silent, and nobody dared move a muscle. Slowly, all eyes migrated towards Stan, who was still standing in the middle of the room looking defeated. Craig glanced at Wendy behind him.

Her shoulders were squared, her head sat high above her shoulders, and the only indication that she was upset at all was the visible clench in her set jaw.
Bebe took a step forward, wanting to comfort Wendy, but not sure if she should.

“Well,” Wendy announced, tossing her arms against her sides haphazardly. “Who’s hungry for dinner?” Slowly, everyone started wandering their way into the dining room.

Craig watched as Wendy turned her back on the crowd and wiped her eyes hastily before gathering up trays of food. Bebe scrambled over to help, resting a comforting hand against her friend’s shoulder. It was not well received. Wendy shrugged her off meanly and whispered something that appeared to be hostile, as Bebe woundedly grabbed another tray and followed Wendy into the dining room. Suddenly Craig’s little non-alcoholic drinking game didn't seem so fun anymore...

The whole night was a disaster. The void from Kyle’s empty seat seemed to reverberate around the room and the dark cloud above Stan’s head was so dark it was practically visible.

Craig’s little place-card-switching prank had gone over like he expected, but now it just seemed unnecessary and mean. Wendy glared at Bebe accusingly, pushed her out of her seat and switched the cards back. Bebe shot Craig a knowing look and he apologized silently.

Wendy painted on expressions of joy and lightness, but her voice was strained and tired.

"Does everybody have what they need?” Wendy scanned the table for guests in need of a perfect host.

"I don't have a napkin..." Ruby admitted.

Firkle loudly jumped up from the table and audibly smacked his knee against the vintage wooden dining set, on his quest to quickly snatch the one from in front of Kyle's seat and hand it to Ruby.

Wendy silently protested the fuss, while everybody else watched in amusement.

Without saying a word, he held it out to her with a jerky motion, face expressionless.

"Oh... thanks... Firkle's got it!” Ruby announced with a stifled laugh.

Bebe caught Craig's eye and wiggled her eyebrows at him inquisitively. He shrugged his shoulders and looked down the table at Ruby, who was also smiling at Bebe and mouthing 'I don't know' in response to her own suggestively questioning look.

"Great.” Wendy rolled her eyes. "Let's get started."

As Wendy spoke about the various sushi rolls and appetizers laid out on the table, Craig heard Ruby grab Token's attention.

"Pass this down to Craig." She whispered. Token inhaled sharply, then cleared his throat curtly to cover it up.

"Craig.” He tapped him on the shoulder. Token snorted as he placed something white into Craig's hand.

It was Ruby's original napkin.

Craig spit his water all over himself, choking in laughter while Token and Ruby struggled to hold their composure next to him.

Wendy glowered at him from the head of the table.
"Sorry." An uncharacteristically high pitched laughed escaped his throat and he felt Token stomp his foot in histrics while trying really hard to suppress howling laughter beside him. "Sorry," Craig cleared his throat. "Really... funny text." He chuckled one more time before taking a deep breath and covering his mouth to stifle any residual giggles.

"No phones." Wendy glared at him before sitting down.

"Yes ma'am." Craig muttered.

“Ok,” She clapped from her place at the head of the table. “Welcome to the first meeting and formal dinner of the Debate Team this year!” Everybody clapped. Wendy smiled self-indulgently. “I’m pleased to announce that our first debate with our rival schools has been set! October 3rd, at 6pm we will participate in our first ‘away game’, as Stan cutely calls them”, Stan gave a half-hearted smile of acknowledgment, “at North Park High!”

Across the table, Bebe’s fork clattered noisily against her plate.

Craig looked up at her and saw her face blanch and her expression frozen.

“You good?” Wendy asked her, slightly annoyed that she’d interrupted her big announcement.

“You ok, babe?” Red asked her lightly, rubbing her arm gently.

Bebe cleared her throat, “Yeah, just choked a little, that’s all.” She told them.

They don’t know.

Bebe glanced at Craig and he held her gaze. ‘You ok?’ He asked her with a small gesture of his head. She smiled at him lightly and nodded. She took another bite of sushi and that was that.

Dinner was awkward. Everybody faked their way through the meeting and everybody left uncomfortable. The only one who seemed to be relishing in the awkwardness was Firkle, as he and Ruby kept making cynical comments to each other under their breath. It was at the end of the night, when Wendy was serving tea and coffee that everything went to shit all over again.

“Oh, well, Stan and I just love that movie, don’t we Stan?” Wendy asked sweetly as she rubbed Stan’s arm, mostly to get his attention again since he’d zoned out of the conversation for the millionth time.

“No, Wendy, you like that movie.” He corrected as he pushed her hand off of his arm.

“What?” She questioned, face frozen in Stepford stone.

“You like that movie. I hate it.” He corrected as he stepped away from her again.

“Stan,” she warned with strategic manipulation, “you’re stressing everybody out.”

“What?” He looked at her incredulously, “My God, Wendy! Kyle’s right, you are seriously delusional.” The façade cracked. Her face fell. Wendy was fuming instantly as she stepped towards Stan and grabbed him tightly by his elbow.

“Why are you acting like this?” She hissed.

“Because it’s true!” He shook her off. “You’re so wrapped up in yourself that you never think
about other people. What you said to Kyle today was really shitty, and honestly, Wendy, it was kind of a wakeup call for me.”

“Wakeup call?” She scoffed. “What do you mean?” Her voice was innocent, but her eyes were fuming.

“We’re done.” Stan said plainly. He shrugged apologetically and turned to walk out the door.

“What!” She was clearly angry now.

“You're always saying how you want me to fight for you,” he continued, as he turned around to face her again, "and fight for us because if I didn't, it meant I didn't care. Well you're right.” Stan's voice went from harsh and aggravated to dangerously apathetic. "I don't care, Wendy.” She dropped her hands to her sides in defeat. "So here I am now, fighting for the end of us. Enjoy the show.” Stan whipped around and stomped his way to the front door for a second time.

“Stan, wait!” Wendy called, tears glistening over her eyes. She desperately followed him up to the front door.

“Not again…” Bebe groaned and rested her elbow on the counter exhaustedly.

“I’m sorry, Wendy.” Stan placed a hand on her shoulder. “We’re done. Forever. Goodbye.”

“Stan!” She called as he opened the door. Her voice was cracking, it was clear she was near tears. Craig was having a hard time hearing her now as she pleaded with him over and over again. ‘Stan, Stan, please!’

“We can’t work this out, Wendy, it’s over.” Craig heard him say.

Wendy picked a nearby book off the coffee table near the entry way and hurled it at his head.

"WHAT THE FUCK?!” He screamed as he backed away from her.

“This is your LAST CHANCE, STAN MARSH!” She stepped closer to him, shoving him and screaming in his face. “If you walk out this door we’re finished!”

“...Yep.” Was all he said before he turned and walked out of her life forever.

The crowd was stunned. Seven teenagers stood frozen, eyes on the trembling girl in the doorway, unable to move or say anything. They were all shocked at what they’d witnessed, though it wasn't necessarily unusual for Stan and Wendy to blow up like this. Everybody saw this coming, especially with their on-again off-again record. If this really was it, it was probably for the best.

But that still didn’t change the fact that Wendy was now leaning against the door frame, crying, and even Bebe’s comforting words didn’t seem to be helping.

“Ok guys, I think the party is over.” Token announced gently as he rounded everyone up and out of the house. “Thanks for having us over, Bebe.” He nodded with a smile. Wendy had already excused herself to the bathroom, and was no where to be found.

Bebe hugged everyone goodbye, and apologized as she shut the door behind them.

“Wow, that was a shit show.” Firkle announced once they were clear of the house. The others nodded in agreement.
“Who needs a ride?” Token asked the group.

Firkle wordlessly walked straight for Token’s car, which was obviously the nicest one in the driveway.

“I got the rest.” Craig told him. “Goodnight, man.”

“‘Night.” Token pulled Craig into a one-armed hug, and the teens walked off to their separate cars.

The ride to Ike’s house was silent, save for the little Broflovski occasionally piping up to engage Karen in conversation. When they got to his house, he politely bid everyone goodnight individually, and thanked Craig for the ride. After asking permission, he sweetly kissed Karen on the cheek before exiting the car. Karen blushed and smiled. Ruby cheered. It was cute.

Craig conveniently neglected to point out Stan Marsh, letting himself into the Broflovski household just moments before.
POV - Kyle

Kyle was sulking in bed, still in his fancy clothes, with his jacket thrown across his floor. He was scrolling through Facebook and not really doing much of anything when his phone dinged in rapid fire.

From Stan: Hey dude, I broke up with Wendy

From Stan: For good this time

From Stan: I'm so done with her

From Stan: I'm sorry she made you feel like you had to quit, I know you loved it…

From Stan: I'm sure if you asked her to stay she would let you

From Stan: She's a bitch but she loves a good reconciliation

From Stan: That exit was epic btw *crying-laughing emoji*

From Stan: I'm sorry, dude, I feel bad…

From Stan: …I'm sorry I didn't go after you…
Kyle's heart fluttered as butterflies filled his stomach. 'I'm sorry I didn't go after you', 'I broke up with Wendy', 'For good'.

Kyle shot up in bed and typed like a madman.

To Stan:  Aw man, I'm sorry dude. Can't say I'm not a little relieved

To Stan:  Welcome to the light side

(Kyle sent a GIF of Darth Vader)

From Stan:  Yeah.

To Stan:  Wanna hang out for a few hours?

From Stan:  Yeah!

From Stan:  I'll be passing by your house soon anyway.

To Stan:  Sounds like a plan!

From Stan:  *thumbs up emoji*

Kyle sprang out of bed and walked over to the mirror. He smoothed his hair down and tucked in his shirt. He picked his coat off the floor and walked over to set up the Xbox. 'Poor Stan' he thought to himself as he plugged the input into his TV. No doubt they both needed a good, old fashioned guy's night — like the good old days. Kyle's stomach did flips again as he warned himself not to get too ahead of himself. He walked into the kitchen to bring in a stash of sodas and chips. He checked everything twice and rearranged the chairs in front of the TV. He was just plugging in the controllers when he heard his front door open and shut, and his Super Best Friend sulk his way down the hallway. He prepared himself for a night in with Stan, and pushed any fluttery feelings out of his head with defiance... at least for the time being. There would be plenty of time to lay awake tonight fantasizing about what could have been...
POV - Ruby

“Goodnight!”

"'Night!" Craig waited outside until the girls had safely made it inside the house. Ruby waved her brother off, indicating that it was safe for him to leave. He threw up a casual salute and sped off in the direction of home. *This is a residential neighborhood*, Ruby thought to herself, rolling her eyes as she closed the door.

As they stepped into the living room, the girls realized they were not alone in the dark, messy house.

Kenny was sitting on the couch, arms crossed, holding himself worriedly and chewing his thumbnail. He was staring dazedly in the direction of a phone on the coffee table in front of him,
eyes wide and unfocused. He didn’t seem to notice them come in.

“Ken, you ok?” Karen asked her brother carefully.

Kenny blinked. “Yeah.” He responded with an unreadable expression; eyes unmoving, still chewing on his nail.

His foot started tapping rapidly. “...Are you sure?” Ruby questioned with concern.

Kenny sprang to life and jumped up from the couch. He smiled at them thinly. “Yeah. Good night!” He grabbed his phone off the coffee table, clicked the home screen, frowned, and walked off to his room.

“He worries me.” Karen half-joked as the two girls stared after him.

“Do you think it’s girl troubles?” Ruby asked, attempting to lighten the mood.

“No.” Karen replied matter-of-factly. Whatever was bothering Kenny, there was a 95% chance that Karen had already figured it out by now.

The front door opened, and the sounds of rustling grocery bags grabbed their attention.

“Hi, baby.” Carol McCormick floated over to her daughter to give her a kiss on the top of her head. “Ruby! Hi, sweetie!” Carol had to rise up on her tippy toes to kiss the side of Ruby’s temple and smooth down her hair.

“Hey, momster.” Ruby greeted. Carol laughed lightheartedly.

It had started as a joke, back when Karen and Ruby were kids, but the affectionate nickname warmed Mrs. McCormick’s heart and softened her tired eyes, so Ruby stuck with it. The joke went: Carol was like a second mom to Ruby, but Ruby already had a mom, and regular ‘mom names’ were so boring. Therefore: Carol’s new name would be ‘momster’. ‘Like a monster that loves you!’ Originally, Carol had pushed for something nicer like ‘mama’ or even ‘ma’, but the fact that she seemed to hate it only made Ruby love it more. She and Karen had run around the house chanting ‘Momster! Momster! Momster!’ over and over again until they were all laughing so hard they couldn’t breathe. Now Mrs. McCormick wouldn’t stand to be addressed any other way. The word had transformed into a cherished memory, so I guess it’s gotta stick.

“Just got off the phone with your mom,” Carol continued as she unpacked, “she says ‘don’t stay up too late because it’s a school night’.” It had been a fight to acquire permission to sleep at Karen’s at all on a Wednesday, but it helped that Carol and Laura were friends. They had grown up together. Laura was there when Carol had gotten unexpectedly pregnant with Kevin, and Carol was there when Laura’s mom died. They had a history, and a bond that no amount of unforeseen tragedy or cancelled plans could distance. They still went out jogging with each other once a week and gossiped about their kids’ and husbands’ lives. Ruby imagined that would be her and Karen one day, only without certain minor details. Jogging is for hamsters.

“I got some snacks, in case you girls weren’t ready to go to bed just yet.” Carol explained as she unpacked a can of Pringles, a store-brand bag of gummy worms, and a 12-pack of iced tea.

“It’s like 10:30,” Karen pointed out.

“I know, but Walmart is open 24 hours.” Carol reasoned. Karen frowned at her mother skeptically. “Besides,” the young mom popped open the gummy worms and settled daintily into the couch, “I want to hear about how tonight went.”
Karen groaned as Ruby’s smile grew mischievously wide.

“Karen got a kiss tonight!” Ruby blurted out, criss-crossing her legs under herself as she took a seat next to Carol on the couch.

“She did?!?” Carol swiveled her head to smile at her daughter disbelievingly.

“Yup.” Ruby confirmed, grabbing a handful of gummy worms as she did so. “On the cheek. Like a gentleman,” Ruby clarified. She looked across the room at her friend, who was begging her with a look that said ‘stop talking, oh my god’. Ruby smirked, “He asked her if he could, it was so sweet.”

“Oh my!” Carol rested a hand over her chest and swooned dramatically. Karen was not amused. “Who is this lovely boy?”

Karen had gone from waving her arms dramatically in a ‘no!’ motion, to now tackling Ruby to cover her mouth.

“Ike!” Ruby blurted from behind Karen’s hand.

“This is so embarrassing!” The smaller teen whined, covering her face with both of her hands. Karen reminded Ruby a lot of Tweek sometimes.

“Oh, Shiela’s boy! Oh, how nice, he’s a nice boy!” Carol complimented.

“Yes! Ok, he’s nice, can we please stop talking about it now!?” Karen shot back with a glare at her mom.

“Ok, fine. I won’t bother you.” Carol conceded calmly, if not also a little sadly.

“Thank you.” Karen hugged her apologetically, already feeling bad for yelling at her mom.

“Just tell me how this thing progresses, ok?” Carol smiled. Karen nodded, and Ruby gave a far more enthusiastic thumbs up behind Karen’s back. Carol said good night and sauntered off to her bedroom, leaving the gummy worms on the table for her girls.

Stewart came home moments later, and his greeting was much more simple. He told Karen all about his new job and asked if she had a fun night, since he’d heard she had ‘some party or other’. She confirmed that she had, and didn’t offer much more information than that.

Everybody said goodnight, and the girls headed to Karen’s room.

“I still can’t believe Ike kissed you tonight.” Ruby schmoozed dramatically from across the room as she wiped off her makeup.

“Does really it count as a kiss if it’s on the cheek?” Karen wondered, failing to hide her blush as she took out her earrings in front of the mirror.

“It counts even more because it was freakin’ adorable!” Ruby exclaimed excitedly.

Karen spun around with a small smirk. “It was kinda sweet, huh?” She admitted with a grin.

“Yes!” Ruby threw a nearby pillow at Karen, hoping to knock some sense into that pretty little head of hers.
Karen ducked. "Rude!" She scolded disingenuously, not one ounce of anger in that giggling body.

Ruby flipped off her friend and Karen did the same. "Seriously, Kare, it really was adorable." Ruby found herself somewhat lost in a daydream as she spoke. "I don’t know if I’ll ever have something like that. But I hope so… one day."

“You will, Ruby. You’ll see.” Karen beamed with certainty.

Ruby wasn’t so sure...

“So, you and Firkle appeared to be having fun together,” Karen commented as she squeezed into her queen-sized bed, “you seemed to be the only reason he wasn’t wallowing in self pity all night.”

“Yeah,” Ruby continued, “he told me he didn’t want to come but Henrietta made him. She said it was good for him to socialize. How freakin’ cute is that? I don’t think he’ll be joining the team after this, though.”

Karen giggled. “He really is adorable.”

“Yeah.” Ruby agreed.

“Do you think he likes you?” Karen smirked.

Ruby shrugged her shoulders as best as she could while lying down, "I think so. He tends to pay attention to me a lot.”

"With the napkin…” Karen grinned.

"Oh my god, the napkin!” Ruby cackled. Both girls broke out into fits of laughter. "I feel so bad," Ruby panted, "I had my original napkin the whole time!"

"And when you sent it down the table to Craig? His reaction made my night!” Karen wheezed.

"I thought Token was gonna pee his pants!” Ruby was laughing so hard her stomach hurt. It didn't help when Karen compared jokes to jazzercise and added in a few sit-ups for comedic effect.

Eventually the laughter died down, both girls still chuckling as they calmed down. "So funny..." Karen giggled as she wiped her eyes.

"Yeah…" Ruby hiccuped, "Kind of a disaster otherwise, though, huh?" She winced, thinking about it.

“Yep.” Karen grimaced. “I feel so bad for Wendy!”

“Me too… I would be so embarrassed if my personal drama was broadcast in a public setting like that.”

“Yeah.” Karen nodded solemnly. "I hope she's ok."

Ruby agreed.

“...Anyway,” Karen flipped the subject with a grin, “we’ve established that Firkle likes you, but what do you think about him?” Karen propped herself up on her elbows in patient anticipation.
Ruby felt her face fall. “Oh… I don’t know…”

“Come on!” Karen pleaded, “tell me!”

“I… I don’t know what to say…” She really didn't...

“Why not? You said it yourself, he’s cute. And he’s sweet, and he’s pretty funny, and you can’t tell me ‘funny’ isn’t exactly your type, plus…” Karen continued to list all the reasons why Ruby should and would fall head-over-heels for the dorky boy with the black hair. Ruby could only hear white noise whooshing through her ears. Karen’s voice was wobbly and distorted, words barely registering at all as Ruby ran around in her own head.

“Karen, I lied to you.” Ruby blurted out before she could stop herself.

Karen blinked at Ruby, shocked, but willing to listen. “Ok…”

The pressure building in Ruby’s chest was too much, she felt like she couldn’t breathe. She was doing this… was she really doing this? Tears started to well in her eyes as she stared her best friend in the face.

“Ruby, what is it?” Karen scooched closer, and lowered her voice in anticipation. “You can tell me.” Ruby closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

“Don’t hate me.” Ruby whispered desperately.

“I’d never hate—”

"—I don't like boys..." Ruby spoke over Karen, who was now looking at her quizzically. 'No, no, no, no…'

"...W-what does—"

“I’m gay.”

Karen stopped mid-sentence, and the silence was deafening. Ruby’s eyes widened as her heart beat painfully against her chest. Oh no, ‘What did I just do?!’

Visions of her lifelong best friend, the only friend who ever understood her — getting angry, kicking her out, never speaking to her again, or worse: hating her, being disgusted by her — flickered across the young girl’s mind. It made her wish she didn’t notice how audibly Karen’s breath had hitched. Ruby’s hand flew to her mouth in a vain attempt to take back what had already been said. Unspoken words lingered in the air as Karen blinked at her surprisingly; her soft hazel gaze suddenly feeling prying and intrusive. Ruby flinched and shifted her focus to the floral patterns strewn across her pillow.

“Saysomething.” Ruby begged, refusing to look Karen in the eyes.

“I’m just… surprised,” Ruby couldn't read her expression, "you never hinted about anything before…”

“I didn’t want anyone to know…” She admitted, dutifully picking up where Karen’s voice had trailed off — her whisper barely audible in the silence. Ruby winced as tears stung the corners of her eyes. She picked at her nails apprehensively with shaking hands. Waiting was the worst part… Ruby could do nothing else but lay there quietly, screaming at herself in her own head, while Karen processed this new information.
The littler one tilted her head curiously, “But… why not?” She wondered sweetly.

Ruby rolled her eyes as a tear escaped and landed on her pillow. She hoped Karen didn’t see.

“But…” Why was she hiding this major part of herself? “…Because I just didn’t want to worry anyone… I didn’t want to stress anyone out and I didn’t want anyone to think any less of me… that it was weird, or whatever…”

“Ruby, I would never think that.” Karen McCormick’s steady voice strongly shouldered the unease that had been weighing so heavily against Ruby’s shaking vocal cords. Ruby released a tense breath that she was tired of holding, as she listened to that reassuring voice, “I don’t think anybody who loves you would care.”

“I don’t know.” Ruby mumbled.

“I do.” Karen assured with a smile. Her certainty broke Ruby's heart even more than the words she was about to say.

“My dad would care…”

Karen looked at Ruby sympathetically, patiently waiting for her to continue.

Ruby lowered her gaze once again to focus on the comforting floral patterns below eye level.

“When Craig first started hanging around Tweek, my dad made all these comments under his breath to my mom and me that were pretty judgmental. When they started dating — or hooking up, or whatever the fuck — my dad lost his shit. Saying: ‘what did I do wrong?’ , ‘What did I do to make my son like this?’ , ‘Why did this have to ‘happen' to my son?’, like it was some horrible curse. It was upsetting! Craig was so hurt, and it started a huge fight with my mom… I just remember the look he gave Craig: like he pitied him… I don’t know what I would do if my dad ever looked at me like that…” Ruby’s voice cracked, eyes finally meeting Karen’s warm, hazel ones as tears began streaming down her aching face. Karen reached out and held Ruby’s hand comfortingly. It made the trembling girl jump. She hadn’t really prepared for this, though she had lie awake many nights praying for this outcome: ‘Nothing had changed’. After years of worrying, and putting it off, Karen genuinely didn't give a fuck. The redhead stared down at her steadying hand. Ruby’s number one fear was that Karen would not treat her the same way: that it would suddenly be weird when they touched or that Karen would be afraid to ‘give the wrong impression'.

But Karen was fearless, and Ruby was still the same Ruby she always was.

There was no prejudice, and there were no conditions.

Their love was too strong.

They would be ok.

*That did it.*

Ruby broke down, shaking, sweating, and sobbing uncontrollably. Her best friend in the whole world accepted her unconditionally. It was so freeing to be able to admit that she felt like she’d been lying by omission all these years... And yet, in the dark corners of her mind, Ruby was not convinced she could not count on her own father to treat her the same way once he knew... The man who’s supposed to love her more than any other man on Earth ever could, was not guaranteed to acknowledge her once she shared who she really was. She wondered if he would even see her the
same way as he did before... It was scary.

“Ruby…” Karen consoled. She gestured for Ruby to sit up, and Karen wrapped her best friend in a secure hug. Ruby's violent sobs sent tremors through Karen's little body, but she only held on tighter. “I don’t think anyone, in my family or yours, will love you any less once you tell them.” She promised.

“What if they do?” Ruby whispered, petrified, as she did her best to wipe her face from around Karen’s shoulder.

“I’ll kick their asses.” Karen stated matter-of-factly. Ruby smiled and sat back on her heels. Karen brushed a delicate finger against Ruby's hot cheek to wipe at the continuous cascade of tears pouring out of Ruby’s eyes. “And your dad has accepted Craig and Tweek now, right?”

Ruby sniffled. “Oh, my dad may love Tweek more than his own son.” She joked with a laugh. “I just don’t think I can handle the period of judgement that could come before acceptance. I can’t break his heart.” Ruby’s voice cracked again. “He still calls me his little girl.” She chuckled through tears.

“Exactly!” Karen gestured excitedly. “You’re his little girl, he will love you no matter what. He may have even softened up by now because of Craig. I don’t think you’ll have anything to worry about.” Ruby thought about it. ‘Karen does have a point…’

“Yeah… I guess that makes sense…” Ruby hiccuped as she wiped her nose.

“Yeah! And my family is so liberal they won’t care who you’re with, as long as she treats you right.” ‘She’. Karen was already using ‘she’. Ruby beamed.

“Ok.” Ruby smiled. “Thanks, Kare.” They hugged once more as Ruby attempted to calm her shaking breaths.

"Wow." Ruby chuckled breathlessly as she fanned her face, sore eyes now spilling over with relief. Karen sniffled as she tried to contain herself. “I didn’t even mean to do this today.” Ruby laughed through hiccups as she wiped her face.

Karen laughed as her eyes instantly filled with tears. Two empathetic souls in sync. They were really something special.

“Love you.” Karen held out her pinky, tilting her head as tears fell. Ruby smiled.

“Love you too, Kare Bear.” Ruby would never lose her best friend, or their dumb secret handshake.

“So…” Karen mused, dabbing at her eyes dramatically as her head hit the pillow, “anything else to tell me? Specific names, perhaps?” She prodded with an ever-growing smile. Sometimes Karen was the spitting image of her mother. Now, quietly gossiping about prospective romance, was one of those times.

Ruby’s smile, however, faded rapidly as one face in particular emerged, unsolicited, into her imagination.

“Are you kidding?” She scoffed, quickly saving face, “None of the girls in our grade are worth my time.” Ruby flipped her hair for emphasis, making Karen roll her eyes jokingly. “Maybe there will be a glow-up in a few years and I’ll start there. For now I just kinda wanna stay in the closet a little longer. Maybe I’ll try dating a few guys, see what’s so fun about that.”
Karen frowned, “No, Ruby, I don’t think that’s how that works—”

“No, I kind of want to. I mean, Firkle’s fun. He’s pretty attractive in an objective way. We already have fun together, and I know he already has a crush on me. Could be a good cover. Maybe it will be fun to hang out with him alone, who knows. Hey, maybe I’m bi.”

“No, Ruby, don’t lie to yourself, if you don’t want to come out then just be single—”

“Don’t stress about it Karen, I’m not.” Ruby looked at her skeptical friend pointedly. “If I end up having fun hooking up with Firkle that’s fine, but I don’t want to waste my time waiting around. I’ll experiment.” She joked.

Karen’s frowned deepened. “Don’t put yourself in situations that will make you uncomfortable…” She warned.

"I won't." Ruby promised.

Karen looked at her skeptically. "Are you sure?"

"Yes." Ruby confirmed. "I promise I will not let my heart get broken." Any more than it has…

"Protect yourself." Karen warned gravely.

"I will."

"Don't play with his heart either." She commanded.

"I won't!"

Karen pursed her lips as her eyebrows furrowed.

"I promise." Ruby added.

Karen still looked at her suspiciously...

Ruby checked the clock. It was now midnight. “We should go to bed, we have school tomorrow. Just… don’t tell anyone, please… I’m not ready yet.” She confessed, eyes focused on a slow-drying spot where a tear had landed on her pillow.

Karen sighed and nodded. “I promise. And if you want to date Firkle as a cover, I won’t stop you… unless he hurts you, then I’m kicking his ass.” And she was serious too. Karen was the best.

Ruby bid her goodnight again, rolled over, and closed her eyes.

Sleep did not come easy that night for Ruby. She kept replaying tonight’s scenes over and over in her head, grateful that she had someone like Karen on her side. She kept dreaming up scenarios of confronting her family: how Craig would make some Star Wars joke about welcoming her to ‘the gay side’, how Tweek would embrace her with words of encouragement, and how her mom would just be happy for her one way or another. It was when she dreamt of her dad that a million scenarios played out in her head; some beautiful, some horrifying. If she was going to get any rest tonight, she had to put these fickle predictions behind her, and focus on the present.

As her blue eyes fluttered closed, Ruby’s daydreams were taken over by fantasies of a warm
embrace: one with curly hair, honest eyes, and a welcoming smile with a tiny mole above her lip.

Chapter End Notes

Whoo. *wipes tears*

Really quickly, I just wanted to say, that lying to yourself is never the solution. But Ruby is young, and she doesn't know that yet.

Sorry to Firkle, too. I'll make something work out for him in the end, don't worry.

Keep your eye on this storyline, it may get messy.
Chapter Summary

Wendy and Red sleep over, and Bebe dreams of a night she wishes she could forget.

TW: for graphic memories of sexual assault

POV - Bebe

“Yeah, no duh, Bebe, I know how to put two ingredients into a glass, thanks.” Wendy snapped, drunkenly struggling to open a new carton of orange juice.

“Maybe, she should stop, she’s had like four drinks.” Red tried to whisper without Wendy hearing.

“I haven’t had enough!” Wendy yelled back, screech echoing through the house. Bebe was lucky her parents were out of town this week. Again.

Bebe sighed and flipped the carton to show Wendy the easy-pull tab, rather than let her destroy a whole new carton of juice by opening it the wrong way.

“I can do it.” She mumbled. “I’m an independent woman, now.” She raised her voice. “I don’t need… Stan to open this carton of juice.” She pulled the tab too hard, tipping the full carton slightly, and spilling some all over the table and herself.

“Why do bad things always happen to me?!?” Wendy whined as she slumped to the floor in a heaping mess of tears and liquor.

“Wendy,” Bebe began cautiously, “why don’t we switch to water for a little bit, huh?”

“I hate water! It’s boring!” Wendy whined, throwing her body in the beginnings of a tantrum any child would be jealous of.

“How about some soda then?” Bebe sighed as she attempted to bring the drunken brat to her feet.

“But we finished all the vodka sodas!” She began.

“Not vodka soda, Wendy, just soda.” Bebe shot Red an exhausted look, sympathized by the redhead with a shrug and a glance at the clock. “We have some Coke left.” She offered.

“Bring me an iced tea!” Wendy demanded. Jesus Christ, Bebe thought there would never be a worse drunk in the world than a heartbroken Wendy Testaburger. Whatever will get her to cheer up…

“Ok, sweetie, coming right up…” Wendy grabbed Bebe by the shoulders and shouted in her face.
“Long Island!” Wendy screamed at the top of her lungs. ‘Right in my fucking ear!’

“Ow! No, Wendy! Be quiet! Now, no more alcohol do you understand? We are going to get you some juice, and some tea, and then we are going to bed. Remember you have school tomorrow?”

Wendy’s face instantly scrunched up into an ugly, contorted expression of pain. “Stan goes to our school!”

Bebe tried to ignore Red’s agitated ‘oh my god!’ as she threw her hands up in the air and walked away into the living room.

“I know, Wendy,” Bebe worked to smooth Wendy’s hair down, seeing as it had frizzed up all over the place after flailing her body against the kitchen cabinets. “Let’s just get you some yummy juice, and go upstairs.”

“Only if it’s a screwdriver.” Wendy pouted.

“Ok.” She won’t be able to tell the difference at this point anyway. Bebe filled a glass mostly with water, and topped it off with the o.j. “Here.” She thrust the glass at Wendy as gently as her patience would allow her.

Wendy took one sip and turned her nose up at it, thrusting it back towards Bebe. “It tastes weird.” The brunette complained, steady voice dripping with privilege. All tears had dissipated, and she was back to her usual prissy self.

“That’s because I put too much vodka.” Bebe lied. Wendy inspected her drink closely, scanning the container with narrow yes and scrunched nose. Upon deciding she liked what she saw, the brunette shrugged and chugged the entire glass in one gulp before wordlessly shoving it into Bebe’s hands and strolling out of the kitchen without another sound. Drunk Wendy was the worst.

“Ok, Wendy, you’ll sleep here.” Bebe laid out pillows and blankets across the chaise lounge in the corner of her room.

“Where’s my drink?” Wendy wondered, looking at her empty hand worriedly.

“I can bring one upstairs, if you promise to go to sleep.” Bebe bargained. Wendy nodded, eyes already drifting closed as she was standing up. Bebe guided her to the makeshift bed and went downstairs to fetch Wendy a big glass of water for the morning. On second thought, she should really lock up the rest of her parents’ liquor too in case a certain someone snuck downstairs later — she really didn’t want to be holding Wendy’s hair back tomorrow morning over the toilet.

“Hey.”

“Oh!” Red’s voice startled Bebe.

She spun around quickly, covering her fast-beating heart with her hand as she laughed.

“You scared me!” She panted.

“Sorry.” Red smirked her lopsided grin as she stepped closer. “I thought maybe you needed some help cleaning up after Hurricane Wendy.” Red leaned against the wall as she pointed towards the mess on the counter.
“I got it.” Bebe smiled sweetly. Honestly she was just gonna leave it until the morning, but it probably was best to clean it up now. Bebe stepped forward to reach for the paper towels near Red, but the chivalrous redhead got there first, awkwardly knocking the whole thing over as she ripped a sheet off for Bebe.

“M’lady.” She nerdily held the quilted square out dramatically for her girlfriend.

“Ha— You appear to be a little tipsy too.” Bebe chuckled, taking the towel and walking over to the spilled juice on the counter. She heard Red’s footsteps follow behind her.

“Well, we didn't let Wendy drink all by herself, after all.” Red drawled lazily in Bebe’s ear as she wrapped her arms around the blonde affectionately.

“That’s true.” Bebe giggled. She turned around to face her girlfriend, and slinked her arms around the back of her neck. “I guess I’m feeling a little loose myself.” She purred, leaning in as she spoke.

Bebe pressed her open mouth against Red’s soft lips in a deep kiss. She felt pale hands grip her waist as she leaned lazily against the counter top. Bebe skimmed her fingertips across Red's collarbone and down the middle of her chest as Red's hands shimmied up Bebe's ribcage. She grasped fabric between her fingers and tugged the other girl towards her, hips pressing gradually against Red's the closer she stepped. Red's fingers glided gently across the soft skin of Bebe's neck, the blonde's heart racing dangerously as she did so. Bebe became distracted as the sound of Wendy's phone ringing pierced the silence of the house. Upon remembering they were not alone, Bebe reluctantly realized they should probably stop… Bebe held her girlfriend at a safe distance as she stepped back to admire her: red hair was tucked hastily behind her adorably giant ears, and her freckled face was flushed and grinning.

God, she was beautiful.

Bebe swallowed, what was her point again? Oh yeah...

“Wendy’s upstairs.” Bebe breathed as she stepped closer, contradicting words she’d already forgotten she’d said. Red shrugged and apologized with a lopsided smile, the one that she knew Bebe couldn’t resist. Unfair... Bebe sighed and dropped her arm. ‘Come here’ she mouthed as she beckoned Red forward with a smirk. They walked towards each other, meeting with a crash as their lips entwined, pressing their bodies closer with every step until they were flush against each other, the countertop digging into Bebe’s lower back. She didn’t care.

Red moved her lips down to Bebe’s neck. Bebe moaned quietly as she ran her fingers through Red’s fiery mane. Red dragged her tongue along the sensitive skin between Bebe’s collarbone and neck, and sucked at the raw skin greedily. It made Bebe’s eyes roll back in her head until… something about it made her uneasy. She tried to push it out of her head.

Slowly, Red’s hands slinked down across Bebe’s back. She felt Red smirk against her skin as her hands drifted around her body.

*fingers unbuttoning, fabric sliding, a gruff voice in her ear*
Vivid images flashed through Bebe’s mind as she felt Red’s hands slide lower…

*Panic, fear, rough hands gripped painfully around her wrists—*

“STOP!” Bebe screamed as she pushed against Red’s chest, sending her flying back against the island behind her.

“I’m sorry!” Red apologized instantly.

The girls stared at each other, faces flushed, hearts racing, not moving and not saying a word. Distance and confusion growing rapidly with every word that remained unsaid.

Silence filled the room — the only sound was the steady ticking of the clock, and Bebe’s heartbeat in her ears.

“It’s just… too fast.” Bebe explained breathlessly.

“Ok… ” Red bit ner lip nervously. Bebe could practically see the worst case scenarios Red was imagining in her worried head.

“It’s not you…” Bebe stepped forward and wrapped an arm around her girlfriend’s neck. She twirled red hair between her fingers as she spoke. “I just… I don’t want to move too fast…” She flinched with guilt.

“I know.” Red cooed, fingers brushing against Bebe’s jaw gently. “I’m sorry.” She repeated.

“It’s not your fault…” Bebe answered honestly.

She stared into Red’s icy blue eyes and nearly melted at their softness and understanding.

Bebe closed her eyes and rested her forehead against Red’s. Red sighed and traced her fingers up and down Bebe’s arms soothingly. They stood like that, unmoving, content in the innocence of this intense intimacy for what felt like hours. Bebe brushed Red’s hair behind her broad shoulder, and cupped her freckled face in her hand. Red leaned into the touch, eyes fluttering in anticipation. Bebe leaned in slowly with a careful, deliberate kiss, lingering gently against Red’s tender lips with delicate softness. A barely-there touch; insect wings on flower petals.

Bebe pulled back, “We should get some sleep.”

Red’s head nodded wordlessly as her arms fell limply against her sides. Bebe grabbed the redhead by the hand, and guided her upstairs.

Bebe placed a glass of water on the nightstand next to the chaise lounge, and bid Wendy goodnight.

“Bebe?” Wendy slurred, eyes closed, reaching out for the blonde girl in the darkness.

“Yes?”
The heartbroken girl kept waving her hands, silently asking for something vague, and getting agitated in the process.

“What is it?” The Bebe whispered, inching closer to the inebriated mess as Wendy kept waving her over. She wondered if maybe Wendy just wanted to thank her for the water, or for taking care of her tonight.

Nope. Wendy’s eyes popped open and her eyebrows furrowed. “You guys aren’t gonna do it in here, with me in the room tonight, right?” She rambled with a judgmental glare.

Bebe sighed. “No, Wendy. Go to sleep.” She started to walk away. “Maybe you’ll be tolerable in the morning.” She muttered quietly.

“Yeah, maybe…” Wendy agreed absently, before rolling over, already snoring, and drooling on the spare pillow.

“No, Bebe, there’s no way. Draco had the dark mark, the end, that’s all, there was no bite mark.”

“No, the movie added that in, the books never once mentioned a mark specifically, so if you’re just going by book standards, yes, the theory makes sense.”

“Explain it again.”

The girls whispered and chatted as they brushed their teeth and gathered extra pillows from the hallway linen closet to get settled in for the night.

By the time Bebe had convinced Red of her Harry Potter-werewolf-conspiracy theory, they were standing at the edge of Bebe’s bed.

Bebe’s hands fidgeted with the pillow awkwardly.

“What is it?” Red questioned, tone flat, lips quirking in a smile.

“Do you… well, do you want to sleep in the bed with me? Or is that too much pressure… I can sleep on the couch downstairs if you want me too… or you could sleep with me.” As Bebe spoke, Red stepped forward, one foot in front of the other, until they were nose to nose.

“What do you want to do?” She almost dared Bebe, a small twinkle in her blue eyes.

Bebe thought about it.

Was it weird sharing a bed with a girl you’ve only been dating a few weeks, a month at most, and never really touched beyond kissing? Maybe.

Did she care?

No.

Bebe smirked back.

“We can share the bed.” Bebe lilted shyly as Red stepped back and opened her mouth in mock surprise. Bebe nodded theatrically as she giggled, playing along with Red’s little game. That was one thing that really drew Red to Bebe, she turned everything into an opportunity to laugh; she made everyday life not quite so heavy. Qualities Bebe had been afraid age and anguish would have
tarnished from her own personality, she was rediscovering pieces of every day with Red.

Bebe grabbed the redhead by the waist and pulled her over to the bed.

“Luckily your parents are out of town, or you would be in so much trouble.” Red joked.

“Pfft. Yeah, you think?” Bebe rolled her eyes as she sat facing Red, logs criss-crossed in front of her.

“I’d have to crawl in through your window.” Red mused with a smirk, mirroring Bebe and crossing her legs the same way.

“Only a couple weekends a month.” Bebe reasoned.

Red’s face smoothed out into a look of concern.

“Wait, how often do they leave you alone in this giant house?” She wondered incredulously.

Bebe shrugged. “Whenever they feel like it.” At least that seemed to be their pattern. “My dad retired early last year so they’ve kinda been exploring the world together with all the money made at his old company. Apparently his pension is, like, really good, or whatever.”


“No, usually it’s just the two of them. Especially now that school’s started I probably won’t be going anywhere with them until at least Christmas, assuming they don’t move to Morocco and leave me behind.” Bebe joked dryly.

“Must be kinda cool having the house to yourself so often.” Red mused.

“Honestly, I hate sleeping here alone, it freaks me out.” Bebe admitted.


“Those are two very different things.” Red pointed out.

“Whatever, it’s all scary, and I’m glad I don’t have to sleep alone tonight.” Bebe nudged Red with her foot.

“Me too.” Red beamed.

Bebe kissed Red goodnight, and lay her head down on the pillow.

“Um…” Red mumbled something under her breath.

“What?” Bebe rolled over and smiled up at her. Sometimes she wondered if her own smile was even half as radiant as the finest spec of twinkle in Red’s icy eyes.

“Can I hold you?” Red asked gently.

Bebe intertwined their fingers and pulled Red’s arm across her body as she rolled over. Red scooted closer and buried her face in Bebe’s hair.

“Goodnight.” She whispered sweetly, heart-stopping smile audible in her gentle voice.
Bebe smiled and held Red’s hand close to her chest.

“Goodnight.”

The last thing Bebe remembered before she fell asleep, was the feeling of Red’s lips pressing gently against her bare shoulder.

She had to have only been asleep for an hour or so before her eyes rolled back in her head, and visions of a maleficent kind clouded her subconscious like a dark storm.

She was back at that party. In North Park. The one Wendy had begged her not to go to alone. She figured she would hang with the small South Park crowd that was going, or maybe even meet some new people and hang out with them.

She did shots with Clyde, chugged a beer with Stan, and beat Kenny at beer pong. She even met some North Park girls on the dance floor who seemed pretty cool.

She had just been spinning around, jumping carelessly to the beat of the music when she slammed into the chest of a nearby boy, an older boy. He smiled at her. She smiled at him.

“Care to dance?” He grinned.

She nodded.

They danced.

They drank.

His friends kept handing her shots.

She drank.

They danced.

He mixed her a drink.

She drank.

She fell down.

She couldn’t walk.

He whispered in her ear. He grabbed her hand.

He carried her upstairs.

He lay her on the bed. He turned out the light. She lay her head on the pillow.

...And she was out moments later.

She woke up to the unmistakable rustle of buckles and zippers shifting around on top of her.

Realization dawned on her as her ringing ears picked up whispering in the darkness above her:
she wasn’t alone in this dark and dismal room. Horror washed over her as she felt a hand graze over her exposed stomach.

“Um.” She mumbled as she tried politely to push this boy off of her.

“Shhhh, don’t be scared.” He cooed with delicacy. “I’ll be gentle.” He chuckled “I ’member I was scared my first time too.” He slurred, nearly falling on top of her.

“I—” Bebe pushed against him as he dove at her lips. “L-let’s go downstairs and dance again… I wanna dance!” She lied.

He chuckled playfully, “Well don’t freak out on me now, you’re the one who followed me up here.” But…what? No...

“But I didn’t—”

“Hey, hey.” He ran his fingers lightly across Bebe’s cheek. She shuddered, sickened by the spoiled innocence of this simple gesture.

“You’ll like it, I promise. Just relax.” He drooled drunkenly as he dove at her neck. Bebe felt her fingernails curl against the sweaty shirt clinging to his back.

"Wait!"

‘This isn’t happening’.

‘This isn’t happening!’

'What do I do?! WHAT THE FUCK AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?!'

Bebe lay panicked in stunned silence until she felt his hands skim low across her hips.

Fuck politeness.

Bebe fought back.

She protested. She said ‘no’, she begged him to stop. She pushed, she kicked, she wiggled as much as her exhausted body would allow her. But he was bigger than her, and he was stronger — and he had had much less to drink than her. Logically, she knew she needed to keep fighting, and part of her still wanted to, but part of her had helplessly given up — remembering horror stories of tales she’d always distanced from herself so dismissively.

'That will never be me…'

Bebe sobbed, choking on her naiveté, innocence bitterly strangled by the sweaty sheets now clutched tightly between her trembling fingers.

He grabbed her wrists painfully and pinned her down. “Just relax.” He hissed. His knuckles whitened as his vice grip squeezed her harder and harder. She could feel his nails digging into her, as he panted in her ear; she could feel her own nails digging into her palms as she clenched her fists tightly. Bebe’s vision blurred and she could have sworn the walls were closing in on her; as the dark room began shrinking, the world became an agonizing nightmare she knew she could not wake up from.

Bebe started calling — to anyone — as loudly as her frail vocal chords would allow. She called for Kenny, she called for Stan... she realized with discouraged alarm that nobody would be able to
hear her over the loud music blaring downstairs.

Nobody would come for her.

Bebe’s screams died down to whimpers as she felt fear stiffen her joints. She kept feeling a salty, sweaty hand cover her mouth, muffling her cries until she felt like she couldn’t try any more. She closed her eyes and grit her teeth. Bebe fell silent, overcome with relief as she blacked out for a second time.

Suddenly there was shouting: two male voices. Bebe felt weightlessness overcome her as 180 lbs was ripped away from her sore body. She was so relieved she started weeping.

But relief quickly turned to dread once she processed what the second boy had said to the first:

“What are you doing, are you crazy?” It wasn’t a friendly voice, it wasn’t even a familiar voice. He was a stranger, they both were, and Bebe had never felt more like a stranger herself.

“We got to get you out of here, man, come on! Look, she’s out cold, do you wanna get arrested?”

He wasn’t here to save her, no one was…

That was it. They were gone. He had gotten away with it and Bebe would never even know his name…

Bebe opened her eyes as the door slammed shut, finally leaving her alone in the heavy darkness.

Bebe curled up on her side and cried, her whimpers gradually exploding into agonizing screams as the door swung open once again. Bebe squinted up into a blinding halo as the light from the hallway illuminated the figure of a gentle giant, one who rushed in a panic to kneel next to the side of the bed. He cried silently as she told him what happened.

Bebe thought she felt a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“Bebe?”

Suddenly time had skipped again, she was safe. She was sitting on the hood of Craig Tucker’s car, wrapped in a soft blanket, and sobbing against his shoulder as he held her shakily.

He turned towards her to speak, but the voice was not completely his own.

“Bebe?”

“Red?” Red’s voice swirled in the air as Bebe’s vision started to go black.

“Bebe, are you ok?” The last thing Bebe saw before she woke up was the ceiling of that room again, the dizzying of alcohol again, and a black figure looming over her, grinning.

“Bebe!”

Bebe’s eyes shot open as she sat up in bed abruptly. “What? Wha— Um…”
“You were… whimpering in your sleep… I wanted to make sure everything was ok.”

Red’s face paled, knotted with concern.

Bebe sighed, relieved, and panted as she wiped her sweaty forehead. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just had a nightmare is all…” She hoped her raspy voice conveyed more conviction than she felt.

“Ok, it’s ok, you’re ok now.”

Red consoled as she beckoned Bebe closer to her.

Bebe collapsed against Red’s shoulder and tried to breathe deeply, focusing on the scent of green apple and mint toothpaste, rather than the gut wrenching nausea racking her shivering body. Red rubbed Bebe’s back soothingly, as Bebe counted an even 8 seconds between each breath. Finally, Bebe sat up straight and smiled at Red assuringly.

“I’m ok, I was a little freaked out but I’m ok now. Thanks, babe.” Bebe kissed her girlfriend on her frowning forehead, and tried to ignore the worried look she was giving her.

She’d tell Wendy and her eventually, but now was just not the time.

Bebe rested her head against Red’s soft chest, and curled up against her tightly. Red wrapped her arms around Bebe’s steady body, and mumbled “‘night, babe,” as she drifted off to sleep around her. Bebe did not fall back asleep so easily; visions of what had transpired in her dream haunted her waking vision. She could practically still see him in the corner of her eye everywhere she looked: lurking in the shadows, hovering over her, hurting her, as she tried to shut out the world and begged hopelessly to dream of something else.

Tears pooled against the palm of Bebe’s hand, as she focused on the soft snoring accompanying the steady rise and fall of Red’s chest. Bebe sobbed quietly, not making a sound, and not moving a muscle. Bebe had learned to cry with a muzzle on, and a suit of spiked armor surrounding her body. She cried herself to sleep, in the arms of someone who would never even know the difference. She had put on a brave face, and swallowed her fears. Bebe had done what she does best: survive.
Waffles & Syrup & Sweet, Sweet Revenge

Chapter Summary

Wendy wakes up with a headache, and Bebe focuses on taking care of her two favorite people.

Stan confronts Wendy, and Wendy confronts her future.

'Flip your hair and don't look back, he's watching you walk away'...

POV - Wendy

Wendy was woken up by the sudden icy chill of Colorado air prickling her skin, as her blankets were ripped away from her suddenly.

“Good morning, sunshine! You look like hell.” Bebe smirked as she crossed her arms over her chest. Wendy glared up at her from where her face was half smooshed into the chaise lounge cushion. “I brought you some Advil.” Bebe grabbed Wendy’s hand and gingerly placed a small red pill into her sweaty palm. Wendy’s unresponsive arm fell against the carpet with a thud as Bebe turned around to leave. “Breakfast is in 15 minutes!” Bebe called cheerfully as she bounced out of her room and down the stairs.

Wendy stared daggers at her retreating form until she could no longer see shiny hair bounce it’s way down the hallway. She didn’t know how Bebe does it. It was way too early to be this peppy, it was sick.

Wendy supposed if Bebe hadn’t quit, she would have been head cheerleader this year, instead of Nichole Daniels.

It was witnessing the horror of morning people like Bebe, in all their vomit-inducing cheerful glory, that reminded Wendy why she quit cheer in middle school. She was far too serious to indulge in such childish airs.

Wendy swung her legs over Bebe’s glorified couch, and pulled herself up, begrudgingly. She winced audibly as a white hot pain shot through her skull. Wendy pressed her hand against her throbbing head as she stared at the Advil in her other hand. Thank god for Bebe…

Wendy shot the pill to the back of her throat and swallowed dryly. It tasted bitter. Wendy nearly threw up as she lunged at her water glass to urgently wash this taste out of her mouth.

Wendy lowered the half drained glass and panted heavily. Well, if she was gonna look like hell at least she felt like it too.

Wendy shuffled her way past the mirror, carefully avoiding her own eye contact, and schlepped her way down the stairs to follow the scent of syrup and toast.

Wendy walked into the kitchen to see Bebe (sort-of) slaving over a continuously growing pile of
frozen waffles, and a slightly smaller stack of toast. There was a carton of orange juice in the middle of the table next to the butter dish, butter knife, and syrup, and there were three, cute little place setting in front of three chairs complete with a fork, a knife, a triangle-folded napkin, and glasses with ice already in them. Man, Bebe did not come to play with the breakfast game...

“Make sure you eat,” Bebe warned Wendy, “if you feel nauseous go slow but take in lots of carbs and drink lots of juice.” Nurse Bebe was so annoying...

“I’ve had a hangover before, Bebe.” Wendy snapped with very little energy, and therefore much less attitude than she intended. Even thinking too much hurt Wendy’s head.

“Yes, but have you ever been able to get rid of it by lunch?” Bebe gestured with a flourish as she placed the last waffle in the stack and brought the food plates to the table.

Just then, Wendy’s brain rattlingly reverberated through her skull as some idiot let the front door slam closed with all its weight. She turned to glare at the culprit, who was grinning happily, carrying the mail in one hand, and a tiny flower in the other.

“God, Bebe, you really are the best.” Red chuckled breathlessly as she took in the spread.

“It’s hangover food!” Bebe cheered happily as she kissed Red on the cheek on her way to the table. “How was your run?” Bebe asked casually.

“You ran this morning?” Wendy scoffed, mouth full of food hanging open in disapproving disbelief.

“I run every morning.” Red answered with a shrug.

“Weird.” Wendy said, more to herself than to anyone else. Bebe shot her a warning look and Red looked only slightly offended. “Sorry.” Wendy tacked on. Bebe rolled her eyes. Red just shrugged it off and walked over to place her offerings on the kitchen counter.

“I got the mail, because I remember you said you forgot to get it yesterday.” Bebe thanked her quietly. “And I got this,” Red presented Bebe with the flower before carefully placing it in an empty shot glass and resting it down in the middle of the table, “just ‘cause.” Red beamed with a dorky grin.

“Babe!” Bebe squealed. Vom.

“Shh!” Wendy scolded. “How are you guys so chipper this morning?” She snapped. If they had a secret, Wendy needed to learn ASAP.

“Wends, we had significantly less to drink than you, and we’ve been up since 6:30.” Bebe lightly patronized.

“Don’t be a bitch.” Wendy scoffed under her breath as she took a bite of toast.

Bebe leaned forward. “Stop being a nightmare and I’ll stop being a bitch.” Bebe stared Wendy straight in her eyes, daring her to say more, as she rose to full alpha and put Wendy in her place. Wendy knew she was being a nightmare, but only Bebe would have the guts to tell her so. They got each other. It was part of why they were so inseparable. It was how they worked.

“Touché.” Wendy muttered under her breath as she continued to eat.
Once breakfast was over, Wendy and Red thanked Bebe for all her hard work before going upstairs to finish getting ready. Red took over the guest bathroom, and Bebe welcomed Wendy to use anything she needed from her bathroom. Seeing as how Wendy never planned on sleeping over, she hadn’t packed anything of her own.

After much bartering with herself, her God, and Neutrogina, Wendy finally gathered the guts to look at herself in the mirror.

First things first, she had to take care of the lovely stripes of cried-off mascara that coated her cheeks. She washed her face and removed the raccoon ring of old eyeliner that had somehow gotten all the way up into her eyebrows. Her breath stunk, but she refused to borrow another person’s toothbrush. Wendy decided three rounds of mouthwash would have to do for today. She made use of Bebe’s massive arsenal of hair products, and borrowed some old mascara from her top drawer. She snooped a little further and found a full collection, a plethora of makeup products, some barely used, some never even opened. Wendy wondered why Bebe never really used this stuff anymore…

She borrowed some blush to liven up her pale cheeks, and walked to the bedroom to get dressed. She borrowed one of Bebe’s many pairs of fashionable sweatpants, and an old band t-shirt from middle school. It wasn’t necessarily the cutest outfit in the world, but the Adidas were expensive, and the shirt was ripped in just the right way that an unsuspecting person would think she bought it — on purpose — from Urban Outfitters for $38. Wendy threw on some newly white sneakers from Bebe’s closet, and cuffed the red pants to show them off. She figured she looked pretty lazy-chic today; only Wendy could take what is essentially pajamas and make it look like a fashionable outfit. She threw on a matching red headband and she was out the door.

On their way into the building Wendy grabbed Bebe’s wrist.


Bebe beamed genuinely. “No problem, Wends. You’re my best friend! We always take care of each other.” Bebe smiled at Wendy warmly. It made Wendy smile, too.

“I’m serious.” Wendy insisted. “For everything. For the clothes, for breakfast, for letting me sleep over… for letting me talk about Stan,” Bebe snorted with laughter, “just… thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.” Bebe whispered as the two girls hugged. Wendy was really lucky to have a friend like Bebe, and the selfless blonde girl deserved to hear that sometimes.

The bell rang and the girls departed for their first classes.

At lunchtime, Wendy had an appointment with her guidance counselor. It’s something that’s practically cemented into Wendy Testaburger’s file. She’d never missed a beginning-of-the-semester meeting her entire high school career.

Bebe told her she’d catch up with her later and walked to the cafeteria with Annie — leaving Wendy alone at her locker to gather her belongings, and attempt to block out the aggravating sounds of two buffoons making fools of themselves across the hall.

“Stan. Stan.”
Wendy sighed as her ears picked up the hushed voices of Kyle Broflovski and Stan Marsh whispering about her, like they didn't think she would hear… Looks like Wendy’s headache was about to get worse. Such idiots…

“I have to go talk to her, Kyle!”

“NO!”

Wendy saw, out of the corner of her eye, Kyle grab Stan by the sleeve and yank him back into position from their spying corner of the lockers.

“What happened to all that stuff you said last night? About being done with her?”

“How could I ever be done with Wendy? She's all I’ve known! I feel so alone!”

“No. Stop. You are not reading her poetry.”

Wendy heard the crinkling of paper as she imagined Stan balling up scribbled notebook paper and shoving it back in his pocket. She pinched the bridge of her nose. So infuriating…

“Hey Wendy.” She looked up and stared into sympathetic brown eyes.

“Hi, Token.”

“I just wanted to see how you were doing. I’m sorry about what happened last night. It almost seems worse that we were all there to witness it,” he rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly as Wendy waited for him to continue, “but since we were, I just wanted to offer my condolences and see if there’s anything I can do.” Token smiled, concern visible on his handsome face. She heard Stan make a small gasping/shrieking sound from across the way. He must've noticed Token.

“Well, Stan made his choice, and I’m not going back. So yeah, I’m ok. I’m fantastic.” Wendy announced matter-of-factly. Wendy tried not to smirk when she saw the mighty Stan practically fall to his knees, Kyle begging him to get back up and stop embarrassing himself.

“Glad to hear that.” Token’s perfect teeth shined brightly against his dark skin. “Well I just wanted to make sure you were doing ok.” Token rested his hand comfortingly against Wendy’s shoulder.

“Ow, Stan!” Wendy resisted the urge to look over and check on Kyle, who’s voice sounded muffled behind his hand. Stupid, Stan…

“Hey Wendy.” Stan slid in between Token and herself, wincing as he banged into the lockers. “How’re ya doing?” He asked her as he attempted to lean casually against the metal walls and act like he didn’t just sprint into them.

“I was just talking to Token.” Wendy stretched out condescendingly. Stan half-turned around to shoot token a nod. Given Token is about a head taller than him, it became a very awkward head jerk in the tall boy’s direction instead.

“Oh yeah? Cool, cool… so listen,” Stan lowered his voice in that sweet, seductive way Wendy always liked — only now it just sounded desperate, “I was wondering if you would be able to step outside with me for a minute and discuss what went down last night? You know, I could apologize and all that…” Stan raised his eyebrows in anticipation.

Wendy shut her locker dangerously close to Stan’s face, he practically leapt into Token’s arms out
of surprise.

“No, thanks.” She sighed disinterestedly. “Token, wanna walk with me so we can discuss the logistics of running this afternoon’s meeting?”

“Um…” Token looked uncomfortably between the severed couple, as Stan turned to glare at him not-very-threateningly. “Sure, Wendy… You ok, Stan?”

Stan blinked at Token blankly before turning back to Wendy.

“Please hear me out.” He begged.

“No, Stan.” Wendy stood her ground. The raven haired boy gaped at her in pained disbelief, like his heart had been ripped to a million pieces for the millionth time… where was that look last night when he embarrassed her in front of all their friends?

“You said it yourself,” she crossed her arms defiantly at the memory, “we can’t work this out.’ It’s been one too many times and I don’t want to get back together with you just so we’ll break up again next week. It’s over, Stan. Goodbye.”

“Wendy…” Stan began again.

“I’m gonna be late for a meeting.” She shot back.

“With who?” He questioned bitterly.

“My counselor.” She spat, like he had any right to know anyway. “Now get out of my way.” She hissed as she pushed past him.

“Wends!” Stan grabbed her hand desperately as she turned to leave. Wendy had never seen such urgent ambition and vulnerability on Stan Marsh’s face before. Too bad it was just too late…

Wendy turned to look at Token, who looked very calm and collected considering how awkward the situation was.

She turned to look back at Stan again, face begging, eyes pleading, his outstretched hand still clutching her limp grasp in desperation. Kyle had wandered over to him now, lip swollen where Stan must have accidentally hit him in his escape earlier. She watched him carefully place a delicate hand on the stubborn boy’s shoulder, as he stared at him miserably.

“Talk to me!” Stan begged. Wendy looked him square in the eye.

“Talk to Kyle.” She dismissed.

And she was gone.

She turned around and walked away from Stan Marsh forever. It felt good. She was a free woman now! She could date anybody she wants! ‘Maybe even Token…’ she thought to herself as they walked down the hallway together.

“Sorry about that.” She breathed once they were out of Stan’s sight.

“Yeah, that was rough. I hope Stan’s gonna be ok.” Token looked over his shoulder.

“Don’t!” She hissed, “Don’t look at him, make it look like we’re having a conversation.”
“We are having a conversation…” Token arched his brow in confusion.

“Yeah! That’s good!” Wendy brushed a hand against his bicep. Oh, correction: his strong bicep.

He looked at her skeptically as she continued to admire his muscle.

“Ok… so what did you want to talk about before today’s meeting?” He shrugged her off gently.

“What? Oh, that… I just wanted Stan to see us walking away together.” She admitted as she mentally compared her height to his. She stood on her tippy toes slightly to imagine herself in heels next to him.

Token raised his eyebrows. “That seems kinda harsh, Wends…”

Wendy rolled her eyes. “Toke, don’t act like you don’t know how to play the game.”

“I don’t.” He insisted firmly.

Wendy shrugged as they came upon the counseling office.

“Well, anyway, this is my stop. I’ll see you this afternoon.” She waved him off, disinterestedly.

Token waved politely. “Ok, well, I’ll see you later, Wendy. Glad to see you’re doing ok.” He turned, shaking his head slightly as he walked away.

Ok, so maybe not Token. He was too goody-goody for Wendy anyway.

Wendy tossed her hair over her shoulder and turned the door knob.

“Wendy Testaburger?” The receptionist called from her desk.

“Yes?” Wendy put down the book she was reading and stood up.

“Your counselor is ready for you.” Wendy smiled brightly as she slung her backpack over her shoulder and sauntered over to receive her praise.

“Well, Wendy, these are some impressive marks!” Ms. Bailey nodded as she scrolled through the screen, chewing on her pen absently as she did so.

“Thanks, I know.” Wendy beamed as she sat up straighter.

“I understand you’re shooting for valedictorian this year… you’ve certainly got the grades for it.” Ms. Bailey nodded as she clicked through Wendy’s file.

“Yes but, Ashley… may I call you Ashley?” Wendy addressed the young woman across the desk.

“Sure.” She waved her hand, inviting Wendy to continue.

“Ashely,” Wendy began, leaning forward to rest her folded hands neatly on top of the desk, “while valedictorian would be nice, and certainly something I intend to accept come my early graduation
this spring, what I’m really focused on and interested in right now is college. How do I get my foot in the door at the country’s most prestigious schools before applications are due in November?” Wendy raised her eyebrows expectantly and rested her chin on her folded hands.

Ashely stared at Wendy carefully as she contemplated what to say next.

“How… ambitious are these goals, Wendy?” She asked delicately.

“Ivy league.” Wendy stated. Ms. Bailey raised her eyebrows worriedly. “Or really any good school in the country you think I’d have a shot at.” Wendy added quickly to cover her tracks.

“Ok. Well, let’s take a look at everything.” Ms. Bailey sat up straight as she clicked away on her little computer screen.

Wendy’s back straightened at the sound. After a few minutes of ‘mhmms’ and ‘okays’, the counselor finally addressed the tightly wound student in front of her.

“Wendy, I’m going to be honest with you.” Wendy’s heart sank. “College is competitive—”

“—I know that!” She insisted nervously, “That’s why I’ve been working my butt off for 10 years! —” Ashley raised her hand politely, motioning for Wendy to stop interrupting. Wendy sunk back against her chair and bit her tongue as her brain soared a mile a minute.

Ashley continued, “Wendy, college is competitive, and whether you know that or not there are certain things that colleges tend to look for that seem to be lacking from your current resume.”

“No.” Wendy felt like the sky had fallen. “Like what?” She snapped desperately.

“Well, for instance, colleges want to see a well rounded student. Your grades are excellent, you’ve covered all the core bases, and it is very impressive that you are able to graduate at an early age.” Wendy relaxed, grinning smugly as she heard these impressive accolades recited back to her. “But as a result of that, you’ve taken very few elective classes, and there are no after school activities you can put on your application.”

Wendy nearly facepalmed as she sunk low in her chair, ‘after school activities, of course!’

Ashely continued, “Debate team is a really good step in the right direction, and it bodes really well for you that you made captain this year, but since it’s technically a “class”, and given the competitive nature of the schools of you’re choosing, I’m afraid it may not be enough.”

“What do I need to do?” Ashely jumped slightly as Wendy slammed both palms against the table over-enthusiastically.

“Oh! Well, why don’t we start with volunteer work? You get a few places under your belt in a few months and colleges will see that you’re serious and ready to work hard and fast.”

“Done.” Wendy jumped out of her seat and threw open the door, ready to go do whatever needed to be done. It suddenly occurred to her that she had no idea where to start. “Like what?” She questioned as she spun around and dropped back into the chair.

“Classic is a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, old folk’s home, something like that.” Wendy turned her nose up at the sloppy suggestions. “Or the local community college has a program I could refer you to that could get you in touch with some wonderful children’s programs in the area for
music, sports, art, etc. Maybe even tutoring, if you find the right program!” Ugh. Wendy doesn’t do children. Ms. Bailey could clearly sense Wendy’s hesitation as she continued with her last suggestion, “Or you could try Hell’s Pass? I know they’re always looking for Candy Stripers.”

“They don’t do anything gross, do they?” Wendy scrunched up her face as she pictured a disgusting rainbow of bedpans and colonoscopy bags.

“No, I believe you’d just deliver meals, spend time with patients, read to them, things like that.”

“Hm… yeah, I could do that…” Wendy considered.

“That’s the spirit! Now if you really wanna impress I would suggest volunteering at a few places simultaneously, but the most important thing would be that whatever you pick you must stick with — the last thing they want to see is an inability to commit.”


“It’s just Ashley.” The uncomfortable staff member corrected.

“Ashley.” Wendy nodded. “I’ll see you.” She promised as she strolled towards the door, at a much more relaxed pace than she had previously.

“Yes, and keep me in the loop about how applications go as well! This year’s college fair will feature a one-day resume writing workshop for SPH students in the Fall, I can get you the information next time I see you.”

“That would be great, thanks!” Wendy smiled thankfully as she opened the door.

“And Wendy?”

Wendy turned to look at Ms. Bailey.

“When the time comes, I’d be more than happy to write a glowing letter of recommendation detailing your impressive work at South Park High.”

Pride swelled in her chest as visions of acceptance letters danced in her head.

“Thanks, Ashley.” Wendy smiled.

Wendy strolled out of the counseling office feeling lighter than air. Ashley’s hesitancy was concerning at first, but she was probably just being cautious. Most likely she was concerned with the worst case scenario. Those never troubled Wendy.

She would work hard, make good choices, and when the time came she would cast a wide net.

Wendy decided, with a bounce in her step, that her future was looking bright.
A Life More Complicated Than Math

Chapter Summary

You guys, you guys, you guys, this is the beginning of a chapter sequence I have been WAITING for!

I was originally going to wait and post all 7 chapters that lead up to a certain relationship in a row, but I can't wait anymore, so I'll just post the first trilogy sequence as a group, and post the rest as they come.

Thanks for everyone who wished me luck on my trip! It was fun, but now I’m so excited to get back to writing!

Here we go…

A little Clyde to start your Thursday.

************

DISCLAIMER: I DO NOT OWN THE LYRICS TO "MR. BLUE SKY" BY ELECTRIC LIGHT ORCHESTRA, ALL CREDIT GOES TO WRITER JEFF LYNNE, I AM NOT CLAIMING TO OWN ANY PART OF THOSE LYRICS, THEY ARE JUST LOVELY AND WONDERFUL AND I HAD TO QUOTE AND CITE THEM. THANK YOU!

Chapter Notes

First off, I just wanted to say ‘thank you’ to everyone who wished me well on my trip! I didn’t get a chance to comment on your posts because I had to keep my phone on airplane mode the whole time, and basically just used it as a very important camera.

Quick note:

If anyone has not seen it already, take a look at the one shot I posted called “The Princess and the Paladin”. It was ALMOST an unplanned chapter in this story because I got inspired on a very long train ride to the Blue Mountains and I just had to type it, but I felt like it pulled too much from 'present day' so now it’s its own little island.

As I said in the description, the series is not necessary for the one shot, but the one shot really gives good insight into the series. At least from Bunny’s perspective.

I highly encourage you to take a look if you like, because Paladin Butters is too sweet and Princess Kenny is too badass.

Ok! Thanks, everyone! Ok… back to the story…

POV Clyde - get ready for a chain reaction
A bright piano, a steady rhythm and a snare drum.

A faded radio announcement, an energizing crescendo, and happy, clapping hands.

Clyde was woken up to the sweet sounds of a cheerful song. The first one in his workout playlist, courtesy of Amazon Alexa and Spotify music.

‘Sun is shining in the sky, there ain’t a cloud in sight…’

Clyde swung his feet over the bed and rubbed his sleepy eyes as ‘Mr. Blue Sky’ by ELO sang on in the background.

He was about as grumpy in the mornings as any growing boy with sports fatigue and an overworked metabolism, but for what it was worth, Clyde preferred the peaceful stillness of an early morning; when the world was dark and quiet in a calm that could shatter like glass, Clyde could clear his head and meditate while his feet pounded steadily along the pavement underneath him.

‘See how the sun shines brightly. In the city, on the streets where once was pity Mr. Blue Sky is living here today-ay!’

Clyde yawned and stretched, tapping his foot along happily as he peed.

‘Mr. Blue Sky please tell us why you had to hide for sooo long’

“So long!” Clyde attempted in a gravely falsetto. He cleared his throat to relieve the crack in his voice as he flushed the toilet.

He stretched briefly before throwing on a sweatshirt, gloves, and a pair of shorts over warm jogging leggings.

He switched Alexa to his phone, and plugged in his earbuds — shutting out the world one plastic wire at a time.

‘Hey you with the pretty face: welcome to the hu-man race! A celebration, Mr. Blue Sky’s up there waiting and today is the day we’ve waited for-or!’

Joyful lyrics about a perfect day continued to play on as Clyde jogged down the stairs and headed straight for the fridge.

He grabbed his ankles and stretched his quads as he searched for his favorite banana protein shakes. He placed one hand on his hip and lunged deeply as he sipped from the plastic bottle.

Robotic voices from a vocoder sang through Clyde’s earbuds and prickled his skin in gooseflesh. He was ready. A chill bit his nose as he opened the front door. He popped his hood up over is head and jogged down his front steps.

‘Mr. Blue you did it right! But soon comes Mr. Night, creepin’ over — now his hand is on your shoulder — never mind! I’ll remember you this… I’ll remember you this way!’

Air pumped steadily in and out of Clyde’s nose and mouth, stinging his lungs in the most pleasant way as voices of an angelic choir electrified him, sending chilly goosebumps all over his bundled legs. Or maybe that was just the cold.
Strings — stretched out over a hard-hitting rock orchestra — floated above the pounding bass as Clyde pushed his pace faster and faster, no longer just warming up. He waved to no one in particular as he passed his house again, looping his way around the first cluster of houses in his figure eight route.

As he reached the crosswalk at the end of the block he checked his watch. Time: 5:56. Heart rate: 170 bpm. Clyde smiled up at the rising sun, peeking up over the mountains in the distance, as the song came to a satisfying conclusion.

Clyde cracked his neck and rolled his shoulders, bouncing on his heels as he geared up for the first few notes of the next track. He jumped in place to keep his blood flowing as he waited for the crosswalk light to change (he knew no one was out this early, but he always did it just in case). Adrenaline pumped through his veins as he took off with a leaping start, raising the volume excitedly as ‘DNA’ by Kendrick Lamar lit a fire under his feet, bass beating him straight through the chest.

Right on schedule, it was exactly 6:30 when Clyde had finally looped the long way back around to his front door. He jumped and stretched in the cold air before wiping off his feet and entering the warm house. He instantly felt his muscles relax, lunging his way across the house, one leg at a time into the kitchen for some water, which he gulped down gratefully. He swiped a banana and rubbed his sore hamstrings as he schlepped his way up the stairs, being careful not to wake his dad.

Having showered and gotten himself ready, Clyde went over his hair with one more meticulous swipe of his hairbrush, that ended up leaving looking exactly the same. Whatever. It looked good, that’s all that matters.

And he was off for school.

To Craig: Hey dude, driving yourself this morning?

From Craig: I’ll be right there.

Good old Craig. He always knew what Clyde was thinking, sometimes even before Clyde knew.

As the two brunette boys pulled into the school, Clyde could already smell the cafeteria’s breakfast special today: syrupy pancakes and hash browns. Unsurprisingly, the two boys made a b-line for the maple scented room at the end of the hall.

Craig saved their seats, greeting Tweek and Token each as they arrived to gather for their pre-stress social hour — before the boring torture of classes sucked all the fun out of their brains.

The cafeteria was quiet this time of morning. Another reason why Clyde enjoyed eating here versus at home. Not only was he a social butterfly who needed to catch up with his friends before
mind dulling math class, but he liked the quiet the cafeteria offered that the hallways just couldn’t compete with. It was nice. A growing boy could gather his thoughts and rag on his friends while chomping down on breakfast potatoes, and that was just the way Clyde liked it.

“Hey, guys!”

Clyde looked up and saw a smiling — albeit very exhausted looking — Kenny McCormick grinning down at the table.

“Hey dude.” Craig greeted in his usual monotone as he slid over so Kenny could sit down in between them. Clyde wordlessly scooched his lunch tray over so Kenny could steal the piece of hash brown he was eyeing. Clyde knew he probably needed it more…

“How’s it going?” Token nodded. Tweek waved politely.

“Good… Oh, Thanks!” Kenny acknowledged as he graciously swiped the potato from Clyde’s tray. Kenny was in all of Clyde’s music classes and had been ever since freshman year — they’d actually become pretty good friends because of it. Unlike Clyde’s awkward, bumbling, maybe-he’s-off-pitch-but-God-damnit-he’s-got-enthusiasm voice, Kenny had a genuinely sweet and resonant tenor voice. He and Craig were supposed to start a band over the summer but never did. Clyde wondered what instrument he would play when they finally got around to it?

“Were you able to hold Tricia hostage and drag her to school on time or is she still passed out in Karen’s bed?” Craig joked with a small smile.

“Actually Karen cracked the whip and Ruby’s now sulking out back with the goths so, yeah.” Kenny chuckled.

“She’s gonna die from lung cancer before first period.” Craig joked darkly. For someone who would fit in so well with the goths, Craig never found a shortage of incredibly rude things to say about them behind their backs.

Clyde yanked the hat off Craig’s head and hit him in the back of the skull with it. Ok, so, like, honestly, what was he thinking, but at the same time: it’s Clyde! Most normal people feared the wrath of Craig Tucker, but when you grew up as practically his brother you learned he was more bark than bite. Craig lazily snatched the hat from Clyde’s hands and flipped him off with minimal effort.

“Anyway,” Kenny continued, “I came here because I wanted to ask you guys something.” He swallowed briskly, noticing Token’s obvious disgust with chewing while talking — a look Clyde knew well — and leaned in excitedly. “Butters’ birthday is next week and I wanted to do something cool.” The scrappy boy grinned ear to ear.

“Is the surprise that you don’t know what you’re doing?” Craig asked dryly. Tweek shot him a look that Craig pretended he was too engrossed in math homework to see. His smirk gave him away.

“I don’t know exactly what to do, no, but I have lots of ideas!” Kenny admitted optimistically. “Anyway, he wants me to invite all of you, so I was wondering if you guys wanna come?”

“Yes!” Clyde pumped his fists in the air excitedly.

“Of course, Kenny!” Tweek perked up from across the table. "We'd love to!"
“Sounds fun.” Craig nodded.

“Absolutely!” Token agreed. “So where will you be having it?” He asked, folding his arms on top of the table.

“That’s the thing…” Kenny bit his lip, “I’m not really sure. It can’t be at Butters’ house because his dad will ruin his birthday. I guess it could be at mine but… I don’t think my house is good for parties.” Kenny shrugged a little embarrassedly. “I was thinking of maybe Stark’s Pond! But… Butters really wanted it to be a small, private party so I’m not 100% sure… I’d have to get back to you on that.”

“You can have it at my house.” Token offered nonchalantly.

“Dude!” Clyde exclaimed, jumping up excitedly. He continued, as Craig pulled him back down into his seat. “Token’s house is perfect for parties, it’s huge!”

“Really?” Kenny looked across the table in grateful disbelief. “Are you sure?”

“Absolutely!” Token assured. “I love hosting! It’s no trouble, really, I’d be happy to.” The wealthy boy nodded humbly.

“That would be perfect! Thank you!” Kenny shot out of his seat to run around the table and give Token an awkward backwards hug.

“Uh… No problem.” Token chuckled.

“Oh, um,” Kenny rubbed the back of his neck nervously as he made his way back to his original seat, “my brother has a fake ID so I was gonna get him to buy alcohol for us… do you mind? I can totally ask him not to if you mind!” Kenny added in a rush. Craig perked up, finally excited for this party. Clyde couldn’t say he wasn’t also a little pumped to get wasted at Token’s house getting to know old friends!

“Oh I don’t mind.” Token assured with a dismissive wave of his hand. “My parents know we drink, and they’re one of those parents that would rather we drink in the house than somewhere where we’d have to drive afterwards. You guys can all crash if you’d like.” Aw, yes! Clyde high-fived Craig behind Kenny’s back.

“Token, my man, you are saving this birthday party, thank you.” Kenny praised. Clyde could practically see the awards show going on in Token’s head as he dismissed Kenny, humbly.

“Don’t even worry about it.” Token waved his hand with a smile. “It’ll be really fun. I’ve got video games, or movies we could watch, a stereo… yeah, bring whoever you want we’ll make a thing of it.” Token almost went back to reading his book before he remembered something else. Oh!” He exclaimed, “and I have a karaoke machine in the basement, if you want to make it a karaoke party?”

“Oh! Yes, yes, yes!” Clyde cheered from his seat. He stopped bouncing when he noticed Tweek eyeing him as if to say ‘it’s not your party, Clyde’. Oh… “Or… you know, what ever Butters would want…”

Luckily Kenny didn’t seem to mind Clyde’s outburst. “Yes!” He cheered, “That’s perfect! Oh, he’s gonna love it! Can I bring him around, like, after dinner time or something? I wanted to take him out separately first… I mean… I just wanna surprise him with something cool first… then we’ll head over. Is that cool?”
Token was hiding a smirk as he nodded. Tweek shot a look at Craig. Clyde looked over and noticed that Kenny was blushing a little. Hm. Did he miss something?

Just then the bell rang, alerting the teens that they had about five minutes to get to their first class.

Token, understandably, packed up his things lightning fast and scurried away to get a good seat. Like everyone didn’t just sit in the same seats day after day...

The others tended to dawdle a little bit more.

“Oh, Shit!” Tweek swore under his breath.

“What’s up?” Craig asked, rubbing Tweek’s back absently.

“I forgot! I wanted to ask Chef to make coffee for me this morning because I forgot to pack some before I left, and… oh! Maybe I’ll steal some from the teacher’s lounge!” Tweek screeched in excitement as he scrambled to grab his things and ran out the door, on course for the teacher’s lounge. Craig, very obviously — in what was really only a half a joke — tilted his head to watch Tweek’s ass as he ran away. Clyde snickered to himself. Craig was a weird animal.

“I’ll let you know more of the details when I figure them out. Butters is gonna be really happy that you guys are coming.” Kenny beamed as the three remaining hung around the table watching Clyde scarf down the last of his breakfast.

Clyde had just skillfully frisbee tossed his empty tray into the collection bin across the room when Craig nudged Kenny with his shoulder.

“So, you and Butters, huh?” Craig asked casually as he slung his backpack over his shoulder.

Kenny’s face paled as he chuckled nervously. “Um…yeah…I guess.”

“Cool.”

“Wait!” Kenny grabbed Craig’s sleeve just as he turned to leave. “Just… don’t tell anyone, please? We’re not exactly… out. Yet. So don’t tell, please? Either of you?” Kenny looked pleadingly between Craig and Clyde.

“No problem, dude.” Craig assured with a nod. Clyde agreed with a smile.

“But just so you know,” Craig continued in a hushed voice, “if I figured it out, odds are Token had it figured out two weeks ago. And Clyde will have it figured out tomorrow.” What! Rude! Craig ignored Clyde’s protests and continued. “But I promise, you can trust us. You can trust all of us.” Clyde nodded with a reassuring smile. “And I’ll make sure to tell Token not to tell anyone later.”

Kenny sighed in relief. “Thanks, man.”

“And Tweek too.” Craig added.

“Tweek doesn’t know.” Kenny pointed out. Craig snorted.

“Oh, odds are if Craig knows something Tweek knows it too.” Clyde explained. Craig bowed his head in agreement. “It’s just the way it is.”

“It’s fine,” Kenny chuckled. His eyes lit up as Clyde followed his gaze to where Butters had just appeared in the doorway, walking and talking excitedly with Tweek. Kenny grinned as they
watched Butters turn and adorably speed walk over to the lunch line to say hello to Chef. “I understand.”

“Obviously…” Craig’s smirk morphed into a smile as he wrapped an arm around the shoulders of the freshly-caffeinated Tweek — who had just come back with a thermos full of illegal-teacher’s-lounge-coffee — and steered them both out of the cafeteria as the smaller one sipped away on his thermos, happily.

Clyde pulled Kenny aside quickly before Butters caught up to them.

“…So you meant your, like, with Butters, like dating, right?” Clyde clarified in a whisper.

“Yes.” Kenny blinked at him disbelievingly.

“Just checking. Yeah, I won’t tell.” Clyde beamed excitedly and waved goodbye to Kenny as he walked to his first class.

Lunchtime had rolled around again and Clyde was in his happy place: the cafeteria.

“Hey, f-fellas!” Jimmy greeted.

“Hey, Jimmy!” Everyone bid Jimmy ‘hello’ as he took his usual spot next to Tweek.

“How come you don’t join us for breakfast?” Clyde wondered of Jimmy.

“I’ve got better things to do than m-m-make small talk and shhh-shove pop tarts in my f-face if I c-could be sleeping i-n.” Jimmy joked with a smile. His lip was still bruised and there was a little scab where it bled when Shelly Marsh had knocked his crutches out from under him, making him hit his face on the lunch tray railing. Poor Jimmy. Shelly had no right. It made Clyde sad all over again just thinking about it.

“That’s Craig’s excuse half the time too.” Tweek piped up. “Just watch as the semester goes on we’ll see him less and less.” Tweek teased with a squeaky giggle. Craig kissed his middle finger and shoved it right in Tweek’s still giggling face.

“Hey, Jimmy, I’m having a party for Butters’ birthday at my house next weekend, you wanna join?” Token asked

Jimmy smirked slyly, “I would love to fellas, but I’m afraid I will be quite busy next weekend.” His mouth dropped open smile as his eyebrows shot up to his hairline.

“Oh, spending the weekend with Leslie?” Token questioned with a quirk of his eyebrow.

“Y-y-y-yep!” Jimmy’s smile widened. “Her p-parents invited me to go with them on her c-c-college tour in Boulder.” Leslie is Jimmy’s girlfriend who he met at the local community improv group last year. She goes to a private school in North Park, and she’s a senior. So cool…

“Well I’d definitely miss a birthday party for a girl.” Clyde agreed. He realized, with only a slight ache in his chest, that it was completely true.

As the last bell rang after school, Clyde headed to his second favorite happy place: the football field. After changing in to his practice uniform with much enthusiasm, Coach was unsurprised to
see that Clyde was one of the first ones out on the field. Coach nodded at the boy gruffly.

“We’re running drills today.” He announced once everybody had arrived. “Then we’re doing our beginning of the semester weigh ins.”

Almost everyone groaned in response. Quarterback Stan Marsh muttered under his breath, something about being ‘beaten up enough today as it is’. Clyde had heard about his very public break up with Wendy and figured that’s probably what he was referring to. He felt bad for him, but he also envied him. As star quarterback since 7th grade, Stan Marsh could always be found with a girl on his arm — usually it was Wendy, but even when they were on a break it didn’t take long for some other girl to flock her way over to him. Clyde was much more of a ‘friend’ type than a ‘boyfriend’ type, or so he’d been told many, many times before. It sucked. It confused him. It was too much to dissect at this moment. Clyde pushed his mystifying theories about women out of his head and focused on what mattered right now: football.

Clyde was on his way out of the locker room when he got a text from Token.

From Token: Hey Clyde, would you mind going in my locker and bringing me my copy of Moby Dick? I forgot it at school and I just wanted to double check something before I hand in my paper.

To Token: Sure thing! Combo?

From Token: 13-6-2. We’re all at Tweak Bros. Thanks.

To Token: *thumbs up emoji*

As Clyde was walking away, typing, he almost ran into the fullback, Eric Cartman, coming back from his weigh in.

“Fuck!” Clyde jumped. “Sorry man, I didn’t see you.”

“Move.” Eric muttered as he half-heartedly pushed Clyde out of the way. Phew. At least he wasn’t in one of his moods.

“Hey!” Clyde announced himself as he entered the familiar coffee shop. “I brought the book.” He held it up as proof.
“Awesome! Thank you, dude.” Token took the book gratefully and plopped back down in his usual spot: first booth from the counter, in the seat facing the doors. His laptop and class notes were spread all over the place, with only a small section cleared where his coffee cup was getting cold. He flipped to a page at the end, skimmed a section where a post-it note peeked out of the side, and nodded his head, agreeing with himself as he typed and edited his essay. Craig was stretched out across the other side of the booth, taking up three seats with his long-ass legs and scrolling through his phone. Jimmy was stretched out at along the cushioned window seat across the room, leaning back on his elbows and taking in the fading sunlight from the bay window with his shades perched on his nose.

As usual, there were very few other customers.

“Do you want something to eat, Clyde?” Tweek smiled from the register. Clyde took a glance at the pastry case and found something that particularly caught his eye.

“You serve donuts now, no way!” Clyde’s eyes widened excitedly.

“Which one?” Tweek asked as he grabbed the tongs from beside the glass display case.

“Mm… how about a jelly one?” Tweek grabbed the donut carefully with the metal arms, trying his best to steady his perpetually shaky hands to avoid squeezing the delicate pastry.

“How much?” Clyde asked, fishing in his picked for his wallet.

“Don’t worry about it.” He dismissed as he handed Clyde his donut.

Clyde grabbed a chair from the middle of the room and dragged it to the little table in the center, closest to the register. With his feet up on the opposite chair, Clyde tucked into his jelly donut.

Jimmy lounging to his right, Tweek bustling behind the counter, and Token and Craig stretched out to his left. Clyde was exactly where he wanted to be, he thought with a small smile.

“You know I think I’ve read that book before, the cover looks familiar.” Clyde mentioned as he took another bite of his dessert.

“Really?” All four boys stared down over their noses at Clyde disbelievingly.

“What… yeah… I think so… why, is it hard?”

“Yeah.” Tweek scoffed. Dammit. Now Clyde was second guessing himself, but he was pretty sure! He thinks... He at least knows he's seen it somewhere!

“Come on f-fellas. Give the man some credit. Clyde c-could have some s-secrets.” Jimmy suggested, eyes still squinting at the settling sun.

“Aw,” Token picked up the maybe-not-familiar-book, “‘See how elastic our prejudices grow when once love comes to bend them.’” Token smiled jokily and looked at Clyde.

“What?” Clyde tipped his head in confusion.

Everybody stared at him disbelievingly, before they ALL started laughing like they knew something he didn’t.

“It’s a quote from the book.” Token rubbed his face.

“It is?” Clyde scrunched his nose.
“Clyde.” Craig groaned.

“He read it.” Tweek squeaked with a chuckle.

“You watched me read it while I said it…” Token pinched the bridge of his nose.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t notice!”

“I was holding up the book, and watching it with my eyes… reading it as I said it…” Token laughed.

“And you said you’d read it before!” Tweek tittered from behind the counter.

“It’s Moby Dick, right?” Craig questioned disbelievingly, “yeah, Moby Dick,” nodding his head as Token flipped the book to show him proof.

“It’s Moby Dick!” Tweek howled in agreement.

“It’s ok guys, he’ll pretend to read it next year.” Jimmy chuckled. Ha ha, very funny, Clyde doesn’t like school, ha.

“Well… it’s a lovely quote.” Clyde praised as the laughter died down. “What’s another one?” Craig snatched the book and flipped to a random page, glancing down briefly before tossing it back down on the table.

“Mm. ‘Eskimo’.” Craig replied blandly over a sip of his frap. Tweek snorted a laugh through his nose at Craig’s well-timed ‘Heathers’ joke. Craig’s smiling eyes flickered to the blond boy as he took another sip of his melting frap.

“Well, I gotta get going.” Token announced, checking his watch.

“Yeah, don’t want to keep your l-lady w-waiting.” Jimmy winked

“Who, his mom?” Clyde wondered aloud. Mrs. Black usually wasn’t so strict but alright…

“No, not my mom.” Token laughed as he packed up his things.

“Then what?” Clyde was confused. ‘What lady? Was Token tutoring today?’

“Aw. Sweet, baby, Clyde!” Craig squeezed his cheeks patronizingly as he passed by, wandering over to lean against the pastries case. Clyde swatted his hands away.

“Token has a date tonight.” Tweek clarified from behind the counter as he scrubbed away at a stubborn, spilled mocha stain.

“What?!” Clyde screeched. “Does everyone in the world have a girlfriend except for me?!”

“I don’t have a girlfriend, we’re going on one date. A study date.” Token clarified. “Plus it may not even work out.” Clyde scoffed. Yeah right. Like someone in their right mind would turn down Token. If anything it would most definitely be the other way around — actually, the odds of that happening were almost certain.

“I don’t have a girlfriend.” Craig pointed out.

“You don’t want one.” Clyde corrected, not failing to notice the small look of panic on Tweek’s face.
“Damn straight.” Craig’s eyes glowed mischievously as he jumped up and leaned over the counter to whisper something in Tweek’s ear that made the twitchy boy shove him off and blush deeply.

Clyde walked home only sulking a little bit as he mulled over how he’d definitely die alone.

Once he made it home, Clyde jogged up his front steps, all deep-seeded fears suddenly vanishing from his brain as he smelled the warm and spicy aroma of his favorite dish: chicken motherfucking tacos.

The kind his mom used to make.

His dad could do a pretty good job too, don’t get him wrong. But standing in the doorway, feeling the warmth of the house, hearing the clatter of pots and pans, and smelling those familiar and comforting spices, Clyde could almost imagine that his mom would be waiting for him at the end of the hall. She’d be standing there, with her soft brown hair and sharp brown eyes. She would smile at him, and remind him to wipe his shoes on the mat. He would give her a hug, and she would kiss him on his forehead and comment on how tall he’s getting. She’d push his hair behind his ears the way she used to, and laugh the way she used to. She’d look, and feel, and sound, and smell exactly the way she used to. Then she’d straighten her apron and hum to herself quietly as she glided into the kitchen to serve her home cooked meal.

Clyde could almost feel her arms around him as he opened his eyes and took in reality instead.

She wasn’t here.

Clyde shrugged off his coat and hung it in the closet, avoiding eye contact with the hand-decorated frame that hung around the mirror in the door.

“Hey, bud!” His dad called from the kitchen.

“Hey Dad!” Clyde walked in and noticed something… off. “You’re all dressed up.” He pointed out, grabbing a tortilla chip from the bowl. Usually by now his dad was home from work, and changing into sweatpants, not into nicer clothes than he left the house in.

“Um… yeah, I kinda needed to talk to you about something, bud.”

“Ok.” Clyde sat down at the island stool opposite the stove. “You got a big interview or something?” That would be odd considering it was almost 6:00…

“No…” Roger put down the spoon he’d been stirring with and glanced up at Clyde with beaming eyes. “I’ve got a date.” His dad shrugged, attempting to hide the wide smile that broke out on his face.

Clyde tried his best to hide his shock as a million thoughts raced through his head while Roger waited patiently for a response.

Clyde swallowed dryly. “Oh?” What does he say to that?!

“Now I know I haven’t expressed any… interest… in dating before, and trust me I do not go into this lightly.” Clyde nodded as his dad looked him in the eyes seriously. “But…” Clyde watched his dad’s eyes soften in a daydream that swepet over his face like a sunrise. “I just met this
incredible woman, who makes me feel like I haven’t in years, and… do you understand?” Roger Donovan looked at his son pleadingly, concern settling into the wrinkles framing his tired eyes.

Clyde smiled forcefully, but truly, “yeah. Yeah, I get it.” Roger sighed in relief.

“Thanks, son.” He ruffled the boy’s hair and went back to making dinner.

Clyde was stunned. He tried his best to engage in regular, lighthearted conversation — talking about school, and football practice, and the first home game of the school year tomorrow.

But his mind kept drifting back to her.

He could practically see her standing in the kitchen, arms wrapped around her husband’s waist as she lightly criticized his choice of cayenne instead of paprika. She’d kiss him on the cheek but he wouldn’t feel it. He wouldn’t see her.

She wasn’t there.

It’s been 7 years since she died…

Clyde and his dad got through dinner as easily as possible, mainly because Clyde wouldn’t dare let on about his apprehension. He had to be happy for his dad. He was happy for his dad. He couldn’t expect him to be alone forever! He didn't want that for his dad, who deserved the absolute WORLD after raising him all these years. Roger was a good man, he deserved to be happy.

Clyde smiled and took another bite of the most delicious tacos in the world.

“Ok.” Clyde turned around from the TV and faced his dad. “How do I look?” Roger asked nervously.

Clyde nodded. “Sharp! I like what you did with your hair…” Clyde gestured at the over-gelled version of what used to be his dad’s hair.

Roger opened the closet door to grab his coat, and Clyde turned back to the tv, only briefly catching sight of the handmade mirror frame that hung in the door.

He was mindlessly flipping over the DVR options for the second time when his dad walked up behind him.

“Thank you.” Clyde felt shaky arms wrap around him as his dad whispered gratefully. “I know how hard this is for you, just… thank you for understanding.”

Roger kissed his son on the top of the head and walked back over to the mirror to look himself over one more time. He watched his dad lovingly press a kissed hand against the purple frame, a goodbye ritual he’d taken a liking to ever since the warm and creative hands that had molded that ornament out of metal and glass were taken out of this world abruptly and unfairly.

“Have fun.” Clyde bid. His father beamed brightly in return. Clyde did too, hoping a smile would remind his brain that he was supposed to be happy. He waved goodbye, fighting back the tears.
with a grin as he watched his dad walked out the door.

Clyde sat there, mind either blank or on overdrive, he honestly couldn’t tell. Suddenly it hit him all at once. Everything. What would she say, what would she think? Would she approve? Should he have not given his blessing, for her sake? Would that be fair? Was anything fair?! What was he supposed to DO?!

Clyde slid to the floor, face frozen, limbs numb, tears finally falling down his face in hot streaks. He took in a shaky breath as he tried to relax. He tried to talk rationally to himself: tell himself that he was just shocked, his apprehension was normal and valid, his mom wouldn’t hate him if she knew he was supporting this… Clyde wrapped his arms around himself and tried to process everything.

He needed to tell someone. Craig.

Clyde whipped out his phone.

To Craig: My dad just left for a date…

Clyde gripped the phone tightly as he waited for a response. Finally, typing.

From Craig: Oof. Do you wanna come over?

From Craig: I’ll let you watch that Handmaid’s Whatever

Clyde laughed to himself. Stupid Craig.

You know… maybe Clyde was overthinking this...

Yeah. Clyde decided he felt better, even if ‘oof’ was the best thing his best friend could come up with.

To Craig: Tale*
To Craig: But no, I think I’m fine now. It did freak me out for a bit though…

From Craig: Do you wanna talk about it?

Clyde smiled at the phone.

To Craig: Maybe tomorrow. I’ll see you then.

Clyde tossed his phone on the coffee table and grabbed the fluffiest blanket from the basket beside the couch. He made himself some tea, flicked off the lights, and distracted himself in the poetically horrid world of Gilead.

Clyde would be ok.

Perhaps more importantly, his dad would finally be happy again.

And tomorrow would be a new day.
Don't Hurt My Friends

Boom! POV - Tweek

From Craig: Goodnight. <3

It was a simple message, the one Tweek woke up to. He’d fallen asleep on the phone with Craig last night, and woken up to find this waiting for him the next morning. ‘<3’… who does he think he is?!

Lately, Craig had been indulging more and more in the sick joy he got out of teasing Tweek about their ‘fake’ relationship. Wait… is it still fake? It must be, because even a stupid typed-out heart made Tweek’s stomach churn while his heart beat irrationally in his chest.

It was a simple message, but it was confusing as Hell.

And it was time to stop staring at it.

Tweek pocketed the phone and stepped out his front door.

It was actually a pretty nice day out. The sun was shining, birds were singing, and — FUCK WHY IS CRAIG CALLING?!

“Hello?”

“Hey, dude, I slept in, can’t pick you up today.” Tweek could hear rustling on the other side of the phone as Craig scrambled to get ready for school.

“Oh, no problem, I can walk.” Tweek assured.

“See you soon.”

“See ya.”

Well.

Looks like Tweek will have even more time to obsess over intentions and expectations, second guess himself, maybe bring up some old, embarrassing memories from middle school. You know, the usual.

Tweek twitched lightly and stepped off his porch to journey the fairly short trek to South Park High.

As Tweek reached the outskirts of the school grounds, the soft humming in his headphones trilled a familiar tune that left him smiling like a dork, wondering if fluttering butterfly wings had replaced all his guts. He’d have to remember to get that checked out.
The gentle acoustics and ambient white noise cast a soft veil of warmth over Tweek, drowning his world in ‘A Lack of Color’. Death Cab For Cutie’s steady swing and buzzing reverb ironically brightened the colors behind Tweek’s eyes and lit the world on fire.

He walked past the small patch of flowers that decorated the grass below the ‘South Park High School’ sign. Tweek people-watched from behind the calm distance of earbuds; the universal sign that he wasn’t really there. Like a ghost. He watched different social groups pass by as he floated along curiously.

...The harmonies kicked in over the interlude — Tweek’s favorite part. A smile tugged at his lips as he was transported back to the last time he heard this song.

It was a rainy day. Craig had run over after some kind of a fight with his family, and he was upset. Tweek held him, swaddled in multiple towels to soak up his dripping hair while Craig sipped his cocoa calmly. Tweek put on this song and they sat in silence. Craig leaned his head back against Tweek’s chest and closed his eyes.

“Tweek!” Tweek plummeted back to reality, snapping his head in the direction of Kyle’s panicked voice. “WHERE’S CLYDE?!”

Tweek ripped his earbuds out and shoved his phone in his pocket.

“I have no idea, is something wrong?” Tweek tried not to panic or jump to conclusions about kidnappers or murderers when it was probably just a homework thing.

“CARTMAN is looking for him!” Fuck. “Please tell me he’s not here yet!”

“I don’t know.” Tweek mumbled as he ran into the school, flinging both doors open with a bang.

There was Clyde alright.

Cartman had him pinned against the lockers with his forearm stretched across Clyde’s collarbone and leaning over him threateningly. Clyde was cowering and shaking his head like whatever Cartman was sneering about just wasn’t true! His hands were tangled up in the bully’s shirt in a feeble attempt to defend himself.

FUCK. NO.

Tweek ran up to them.

“What the FUCK, FATASS?!” Tweek barked as he shoved Eric off of Clyde, a surprised look on both of their faces.

“This isn’t your problem, Tweek! Leave us alone!” Cartman snarled angrily. Too bad for him Tweek was twice as mad as him already.

His hands shook in rage, blood boiling; Tweek wouldn’t be surprised if he boiled so hot that steam came out of his ears.

“IF YOU FUCK WITH MY FRIENDS, YOU F-FUCK WITH ME, SO IT IS MY PROBLEM NOW!” Tweek shot back aggressively, getting in Cartman’s face, watching it grow redder by the second.

Cartman sputtered incoherently with rage. “WHAT — HOW WOULD I EVEN HIT YOU, TWITCH, YOU’RE A FUCKING MOVING TARGET WITH ALL THE FREAKY SHAKING!”
Ah, fuck. Tweek could feel it, but he was hoping Cartman couldn’t see it.

“Gah!” Tweek shrieked involuntarily, much to his own dismay.

Cartman grinned evilly in response.

“What are you scared?” The talking cow cooed condescendingly. Tweek folded his arms and suppressed a twitch as he stared him down. “Do you need your butt plug to come save you?” Cartman shoved Tweek’s shoulder into the lockers.

“Hey, if you’re problem’s with me then tell me, don’t involve Tweek in this.” Clyde stepped in, bravely.

Cartman looked between them disbelievingly like he was about ready to explode with idiocy.

“WHA — HE INVOLVED HIMSELF, YOU FUCKING MORON!” He screeched in incredulous frustration.

“HEY!” Tweek shoved him hard in the chest, diverting the attention back to himself. He stepped in front of Clyde, nose to pig-nose with Eric Cartman.

Tweek sneered meanly as he lashed out with all the force he could muster.

“DON’T YOU FUCKING CALL HIM THAT! You BIG FAT PILE OF SHIT!”

Tweek ducked just in time, right as Cartman took a swing, hitting the lockers behind Tweek’s head with full force. Tweek backed out from against the wall and circled around in a defensive stance as Cartman grabbed his knuckles, wailing and whimpering in pain.

“Fucking… BITCH! You SPAZ, Tweek! …Ow!… You’re so dead! I’m gonna KILL you, TWEEN!” Tweek felt horror flood his senses as Cartman growled — literally fucking growled! — like a wild animal ready to attack. “Grrr — FIGHT ME YOU PUSSY!”

Like a lion pouncing on his prey, the angry bully lunged at the blond.

He didn’t get far before Craig Tucker came out of fucking NOWHERE and pinned Cartman facedown against the lockers — bending Cartman’s arm painfully behind his back and jamming his knee into the back of Cartman’s knee — throwing all his weight against him, so that the impact rattled the lockers and startled the onlooking crowd that was forming. Craig grabbed Eric by the hair and slammed the side of his face into the lockers one more time for emphasis.

“Don’t ever do that again.” Craig snarled as he let him go — more like threw him to the ground — just as Stan ran up to the scene, flanked tentatively by Kyle, and further back, Kenny and Butters.

“Get up, man! What the fuck are you doing fighting at school, what are you, 12?!” Stan reprimanded as he picked Cartman up off the ground as best as he could before dragging him off to the cafeteria to separate themselves from Craig’s gang.

“Why are there never any teachers at this school?” Kyle wondered, pinching the bridge of his nose in frustration as he followed after them.

“You ok?” Kenny asked, Butters looking worriedly between Tweek and Clyde. They both nodded — Clyde with wide eyes and Tweek with narrowed ones.

“Let’s go, Tweek.” Craig grabbed Tweek by the back of his green hoodie and walked him in the
other direction, right into the nearest boys’ bathroom.

“Craig!” Tweek whined as they stumbled through the swinging door. “I almost had him!”

“Cool off!” Craig hissed as he let him go in front of the sink.

“He was gonna hurt Clyde!”

“I don’t care!”

Tweek stared at Craig through the mirror for a moment before turning on the squeaky tap and running his shaking wrists under the water.

"F-fuck!” Tweek stuttered as he felt a tick coming on. Craig stormed over and grabbed the hand that Tweek was reaching towards the side of his head. Tweek stubbornly clenched his fist so Craig had to pry his fingers open one by one. He did so patiently, and delicately. He brushed his long fingers down the palm of Tweek's hand before tenderly lacing their fingers together. Tweek defiantly reached up with his other hand. Craig blocked it by running his fingers gently through Tweek's hair. Craig leaned down slightly and rested his forehead against Tweek's blond temple, closing his eyes serenely. Tweek stared at him through the mirror, watched this gentle giant soothe his boiling anger until there was nothing left. He watched himself; watched the rage dissolve from his own eyes gradually, as his light eyebrows slowly unknit themselves. Tweek felt his breath deepen with each knot Craig unknowingly loosened in Tweek's tight chest. He took in a shaky breath and exhaled sharply.

He felt Craig take another step closer to him. Tweek turned his head slightly, eyelids heavy. They both jumped when the door swung open loudly and Clyde stormed in, headed straight for a stall.

Craig chased after him as Clyde slammed the chipped, plastic Laminate clicked the lock shut.

“Clyde.” Craig called. Tweek could hear quiet sobbing from inside the stall. Clyde didn’t answer. Craig slid down to the floor and sat against the wall. “You ok?” He asked the green partition between them. Tweek could see that Clyde was sitting on the floor, huddled against the door as well.

“It’s wasn’t my fault.” He whispered, muffled from inside the stall. Craig looked at Tweek pleadingly. But Tweek would be no help, in fact, Tweek had never felt so helpless. He walked over and sat down on the other side of the stall, across from Craig. He sat there and listened to Clyde cry all the way through first period.

By lunchtime, Clyde was ok. He still wouldn’t talk about it, but he was feeling better — or at least appeared to. He bounced happily in his seat as he scarfed down enough food to count for breakfast and lunch. Tweek sipped his coffee slowly, he wasn’t very hungry. Even if he was, anxiety was strangling him, and his throat was so tight he couldn’t swallow.

Tweek was feeling a little bit better, too, but not by much. After everything had calmed down, Craig had pulled him aside again and lectured him about not getting into it with assholes. It didn’t matter that Tweek hadn’t hit back, he knew his mouth was enough to get him in trouble twice as much, and that’s where he went wrong. His ‘I don’t hit first’ rule didn’t mean shit, if he was still gonna jab and provoke. Tweek knew he wounded Cartman before the first punch was even thrown, and he felt sorta bad for that. He wasn’t angry anymore, but his guilt had kicked in full force.
Luckily, his last class of the day today was art. And creating Zen-ed Tweek’s senses.

The bell rang and everybody scattered in their separate directions.

“I’ll see you in music class!” Clyde called to Craig with a fatigued version of his usual chipper attitude. “Will I see the rest of you guys at the game?” He asked hopefully. Everyone nodded. Clyde smiled and walked out the door. Token made sure to walk with him just in case anything crazy went down.

“Fuck this day, dude, I’m so done with it.” Craig grumbled from beside Tweek as they walked to the U.S. History class they shared together.

Tweek nodded in whole-hearted agreement.

After sitting in a class that he barely paid attention to, Tweek was relieved to get to art class.

“See you later,” he waved at Craig briskly before opening the door. The room smelled of clay, and paints, and old leather stools that always had one wobbly leg. Tweek grinned in satisfaction as he put his stuff down in his usual seat and took his painting down from the drying rack.

He stared down at his half-painted drawing.

It was a portrait of sorts — though that was kind of a stretch — with each ‘item’ symbolizing a different friend. It was based off of an old picture Tweek found from 4th grade, with Craig and Tweek on the end (Craig smiling while flipping off the camera, of course, while Tweek smiled dorkily next to him), Clyde pulling a funny, stretched out face to Craig’s right, Token smiling nicely next to him, giving Clyde ‘bunny ears’, and Jimmy smiling his bright metal smile, holding his crutched arm out, presenting himself grandly from where he lay across the floor in front of everyone. It was especially special because Clyde’s mom had taken the picture at a sleepover at the Donovan house. Clyde had printed 10 copies and given everybody each 2 the next Monday at school. Tweek still had his second copy hanging on his wall at home.

In Tweek’s version, Craig became graffiti of a disembodied middle finger, simply enough, with black nail polish, and bloodied knuckles. It sat behind a backdrop: a wall of bricks, painted dark shades of purple and blue like the night sky on acid, with little white flecks of stars arranged into little patterns indicative of the real constellations Craig had drilled into Tweek’s little head as a child. Tweek had become a to-go coffee cup, half spilled over onto a patch of sidewalk, that he planned to cover in tiny details of abstract graffiti with colorful markers. Instead of Clyde sticking his tongue out and pulling on his cheeks like a monkey, Tweek had gone with a different approach and turned him into a little boy, with his back to the viewer, staring up at the graffitied wall in a gray t-shirt and jeans, with a black balloon in his hand. He felt it suited him more. A small bunny sat next to him in the grass, looking up at him with it’s light brown eyes and matching fur, it’s ear drooping from the heavy purple paint dripping off it’s poor little ears: Token. Jimmy had become the boy’s shadow, laughing and dancing joyfully behind him as he stared up at the offensive mural curiously.

It was mostly finished, but Tweek still had to do the sky in the background and the grass in the foreground, some shading, little details here and there and voilà! Despite the sad symbolism and dark palette, the painting made Tweek smile. He thought about giving it to Clyde when he was finished with it. Tweek grabbed some sponges for clouds and got to work.

“Hello.” Butters chimed happily as he sat down. “Jesus, you’re already almost finished?!” He
panicked as he looked down at his own mostly empty page.

“I work fast.” Tweek shrugged, scribbling furiously to shade in the balloon with pointy, jagged streaks. “Plus I’ve had this idea for months so I didn’t have to do any planning.” He added casually.

“Oh jeez…” Butters murmured, more to himself than to Tweek, starting at his empty page with concern. “Oh — Heya, Kyle!”

"Hey Butters." Kyle dropped his supplies to the table and sighed exhaustedly. "Look dude" he turned towards Tweek, "I just wanted you to know that I do not condone Cartman's actions at all, I think he's a fucking bully when he wants to be, and I don't know why, but he's my friend, so yeah. I'm sorry on his behalf.” Kyle apologized awkwardly.

Tweek twitched. “G— that’s ok, Kyle, I’m not judging you. Some people used to think Craig was a bully because he fought all the time.” Tweek shrugged understandingly. Kyle nodded and sat down.

Kyle looked over at Butters’ paper. “The theme’s supposed to be ‘urban contrast’.” He informed.

“Well it’s not finished yet!” Butters panicked, covering it with his forearms. The small boy sighed, propping his elbow up on the table, leaning his head against his palm as he stuck out his tongue and sketched furiously. So far, his page just included a small patch of green grass with a little golden sunflower standing tall, illuminated by a bright orange sun. Half-finished, clumsily penciled sketches appeared to be a mountain of buildings. It seemed to take place in some kind of a post-apocalyptic, shell-of-a-thriving-city that once was. Butters was just finishing the biggest sketch on the page: a giant, looming church with peeling paint, broken windows, and one simple steeple. The building was long and narrow, like you could run down one hallway forever. It was dark and distorted like when you take a picture of a tall building from far away. The giant cross above the entrance hung off the door diagonally in blasphemous neglect. It was kinda chilling. Tweek shivered. He looked across the table.

Kyle was furiously splattering his solid, burnt rust colored page with wild streaks of bright red, orange, and dark green. He had pieces of painter’s tape down to cover up the places he’d already started drawing, eyebrows furrowing as he slashed at his canvas paper. Tweek watched him curiously. Once the paint was how he liked it, Kyle gingerly peeled back the tape to reveal strips of blues and reds, splattered carelessly in the same style as the surrounding oranges and greens. It was really beautiful, actually, in a furious sort of way.

“Looks angry.” Tweek commented.

“It is.” Kyle swiped his thumb in yellow and dragged it across the top in a blurry mess.

“Well, Kyle… why did you get on my case for not following the theme if you were just gonna flat out ignore it?” Butters wondered.

Kyle shrugged. “Just wanted to make sure you knew.”

With only 5 minutes left until the end of class, Tweek decided to head out early so he could get to the music room in time to walk with Craig and Clyde. Just in case. Tweek grabbed his backpack and let the others know that he’d see them after school. On his way out, he saluted the teacher,
who was sitting at her desk, painstakingly adding faint, pale brush strokes in concentric patterns to a piece of pottery Tweek had watched her finish last week. She waved at him as he exited. By far, one of the top 10 coolest teachers at this school.

Tweek walked down the hallway and checked his phone. No messages, so that seemed to be a good sign. Tweek just felt so bad for Clyde, he hoped he didn’t ruin his day by making it a whole scene.

‘No,’ Tweek thought to himself as he started shoving his heavy textbooks back in his locker. ‘no, I shouldn’t just blame myself; I’m not at fault here, at least not fully; it’s also Cartman’s fault. Probably mostly his fault. Stand up for yourself, Tweek, if anybody should be sorry, it’s him.’

Tweek had just closed his locker when his head connected with the metal painfully. ‘What the fuck?’

Tweek winced as he felt his whole body shoved up against the lockers, much like how Craig had detained Cartman this morning.

“Who’s here to fight your battles for you now?” A voice snarled in Tweek’s ear before his face was painfully bashed into the lockers again, and he was thrown to the ground in the middle of the hallway.

“Get up, brah, make it fun for me.” Cartman mocked, an angry, wild look in his puffy eyes.

Tweek stood up slowly, eyeing Cartman carefully.

“Can’t hide anywhere now. Unless you wanna run away like a pussy.” Cartman spat angrily as he cracked his neck. “Square up!” He barked. ‘God dammit…’

Tweek slowly brought his hands up in a fighting stance and Cartman sneered nastily.

“Ok.” He lunged at Tweek.

Luckily, Tweek was quicker. He dodged under Cartman’s arm and jabbed him with one hard punch to his kidney.

“Fuck.” Cartman wheezed before he stood up, swinging harder and angrier than before. Tweek was a good blocker, but he let one slip.

Tweek’s cheek stung where Cartman landed a good one, in exactly the same spot where Tweek had taken a locker to the face moments before.

Blood flew from Cartman’s mouth as Tweek retaliated, fists flying furiously as his double hit even harder the second time. Cartman ducked and covered his mouth.

Tweek took saw an opportunity.

He grabbed Cartman by the shoulders and kneed him in the solar plexus. He threw him against the lockers and backed off.

“Come on, m-man, I don’t wanna keep doing this!” Tweek pleaded, watching Cartman sputter, struggling to catch his breath. “Seriously! Let’s end this!” Tweek held his hand out in a truce offering, that his opponent ignored, spitting blood on the floor instead. Cartman narrowed his eyes like a lion zeroing on its pray. It made Tweek’s blood run cold. He retracted his hand slowly.
“Oh, I intend to.” The fat jock snarled as he lunged for Tweek. ‘Oh shit’, turning his head just as Cartman thrust an uppercut, just missing and hitting the side of Tweek’s jaw instead. It still hurt like all fuck but at least he didn’t break any teeth.

“What the fuck, man!” Tweek complained, grabbing his jaw. Was this guy psycho?!

Tweek instantly regretted his moment of weakness as a maniacal smile stretched across Cartman’s face. Tweek ducked and rolled out of the way as Cartman attempted to tackle him recklessly. What he wasn’t ready for, was the kick to his abdomen that sent him doubling over instictively.

Cartman was not a fair fighter. That much was clear when he took that opportunity to grab the trembling blond boy by his pretty hair, and kick him right in the ear like it was a field goal.

Tweek’s vision went black as a high pitched ringing stung his ears. He could feel one of them bleeding.

Tweek crawled along the floor just trying to get away when the cadences of muffled, indistinguishable threats loomed over him, just before he felt himself get dragged across the floor. Tweek kicked and squirmed as best as he could, but it was hard to see where he needed to aim with his vision compromised. Tweek swallowed the taste of vomit and blinked furiously until he could see some blurry spots in his black vision. He kicked up behind him like a donkey and felt his heel hit bone. Good. He hoped it hurt.

Tweek was able to stand up, though his knees were shaking and his stomach was queasy. Despite all this, he went all out.

It’s not like he hadn’t been in worse shape in the tournament ring before, granted it had been a few years.

Tweek focused himself as he went after Cartman, slamming his small body into his as hard as he could, the lockers reverberating with a booming echo through the halls. Tweek wailed on him mercilessly, as Cartman stood there, just trying to block his face. Tweek was mostly hitting forearm at this point, but if he stopped now he was afraid he would pass out.

So he just kept going. Hitting and punching and kicking Cartman anywhere and everywhere while he still had him pinned down, until… Tweek messed up.

There was a noise. Both boys froze, fighting stopped mid-blow, distracted by the clatter of a hall pass hitting the floor. There was a small gasp. Tweek looked toward the sound. Some freshman kid had come into the hallway and accidentally grabbed their attention. Tweek stared a second too long as he watched the small face blanch and his big eyes widen even bigger before his little frame turned and ran back towards the direction of the classrooms.

Tweek stood paused, fist poised in the air, staring after the kid with an annoyingly impulsive need to run after him and explain. Cartman looked wildly between Tweek and the vanishing kid and made a much quicker decision. The next thing he knew, Cartman had grabbed Tweek by the shoulders slammed him into the lockers again. This time with full force, Tweek’s head knocked against the metal in a sharp, icy sting.

The last thing Tweek remembered before blacking out was the ring of the school bell, the murmur of a growing crowd, the sting of one good punch to the eye, and the shadow of a looming figure towering over the both of them.
Blackout

Chapter Summary

Gonna go back in time a little bit before we go forward past the Tweek fight. This is a long one, but it’s all VERY important to the plot and character relationships, but also Eric's psyche; he's really not a monster, I promise. Shout out to the random cameo of Vampir/Mike Makoswki's mom (she does exist!)

TW: Domestic abuse
TW: Eating disorders

*I also really don't like the "r-word", but it's Cartman's character to be insensitive.

POV - Eric/Cartman

“Thanks for the ride, Randy.”

“No problemo, kiddo. I’m ‘woke’ to ‘the struggle’ of that ‘no license life’, ha right?”

“…Um… yeah… Bye, Stan.”

As Eric Cartman opened the car door, he immediately heard shouting coming from inside his house. His blood ran cold, and his head felt hot; Eric tried not to panic as he ran through his wide-open front door, ignoring Stan’s pleas to stay in the car and call the police.

Everything felt like it was in slow motion as he bolted up the stairs two at a time and followed the screams.

“Mom!” He shouted as he entered her disheveled bedroom. She was holding the side of her face and cowering slightly. Tony stood tall, palm flexed, red in the face and shaking with anger. Half of his stuff was haphazardly thrown into his suitcase, and half of it was in a messy pile on the bed. That explains the laundry basket of toiletries Eric almost tripped on running inside the house.

He turned toward the teenager menacingly.

“Do you believe this shit?” He spat towards the son of the girlfriend he was fucking.

“What’s going on?” Cartman asked his mom, who was looking at him helplessly, while tilting her head in a fake smile, tears rolling down her face.

“She’s kicking me out.” Tony grunted as he kicked a nearby laundry basket.

“Then get out.” Cartman swallowed anxiously. His senses were firing like crazy and he felt like he would vibrate until he exploded.

“No! Hey, it’s my house too! I’ll get out when I’m damn well good and ready.” Tony spat in his ugly New England accent. Bullshit. He doesn’t pay a goddamn dime on this place. He lent her
money *one time*, throws his dirty underwear in the hamper and boom, now it’s ‘his house too’. A dirty fucking toothbrush crammed into the toothbrush holder doesn’t make it his fucking house!

“Did you hit her?” Eric asked, very carefully, all too familiar with Tony’s violent outbursts.

“Oh please, I slapped her, she’s being a baby.” Liane was crying silently, lip trembling, as she stared between the grown man and the young man at odds in her bedroom.

“THAT DOESN’T MATTER YOU PIECE OF SHIT!” Cartman spat at the jacked lump of protein powder, tears beginning to prickle his eyes.

“Cartman!” Eric turned around to find Stan standing in the doorway, a growing look of panic on his pale face. “E-everything ok?” He asked nervously. “Your front door was open…” Stan’s eyes seemed to catch Liane’s as they widened exponentially.

“Who is this kid? — Look, we’re fine, just a little lover’s quarrel that’s all, now get the fuck out.” Tony dismissed, pointing to the door, patience only able to hold out for so long.

Stan looked between Cartman at Liane and nodded very slowly before turning and racing down the stairs.

“I’ll help you pack.” Liane muttered as she tried to make herself useful placing the rest of his folded workout shirts into his cluttered suitcase. She jumped when they were slapped out of her hands.

Tony rounded on her.

He grabbed her by the collar of her work shirt and screamed in her face.

“What right do you have to touch my shit? Huh?… Fucking whore…” Tony roared, before letting her go — or more like pushing her — hard into the dresser.

“HEY!” Cartman yelled, his voice traveling farther than his planted feet. “You don’t touch her.” He warned with a scowl.

Tony raised his eyebrows in surprise as he slung his arm around Liane’s shoulders, clasping his hands together so that she was trapped in a loose chokehold.

“I can fucking touch her anytime I want.” He challenged in a vile whisper, grip slowly tightening as Eric took a tentative step forward. The boy immediately retracted his stride and Tony let go of his mom.

She ran to him and buried her face in her son’s shoulder. Cartman wrapped his arms around her protectively, eyes never leaving Tony’s.

The middle-aged frat boy chuckled in disdain. “You’re pathetic, Liane. You know that?” The dresser shook as he slammed the drawers shut. “You lying, piece of shit.” He mumbled as he stuffed the last of his ripped tank tops and sleeveless t-shirts in the suitcase with the rest of his clothes. “To think I put up with you for so long!” He yelled as he tossed his half-closed suitcase to the floor.

“Well… you have your things… now you need to leave.” Liane demanded from behind the comfort of her son’s protection. “Please.” She begged.

Then, it all happened so fast.
Tony sprinted over and grabbed Liane forcefully by the arm. She wailed in pain.

Cartman shook him off of her, pushing and shoving and yelling as they fought.

Tony let her go, a sacrifice he made for the sake of wrapping both of his ‘roided-out hands around the teen boy’s neck and squeezing tightly.

Cartman sputtered and tried to catch his breath, kicking and struggling as Liane screamed bloody murder right next to him.

“NO! LET HIM GO! LEAVE US ALONE!” She begged as she beat on his dense shoulders with balled up fists. Tony hip-checked her to the floor, grip only tightening with anger.

Cartman’s feet gave out from under him as he kicked, suspended by his neck, vision starting to cave in.

“UP HERE!” Liane screamed from the floor of her bedroom, and Cartman heard pounding footsteps sprinting up the stairs.

Time seemed to slow down as extra bodies filled the room. Cartman fell into his mother’s waiting arms as Tony let him go, surprise and betrayal on his white trash face.

Cartman wheezed as he watched his mother’s ex-fuckboy fall to his knees, hands above his head. Liane weeped apologies as she pet her son’s hair, holding him loosely as he caught his breath. Metal cuffs clicked around Tony’s wrists and a woman in blue knelt down to check on the boy.

“You ok, son?” She asked firmly, with a hint of sadness behind her hazel eyes. Cartman looked down and saw her name tag, it read ‘Makowwski’. He nodded as he watched Tony be dragged out of the room and down the stairs.

“Excuse me,” Liane chirped in her lilting, ditsy voice, “We’d like a restraining order, please.”

... Mother and son sat in their living room and gave their statements to the police.

Tony was driven away in a cop car, crying like a wuss and swearing like a sailor. Cartman bid him good fucking riddance as he watched the lights disappear around the block.

He could hear the distant and muffled sounds of his mother speaking with police across the room. She was strong, and certain in her tone of voice. It sounded so far away.

“He won’t be able to hurt you anymore.” A stern voice promised with convincing certainty.

Eric directed his attention to the cop named ‘Makowski’, only briefly, before turning back to look out the window once more. There was nothing out there anymore, but he kept finding himself watching anyway. He’d watched the car pull away. Now he was just watching.

“You know, I have a son about your age.” Eric looked over once more. Officer Makowski’s smile was warm, but minuscule, only lasting a brief second.

Eric nodded.

“Mike.” Officer Makiwski continued. “Though he’s a grade older than you.”

“I don’t really know him.” Cartman muttered, directing his attention back out the window to look
Officer Makowski straightened her back and cleared her throat.

“Yes. Well, Eric, I just want you to know that I am going to do everything in my power, to personally make sure that asshole never comes near you or your mom again.” Cartman rolled his eyes, doubtful that any cop would give a shit about them. After a moment, the officer nodded understandingly and stood up slowly.

“Mrs. Cartman,” Liane stood up from the couch and shuffled over to where she was being called. “Can you think of any instances that would have been documented of prior abuse? Medical records? Noise complaints? Any of that sort of thing?”

“Why… no, no, I don’t believe I can…” Liane spoke politely. “This was the first one.”

“What about you, son.” Cartman clenched his fist. There’s that fucking word again. “Anything you can recall.” Wait… Fuck. No, this really was the first time.

Cartman shook his head dejectedly.

“Hm.” The two cops looked at each other concern obvious on their faces.

“Please,” Liane whispered. Both officers turned towards the pleading woman, “can you help us?”

“Yes.” Officer Makowski nodded sharply. Liane sighed in relief. “But it’s going to be harder, and it may take longer. There’s no guarantee that the order won’t be thrown out by a judge, but I’d say that outcome is unlikely.”

Cartman stood up, marching over in frustration.

“Well, what the fuck does that mean? Are you gonna protect us or not?” Eric ignored his mom's tiny protests ‘not to swear’ and stood his ground.

“Well, you see, without sufficient, admissible evidence there’s a risk of the case being… thrown out.” The second cop explained tentatively.

“But with our statements — police witnesses — you have quite a fair shot. I’d say it’s more than plausible we can have that restraining order in place by next week.” Officer Makowski explained optimistically.

“Yeah, especially because his fucking hands were around my throat when you came in.” Cartman joked darkly.

“Yes, precisely.” Makowski agreed.

The Cartmans thanked the officers profusely as they showed them out of the house once everything was finished, Liane even offered them cookies for the road.

As everybody stepped through the front door, Cartman’s attention was drawn towards the slamming doors across the street.

“Cartman! Oh my God!” Stan exclaimed as he ran into his arms.

“I’m ok. We’re ok.” Cartman was still shocked and breathless when Kenny and Kyle ran from the
back doors of Randy’s car.

“Dude! We were so worried about you!”

“We’re so glad your ok, we didn’t know what was going on!”

“You ok, Liane?” Randy checked as he walked past the giant huddle of boys.

“Yes, Randy, thank you.” Liane wrapped her slender arms around him and smiled.

“You’re lucky.” Everybody turned to look at Mrs. Makowski, smiling brightly for the first time all night. “Looks like you’ve got a great support system here.” Cartman shoved Kenny off as he attempted to kiss him jokingly.

“We’ll keep someone on patrol around your neighborhood just in case, but he’s going to be in police custody for 24 hours.” The officer dug around in her pockets for a moment before presenting two white business cards to the Cartmans. “But should you need anything — help, advice, anything —” She stared into each of their eyes intently as she reassured them, “just give me a call.”

Liane lunged forward and hugged the stiff officer.

Everybody waved goodbye as the two cops drove off, leaving an unfilled silence in their wake. Randy sputtered and clapped his hands awkwardly.

“Are you boys hungry?” Liane wondered. Kenny nodded. “I can order some pizza?”

“I’m buying.” Randy assured. After the usual adult banter of ‘oh, are you sure?’, ‘oh, absolutely, it would be my pleasure’, ‘oh, you shouldn’t’, ‘I insist’, ‘are you sure?’, ‘please’, Liane finally agreed. She went ahead and called the pizza while Randy and the boys brought the rest of Tony’s shit to the curb. The garbage man will take it tomorrow, and that piece of garbage will have no more reasons to be here. He’d only be losing some janky clothes and protein shit anyway. He can buy a new toothbrush at the dollar tree tomorrow.

When the pizza came, Randy paid the pizza man and Liane served everyone on paper plates. Of course Kenny started eating before saying grace, but Cartman shot him a look and he put down his slice.

“Dear Lord,” Liane began, grabbing Cartman’s hand in prayer. As she spoke, the boys went down the line, grabbing each other’s hands one by one. “Thank you for this delicious meal, and thank you for bringing us such wonderful friends to share it with in this time of difficulty.” Cartman felt his mom squeeze his hand as she took in a shaky breath. “Thank you for showing me, the ugly side to the ugly people in my life.” Cartman rolled his eyes. She’s gonna martyr him in two days, he just knows it. “And thank you for getting him out of my house permanently. He’ll never—” Liane’s breath hitched and her prayer stopped mid sentence. Cartman opened his eyes and stared at his mom. She was crying.

“Mom…” He squeezed her hand reassuringly, and she squeezed it right back, she squeezed so tightly that he could feel her shaking. He felt his eyes start to tear up as he watched her. “Mom,” he whispered helplessly.

Liane took a deep breath and wiped her face on her shoulder before clearing her throat and finishing her thought. “He’ll never hurt us again.” She declared clearly. “Amen.”
“Amen.” Everyone mumbled awkwardly.

“Uh, boys, why don’t you eat inside?”

The boys wordlessly grabbed their plates and sat on the same couch they’d sat in many times since they were children.

Time had moved on, life had gotten harder, but some things would never change.

In their silence, the boys could overhear Liane telling Randy about going to the courthouse tomorrow to file the restraining order.

Stan, Kyle, and Kenny were all looking down at their plates like they couldn’t eat, but didn’t know what to say to fill the silence.

Finally, Stan spoke up. “So… what happened?” Cartman put down his plate in preparation for the story. “After I called the cops, all I heard was screaming.” Stan looked down and took a bite of pizza to busy himself. Or shut himself up.

“You called?” Cartman asked. Stan nodded.

“Your mom signaled for me to when you and that big guy’s backs were turned.” Wow. For once Cartman was proud of his mom for doing the smart thing.

The boys slowly got around to eating their slices as Cartman told the story of the chaos went down just two short hours before.

As Cartman finished his story, he stared down at his slice of untouched pizza. No, screw this. He’d earned this today. Practice, then white-trash choking him out, he earned all the fucking pizza in the world, if you asked him; he was fucking hungry and stressed. Actually, you know what: Cartman didn’t need excuses. No justifications, he told himself, he’d earned normal. Eric took small, tentative bites of his pizza, and ended up finishing the whole thing.

... 

Randy and the boys showed themselves out about a half hour later, bidding the Cartman’s well wishes, asking them to reach out, anytime. Randy sent Sharon’s love and promised she’d call Liane the next day to check in.

Cartman waved to his friends as they all drove off.

Liane turned and kissed her son on the top of his head.

“I’m sorry, baby.” She cupped his cheek as tears began to well in her eyes.

“It’s ok.” He shrugged. It really wasn’t but what else is he gonna say? You have shit taste in men, Mom? I’m so happy you kicked that fucker out, even though you should have done it weeks ago, Mom? Don’t be stupid...

“I promise I’ll be more careful with who I bring in the house, next time.” Well, shit, that’s pretty much all that Cartman could ask for.

Liane checked her watch like she had someplace to be. “Ooh! I better get going!” She chimed as she floated her way back inside the house.

Cartman stood stunned for a second before he could bring himself to react.
“Going?! He questioned as he followed after her, shutting and locking the door behind himself. “Where could you possibly be going right now?”

“Oh, I have a date coming to pick me up in 45 minutes.” She announced innocently.

Cartman’s head damn near exploded.

“A DATE?!”

“Yes sweetie, in 45 minutes so I better get ready.” Liane explained daintily.

“WHAT?!” He screeched as he ran up the stairs and stormed up to his mother’s bedroom.

“You’re joking, right? This HAS to be some kind of SICK JOKE, RIGHT?!” He called from outside the partially closed door.

“It’s not a joke, poopykins, I met a man yesterday.”

“Yesterday.” Cartman sighed in exasperation. “Fucking kidding me, you met him yesterday? Fucking kidding me, you met him yesterday? You were still with fucking douche-muscles yesterday!”

“Well, why do you think I needed to break up with Tony today, honey? I didn’t want to be dishonest with him.” Cartman was going to lose his cool if she didn’t find some fucking brain cells in that hairspray-ed head.

“I DON’T GIVE A SHIT IF YOU’RE DISHONEST WITH TONY, MOM!” Cartman took a deep breath and tried to calm himself, speaking slowly and carefully. “My point is that you hop from one guy to the next, and they’re all shit, and they all end up hurting you so WHY DO YOU DO IT?! The free weights are not even cold, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!” Cartman would never understand his mom. She throws herself at some guy and claims she ‘met someone else’. Then lather, rinse, repeat; this was her cycle. It made him so fucking mad to see useless men wander in and out of his life constantly. He wanted to scream at her, he wanted to fucking shake some sense into her, he wanted — “Mom,” Cartman’s voice cracked as tears pricked the corners of his eyes, “please. Don’t you want to be better than this?” He heard silence on the other end the door. Then he heard her soft footsteps pad across the carpet and open the door. She was wearing a new dress. Guess he had his answer.

“This one’s different, poopykins, I promise.”

Cartman threw his hands up in the air in frustration.

“Well after the, as you called it, ‘shitstorm’ of a day I’ve had, don’t you think you deserve a little happiness?” She shot back at him, more attitude from her than Eric had ever seen. She raised her eyebrows, looked at him pointedly, then went back to putting on her lipstick.

Cartman was hurt. ‘Happiness’, was that not something he could give her? His eyes began to tear up.

“Then stay home with me, we’ll watch a movie downstairs, whatever chick flick you want, I don’t
care just DON'T LEAVE ME!” Cartman’s heart wrenched in his chest as he watched Liane silently get up and continue to put her heels on. He followed her to her closet and kneeled in front of the chair she was sitting in. “Mommy, please.” He begged, tears falling now.

He was surprised when Liane looked back up at him to see angry tears of her own drowning her red face.

“You’re being selfish.” She hissed at him nastily.

“What?”

“What about me, huh? What if this is what I need? WHAT about what I NEED?!” She scream/cried in his face. Cartman was stunned. “I met the most wonderful man at the grocery store yesterday. We sat down, had some coffee, I get to know him a little bit better and I really think he could be the one. He’s sweet, he’s kind, he cares about his son, and he cares about me. So I decide to leave Tony for him. Yes, that was a ‘shitshow’,” Liane made air quotes in the air, rolling her eyes fuming, “But now I can finally be with him. And you’re telling me to cancel? Because you want me to? WHAT ABOUT ME?!”

“No, what about ME?!” Cartman stood up, pacing back and forth, irate in his irritation. “A psycho tried to KILL me today, do you get that?” Eric stopped pacing and stared into his mother’s eyes. “What if that scared me, what if I NEED you right now?” Cartman covered his mouth as sobs overtook his rant. Liane stood and hugged her son.

She shushed him and comforted him, rubbing his back as she soothed him. “It’s ok, you’ll be ok.” Eric was relieved.

Liane straightened herself and squeezed her son’s cheeks lovingly. “You’re a big boy, I’m sure you’ll be fine.” Eric’s face dropped, processing what she’d said. Her face went back to it’s neutral, dumb smile as she stared at him.

Eric ripped his mother’s hands from his face and stepped away from her, slowly.

“I need this today, Eric. Do you understand?” She reached for him again.

Cartman batted her hand away.

“You should be the one in therapy every fucking week.” He spat as he stormed out of her bedroom and into his.

Liane called a goodbye through the door as she left for her date. Cartman listened to her heeled steps trot down the stairs and open the door. He listened to the lilting cadences of her mask of a voice, only able to decipher the muffled tone of a man’s voice lilting back.

He looked out the window, only in time to see her purple dress disappear inside a nothing-special sedan of some kind. He couldn’t see who was driving, but the car looked familiar. Then again, there were millions of those average things on the road, he couldn’t really be sure if he’d seen it before at all. Cartman shoved his headphones back in his ears, but wouldn’t press play. He listened all the way until the hum of the car had disappeared from earshot.

Cartman wondered if his mom locked the door. In a small, irrational moment of panic, the teen boy ran downstairs to check. Luckily, it was locked. He sighed in relief. Emotions suddenly flooding with fear, and anger, and anxiousness; it didn’t make sense, it wasn’t fair! His life was
shit, and it just wasn’t fair.

Cartman was starting to hyperventilate when he ran upstairs to the bathroom. He felt like he was going to throw up. His body was shaking and his stomach felt sour. Cartman gripped the sides of the porcelain sink and looked up at himself in the mirror.

Fat fucking pig. Couldn’t even defend his mother without losing the fight.

Cartman retched dryly, as he attempted to banish these thoughts from his head.

He’s just a kid, after all, and he went up against a fully grown man, of course he failed.

But he failed.

Cartman shook his head as he tried to breathe deeply enough to settle his stomach.

He couldn’t even keep her here. Now she’s off with some other guy, who didn’t even have the decency to shake his hand.

God damn Cartman felt like shit, in every possible way. He needed relief, he needed something real to cry about. He needed to expel these awful thoughts from himself.

Cartman looked at his sweaty face in the mirror, and nodded to himself.

The boy fell to his knees in front of the toilet, gagging and shaking already, just wanting it to be over already. He promised himself he would feel better after.

For the first time in months, Cartman did something he had only ever done once before.

As the sounds of vomit splashing in the toilet pounded in his eardrums like a waterfall, Cartman realized he’d made a huge mistake. He felt worse now. Disappointed. Weak.

So he did it again.

Cartman had purged three times before nothing else would even come up.

He stared at the toilet bowl, suddenly lucid from his fit, and wondering what the fuck he’d done that for.

He wiped his mouth shakily as he flushed, standing slowly, woozy.

His vision was prickling with black spots since the one ounce of nourishment he'd had all day had just fucked off and vanished through his plumbing system.

“Great.” He muttered sarcastically to himself as he rinsed his mouth and brushed his teeth.

Cartman made his way down to the kitchen and got himself a glass of water. He decided to wait on the couch for his mom to get home, so she could tell him about it. He would listen, and he would try to be happy for her.

He gathered up a pillow and blanket from the nearby closet and settled in, falling asleep only moments later.

...

Cartman woke up tp the sounds of the front door opening, simultaneous with the alarm chiming on
his phone. It was 7:00... 7:00?!

“Are you... just getting home?” He asked his mom, giving her the benefit of the doubt. The guilty look on her face telling him everything he needed to know.

“Um, yes, my date... just dropped me off.” She admitted sheepishly, headed for the stairs. Cartman blocked her way.

“Good. He’s gentleman enough to drive you home rather than just leave some cab fair on the nightstand?” Cartman sneered meanly. “Not gentleman enough to take you home the night before, though, I see.” He crossed his arms, waiting for his mother to explain herself.

“I’m a grown woman, what I do outside of the house is none of my son’s business.” She explained weakly. Yeah fucking right. “And for your information,” she continued, “Roger was a complete gentleman. We only talked.” She was probably lying but Cartman really, really didn’t want to ask the details.

“Roger, huh?” Cartman shifted his weight with attitude.

“Yes. Roger Donovan, if you must know.”

Wait... wait...

“Mr. Donovan? Clyde’s dad? CLYDE’S DAD?!” Cartman was floored.

“Yes.” Liane folded her arms defiantly. “Clyde’s dad. I never really knew him before, but now I do, and I like him.” God she sounded like a fucking teenager, it was infuriating.

“Ew, were you at his house?” Cartman made no effort to hide his disgust.

“We were at a motel, if you must know.”

“Ew.”

“It was getting late, and we still hadn’t finished talking about yesterday—”

“EW.”

“I wanted to be honest, so I waited to tell him everything in person, and he didn’t judge me, he comforted me—”

“EW STOP!”

Cartman stomped up the stairs to get ready for school. He turned at the top of the stairs and leaned over the banister to give his last two cents.

“Glad to know you weren’t murdered. You didn’t even call.” Liane looked ashamedly at the floor as she apologized. “God, who’s the adult here?” Cartman muttered as he stomped off to his bathroom to brush his teeth.

Cartman seethed as he got ready, getting more and more irritated as the minutes ticked on. At 7:15 Cartman’s anger had reached maximum boiling point, and all of the events from yesterday spoiled his soul rotten. Feeling the urge to hit something, Cartman decided he needed to talk with Clyde, to make sure his fuckboy father knows his place. Cartman grunted as he pulled a sweatshirt over his head, bounding down the stairs in yesterday’s jeans, on a mission to get to school as quickly as possible. A metaphorically threatening thought popped into his head as he flew open the door:
‘I’m gonna kill Clyde.’

Cartman speed walked the whole way to school, anger bubbling to a boil the longer he spent thinking too much.

Cartman flew past Tweek, looking down at the flowers like some dumb, retarded kid.

He stormed right up to Stan and Kyle. “Where’s Clyde.” He growled through clenched teeth.

“Um. I don’t know dude, why?” Stan’s eyes widened nervously.

“Are you ok, dude? Maybe you should cool off first.” Kyle’s little ‘advice’ was interrupted when Cartman grabbed a hold of his collar. Kyle gulped quietly and kept his mouth shut.

Eric let go of his friend and stalked off into the school hallways.

Clyde was standing at his locker, all alone. Smiling. It made Cartman sick.

He stormed over to Clyde and grabbed him by the shirt, shoving him into the lockers.

"What do you think you're doing, huh? Is this some kind of sick joke?"

Clyde's brown eyes grew wider as his face dropped.

"What?"

"You put him up to this? You think it's funny?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" he sputtered in a rush, shaking his head violently.

Cartman readjusted his grip, slamming Clyde into the lockers again with his forearm stretched across his collarbone.

"You tell your dad to stay the HELL away from my mom!" Cartman whispered menacingly as Clyde shook his head pleadingly.

Cartman had just about finished intimidating Clyde, when Tweek popped up into his narrowed line of sight and shoved him backwards.

"What the FUCK, FAT-ASS?!"

...  

“Get up, man! What the fuck are you doing fighting at school, what are you, 12?!” Stan reprimanded as he picked Cartman up off the ground as best as he could before dragging him off to the cafeteria to separate themselves from Craig’s gang.

“Why are there never any teachers at this school?” Kyle muttered from behind them before following obediently.

Cartman heard Kenny lagging behind, the traitor, all sounds from the hallway drowned out when the cafeteria doors closed behind them.

“Seriously, Cartman, what the hell?” Stan asked softly, only a slight edge to his wimpy voice.
“Do you have *anything* to say for yourself?” Kyle’s voice held much more bite than Stan’s, but for once Cartman didn’t have a comeback.

The bruised boy shook his head silently, earning only blank stares from his friends. They sat in stunned silence for a minute or two, before Kenny strolled back into the cafeteria.

“Ok.” He sighed as he hoisted himself up on the table, placing his feet on the seat next to Cartman. “What the fuck was that all about?” He muttered, staring at Cartman patiently, not leaving until he got an answer.


“Well, why were you looking for Clyde this morning?” Kyle started. He jumped when Cartman slammed his hands on the table loudly.

“Can we just drop it?” He stared at his friend’s stunned faces one by one. “I have to go to class”. He muttered and stood up from the table, out the door a few seconds later.

... 

At lunch, Eric stared down at his uneaten meatloaf with disgust. It was soggy by now, laying in a puddle of it’s own grease in the well of his plastic lunch tray.

He pushed it towards the middle of the table and slumped forward onto his folded arms. Cartman felt Kenny place a comforting hand on his shoulder. He was too exhausted to shrug it off.

Cartman glanced over to the other side of the cafeteria. Usually Cartman and his friends sat just a table away from Craig and his friends. Seeing as the ten of them had been friends since elementary school, sometimes they would intermingle, treating it like one big lunch table — rich with cheap gossip and free from rivalries. Today, Clyde had been dragged from his seat and the five of them had occupied an empty table at the back, glaring at Eric as they passed.

Cartman wasn’t surprised, he was good at making enemies.

Damn, all this over some fucking guy, his slutty mother, and his stupid temper.

“You don’t wanna eat?” Butters asked Cartman sweetly.

Sorry, but just because it was well intended did not mean the question didn’t make Cartman irrationally furious at Butters.

Cartman clenched his fists and stood up from the table.

“Whoa.” Kenny stood up and stepped in between Cartman and Butters, hands out like he could stop the powerful force that was Eric Cartman. “He’s just worried, we all are.”

Cartman huffed and folded his arms. “I’m fucking, fine.” Cartman assured, unconvincingly.

“I’m serious dude!” Kenny stepped closer and lowered his voice sympathetically. “Something’s going on with you lately, and you won’t tell us what.” Cartman was starting to get uncomfortable with the way his friends were staring at him, pitifully. “I mean, yesterday was one thing, and that’s understandable, but—”

Cartman grabbed his oldest friend by the collar, burning silent threats with his eyes.

Stan tensed uncomfortably, Kyle stood up carefully, Butters watched with widening eyes.
But Kenny stood calm. He stared at Cartman in the eyes, patient and determined.

Infuriating.

Cartman let him go.

Everybody visibly relaxed. Butters grabbed onto the back of Kenny’s sleeve reassuringly.

Jesus, is this really who Cartman’s become? Some aggro beast that could snap at any second? Someone his friends were fucking scared of?

“You guys are aggravating.” He ended up muttering as he stalked away from the cafeteria, backpack dragging on the floor behind him.

Cartman kicked open the door to the bathroom.

“Out!” He screamed at some freshmen boys taking their time at the sinks.

As the door swung behind their hurried feet, Cartman was left alone in the silent bathroom to collect his thoughts.

He stood there for a second. Still. Looking around the room one more time.

Cartman’s breath hitched as he sighed, tossing his bag against the wall and turning to lean against it, hands in pockets, and brain on silent.

He blinked a few times before sliding down the wall, stone faced, staring straight ahead. He wasn’t gonna cry.

Sure, whenever Cartman showed emotions he was a 'crybaby', but whenever Kenny or Stan did it they were just 'sensitive'.

…Just then, Cartman started crying.

He whined as he dropped his head to his knees and let the tears fall quietly.

When did everything become such a mess?

There was a time when Eric Cartman was at the top of his game. He cared more about mass than muscle tone, he ruled the school, he was feared by older bullies, and he had not a care in the world. Then he’d grown older, and his genius manipulation tactics became tired and predictable — less impressive as his classmates got smarter. The age gap had shifted, and now that he was the older kid, he’d become the bully. It was ugly, it was pathetic.

It was no longer kewel.

Cartman spent all of next period trying to pull himself together, and most of the one after that trying to make it look like he wasn’t crying an hour ago.

It was when he wandered out of the bathroom at 2:55, that Cartman caught sight of an infuriating blond, with a wild temper and a loud mouth.

The morning’s events flashed in front of him like a wild vision. Emotions, fresh like new, flooded Cartman’s thoughts and pumped rage through his veins. He saw nothing but red as he mentally
blacked out in anger. He felt cheated out of redemption this morning, but he was gonna get it now.

The next thing he knew, he’d shoved Tweek Tweak (stupid name), into the front of his closed locker.

“Who’s here to fight your battles for you now?” He growled as he shoved the boy into the metal walls again.

He threw him to the ground, hard.

If Tweek wanted a fight this morning, Cartman was sure as Hell going to give it to him now.

He watched Tweek stand up slowly.

Game on.

As Cartman threw the first punch, he would swear he’d almost forgotten what had gotten him so mad in the first place.

But he knew it didn't fucking matter.

...

Cartman had just socked the small blonde in the eye when he began to feel a sharp pain in his scalp.

Cartman yelped as he was dragged by his hair, and thrown against the opposite wall.

Right in front of Craig Tucker.

*Oh fuck.*

Cartman couldn’t protect himself fast enough.

The impulsiveness of the hot-headed big-mouth was no match for the raw fury of the schoolyard assassin. Craig Tucker had spit more blood on hallway floors than a hyper kid at the dentist.

Craig swung fiercely, and he swung quickly.

Cartman grunted and winced as his ribs took the heavy beating his face was taking a break from.

“Tweek! Tweek!” Clyde and Token were huddled around the blond boy, fanning him and talking to him as he struggled to regain consciousness.

Had Eric done that?

Well, his mind wasn’t in such a blur that he couldn’t recognize an opportunity when he saw one.

Craig’s head had whipped around, just for a second.

Cartman grabbed him by the ear flaps on his stupid hat and head butted him right in the nose, as hard as he could.

“Fuck! *FUCK!*” Craig swore as blood started instantly gushing from a deep gash on the bridge of his nose, small trickles flowing gently from his nostrils.
Breathing heavily, eyes wild like a bull, Craig smeared the blood across his face with the back of his hand and lunged at Cartman.

The two hit the floor hard, both wincing as hard linoleum caught them on their sides.

Craig wrestled his way on top, delivering hit after hit as Cartman covered his head with his forearms like the coward he was slowly realizing he was.

“Stop!”

He yelped as Craig refused to let up, the crowd around them growing more and more excited the longer he wailed on the chubby boy underneath him.

“Get off me, fucking queer!”

Craig snapped. He quickly changed his position. Grabbing Cartman at both wrists above his head, knee now jamming lightly right into Cartman’s neck.

Cartman gasped, trapped, as Craig slowly pressed more weight onto Cartman’s collarbone as he spoke.

“Looks like you messed with the wrong queer, then.” He tipped his head cockily.

Cartman let out a warcry as he tossed his body as hard as he could, kicking Craig in the back and kneeling against his chest.

Craig gasped for breath as the wind knocked out of him, no time to recover before Cartman socked him once in the mouth, twice in the nose, again in the mouth, again, again.

Craig’s eyes were starting to glaze over, lost and out of focus, arms falling limp at his sides, when he suddenly blinked wildly, determination blazing back into focus once more.

Craig grabbed Eric painfully by the hair, and yanked him off to the side. Instinctually he fell on his side, catching himself just before he rolled down the stairs they had some how wrestled in front of.

This gave Craig ample time to straddle his chest and beat the shit out of him like he’d kill him, blow after blow landing harder than the last.

One.

Commotion rattled through the crowd, someone was coming!

Two.

Tweek was up, Eric tipped his head to the side and watched as Clyde and Token did their best to hold back the blond firecracker as he fought his way toward Craig and Cartman.

Three.

Cartman was starting to see stars. Pain radiated through his jaw as his turned head took a square one right behind his cheekbone.

Four.

Cartman gripped his hands around Craig’s flushed neck, squeezing weakly.
Cartman dropped his hands and ducked away from the fifth blow just in time, vision starting to blur as above him he saw the skinny arms of Tweek Tweak wrap around underneath Craig’s arms and pull him away — kicking and swearing and lunging for Cartman the whole time, blood flying from his mouth as he screamed.

“Craig! We have to get out of here, you’ll get in trouble! A teacher is coming! Craig, come on!”

“You fucking, bastard, Cartman! Don’t ever touch Tweek or Clyde again!”

Six.

Cartman had sat up too soon, as Craig’s long spider legs kicked out in front of him, smacking Cartman right in the center of the forehead and sending him flat on his back for the last time.

“God Dammit, Cartman!” The angry and worried faces of his friends swam in front of him as he lay against the cold linoleum.

“Are you ok?”

“How many fingers am I holding up?”

“You fucking dumbass, you could have gotten seriously hurt!”

“Gee, Eric, you don’t look so good!”

“I’m fine.” Eric grunted as he sat up, glaring in their direction just in time to see Tweek and Craig run out of the building and fly down the outdoor stairs towards the parking lot. “Fucking pussies.” Cartman smirked self-satisfactorily, like he’d won the fight he clearly knew he didn’t. Blood seeped from his mouth from between his teeth.

“You look pale.” Kyle commented with a terrified look on his freckled face.

“Look who’s talking, jew. Ha!” Cartman muttered, wiping blood from a cut under his eye as he glanced around at the crowd of rubbernecker. “Go, fuckers!” He screamed at a horrified Clyde, an embarrassed Token, and the rest of the stunned group. “Show’s over!”

“Don’t get up, I’ll get the nurse.” Stan ordered, pushing against Cartman’s knee as he attempted to get up.

“Pshh, you think Craig got the best of me? Nah, you should’ve seen him! Blood everywhere!” Cartman boasted as he shrugged off Stan.

“We did see him.” Kenny commented gravely, holding his hands out in front of him as if to catch Cartman from falling.

“Kenny, you worry too much.” Cartman chuckled as he swatted everyone’s hands away and grabbed onto the railing to help himself stand up. “Whoa.” He commented slightly as he knees wobbled underneath his hunched form. He stood up quickly and whipped the sweat off his head with a jerk of his neck. “Clearly, I came out the other side unscathed.” He joked with a sarcastic gesture to his bruised and bloodied form and a dark chuckle towards the jew eyeing him way too carelessly. Cartman shrugged self conciously, raising his voice again to address the onlooking crowd. “I just wish Craig hadn’t run away like a PUSSY or I would’ve really finished him... off.”
Screams assaulted Cartman’s ears as his friends reached towards him desperately, his knees wobbling, vision blacking — Butters’ fingers just barely grazing the front of Cartman’s shirt before he fainted, backwards, down the stairs, in front of everybody.
Coffee & Cocoa, Bloodied & Bruised

Chapter Summary

Get ready for some awkward sexual tension.
Tweek and Craig bandage up after the fight.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

POV - Craig

“FUCK, THERE’S BLOOD EVERYWHERE!!” Tweek screeched as he and Craig ran towards the parking lot.

With the taste of copper in his mouth and the smell of iron in his sinuses, Craig tried not to inhale lungfuls of plasma as he doubled over, trying to catch his breath through the thick slime obstructing his nostrils.

Craig grunted in agreement, covering his mouth and nose with his hand the best that he could. Tweek screeched and ran over to Craig’s aid, frantically roaming his hovering hands above Craig’s body with no real solutions or aid.

“What do I do, WHAT SHOULD I DO?!” Tweek twitched hard to one side, something he hadn’t done in a long time. “Ow.” He whimpered, when the action pulled on the bruise at the side of his face.

He grabbed at it shakily, the gravel in his voice scraping at Craig’s heart painfully as Tweek whimpered again and again.

‘Baby…’

“Tweek, relax.” Craig attempted, muffled by the hand that was failing to keep all the blood in his face where it fucking belongs.

“Oh, Craig…” Tweek cooed as he reached for Craig, withdrawing his hand as the bloodied boy winced. “Ice… y-you need ice. A-and TOWELS!! WE NEED TOWELS, GAH!”

Ah, shit. Tweek’s was stammering shrieking exactly like he used to when they were younger.

Fuck.

Years of therapy undone by one stupid fight.

He could kill Cartman for this…
“Uh, here,” Craig tossed the keys to Tweek, who promptly tossed them back with a yelp. You’d think it was a live fucking grenade, Jesus Christ…

“GAH! CRAIG NO! I-I-I can’t drive, I DON’T KNOW HOW!!” Tweek shrieked as a tear rolled down his bruised cheek.

He doesn’t know how to drive?!

“You don’t know how to drive?!” Craig asked disbelievingly.

“NOO!” Tweek continued wiping his eyes as if they weren’t steadily pouring tears.

“Well, I can’t drive! My face is gushing blood!” Craig reasoned rationally, CLEARLY not the language Tweek wanted to be speaking at the moment.

“ACK! NO!! P-PLEASE, you have to drive, I’ll kill us… and then we’ll be dead, AH!” Tweek started pulling at his hair, unable to stop himself. Dammit, Craig would help but his hands were a little full with his bodily fluids right now…

Craig sighed towards the sky and tried to speak calmly.

“Tweek, honey, you have to calm down.” ‘Honey?’ Where the hell did that come from?’ The smaller boy studied Craig skeptically. He seemed to be mulling over the weight of the simple request.

Tweek nodded. He closed his eyes serenely, gesturing his hands downward across his body, as if to shake off bad energy.

Tweek did his best to breathe deeply, but a little too quickly. Panic flashed across Tweek’s face as his hyperventilating meditation started to resemble something more like labor pains.

“AH!” Tweek screamed clutching his chest.

“Ok! Ok!” Craig conceded, picking the keys off the pavement, stiffly, “I’ll drive but you have to relax!”

“HOW?! We’re all SHAKEN UP!! You’re face is bleeding, Oh, Craig—!”

“Tweek”, Craig grabbed Tweek with one bloody, free hand and stared down at him above his pinched, gushing nose. “Please.” Tweek stared up at him with giant doe eyes. “I need your help.” A curious look of bravery swept over Tweek’s small face.

“Help me.” Craig repeated.

“H-here, Craig, hang on!”

Tweek whipped his sweatshirt off and threw it in the backseat with a small yelp. He grabbed his bloody ear briefly before shaking off the pain and practically ripping the flannel off his body. Now only wearing a t-shirt, Tweek bundled it up into a small ball as best as his shaking hands would allow.

Craig drove home in his shitty van, at 80mph, through residential neighborhoods. He drove with his head tipped back as far as he could while still being able to see, with Tweek holding his bundled up flannel underneath Craig’s gushing nose, his other small hand cradling the back of Craig’s head.
For someone who used to be so small, then shot up like a tree to the height of normal human beings in eighth grade, Tweek still had adorably small hands.

Every now and then Craig would feel him stretch his little fingers and comb them through Craig’s hair tentatively, in a movement so small it almost didn’t seem deliberate.

“We’re here!” Tweek announced, tossing off his seatbelt and jumping out of the car before it had even come to a complete stop. He ran around to the driver’s side and threw open the door.

“Tweek, I can walk myself inside—”

Too late. Tweek had already wrapped his arms around Craig and pulled him inside as Craig struggled to keep up with his long legs.

“Gimme your shirt.” Tweek demanded as he reached for the bloodied cloth, lifting it halfway above Craig’s abdomen by the time he’d finished his sentence.

“Tweek, stop, OW!” Craig screamed as the collar of his shirt pulled against his battered nose.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, Baby, I’m sorry!” Wait… who?

“GAH!” Tweek shrieked again, jumping back from Craig like he had spontaneously set himself on fire. “Um. I’m sorry Craig.” Tweek corrected, lunging forward again to help Craig — gently, this time — slowly pull his shirt off over his injuries.

Once Tweek had Craig’s bloodied shirt in his fists, he scurried off to the laundry room where Craig could hear him slamming cabinets and cursing to himself under his breath.

“Can I help?” Craig asked regretfully as he walked into the absolute war-zone that was the Tweak’s laundry room. He walked in just in time to witness Tweek toss an entire pile of what appeared to be clean clothes onto the floor to make room on top of the washer.

Tweek grabbed for some kind of cleaner, dropping it twice before he was able to get a grip on it, and poured the contents all over Craig’s shirt.

“Dammit!” Tweek cursed as he opened the washer to find an old and musty pile of wash that must’ve been there for at least a few days. “Fuck!” Tweek exclaimed as he turned towards the dryer and saw that there was still 7 minutes left on the machine. Mrs. Tweak must’ve come home in the middle of the day to do some chores… emphasis on ‘some’.

“I’m sure it’s fine.” Craig grumbled, blood dripping onto his chin as he spoke, some falling onto his chest as he attempted to cover his mouth.

Tweek’s eyes widened, but he didn’t say anything. Instead he worked frantically, pressing ‘cancel’ on the dryer, mmm, probably, 50 times in the 5 seconds it took to turn off, tossing the warm clothes in a basket and throwing the wet clothes in the dryer with an extra dryer sheet. He tossed Craig’s crime scene of a t-shirt into the washer and filled it with soap. Before pressing start, Tweek shakily whipped off his own shirt, tossing it in, and pressed ‘start’.

“Here.” Tweek grabbed an oversized t-shirt from the basket and handed it to Craig. It was warm, and soft, and smelled like the Tweak’s laundry soap.

Craig flipped it over to examine it: it was a band t-shirt, from the concert he and Tweek had gone to
at the county fair three summers ago. They both had no idea who the band was, but some nice woman said she didn’t need the tickets anymore and Tweek and Craig happened to be the lucky strangers closest to the exit as she was leaving. They ended up having a great time and bought matching T-shirts to commemorate. It was faded now, and Craig couldn’t even remember the name of the band.

Craig pulled the printed cotton over his head and followed Tweek into the kitchen.

Tweek scurried towards the freezer, pulling an oversized t-shirt of his own over his blond head as he scrambled.

Ice packs and towels in hand, Tweek was about to turn and run up the stairs when Craig caught him by the wrist. He could feel his racing pulse against his thumb as he held him.

“We’re okay, now.” Craig reminded Tweek, who looked at the ground contemplatively before agreeing.

“Okay.” Tweek dropped the supplies in his hands and nearly knocked Craig over with the force of his little body, as he wrapped two skinny arms around him and hugged him tightly. Craig held Tweek close to him with one, tired arm, the other protecting Tweek’s head from Craig’s still-bleeding face.

They stood there for a while, just breathing, just existing.

Together.

Tweek untangled himself from Craig’s stiff body and looked up into his tired eyes.

Tweek stretched up on his toes, and pressed a quick kiss to Craig’s cheek.

Craig stared at Tweek blankly, frozen and confused. Sure, Craig has kissed Tweek all over his face, many times before, mostly because he loved how flustered it made the blushing boy. The boy that was now staring at him with stoic confidence and an air of expectancy.

But Craig didn’t react. He didn’t do anything. He just stood there, like a lovestruck goldfish, with his mouth hanging open, hand in front to catch the blood, and his eyes wide. Tweek sighed, tiredly.

“We should get you upstairs.” Tweek declared, scooping up the towels and ice, leading the way as Craig followed him up the stairs.

Craig found himself stretched out across Tweek’s bed, head resting against Tweek’s thighs like a pillow, with a bag of ice perched on top of his forehead and a bundled up rag under his nose, hat discarded somewhere on the bed.

Tweek’s room was dark and quiet. With the shades drawn and only the dim light of some Christmas bulbs strung across the ceiling, you would almost think they were spending a relaxing, rainy day inside, rather than icing their bruises and mopping up blood.

Craig closed his eyes against the soft feeling of Tweek’s fingers wandering aimlessly through his thick hair.

Damn, everything hurt.
Craig had a headache that felt like he could shooting sparks out of his eyes.

“I think you’ve officially stopped bleeding.” Tweek announced quietly as he showed Craig an unsullied corner of the thoroughly blood-soaked rag.

“Thanks,” Craig’s flat, gravely voice rumbled up from his sore chest. “You’re the best fake boyfriend ever.” Craig praised jokingly. Craig chuckled uncomfortably at the way Tweek frowned. “Ok switch.”

Tweek helped Craig sit up very slowly, mindful of Craig’s pounding head.

Tweek fiddled with the bloodied rag in his pale hands, nervously, as Craig settled in next to him in against the wall. The two sat side by side, pain radiating from every pore in Craig’s being as he closed his eyes, listening to Tweek fidgeting next to him.

One simple question, innocent and fragile, exploded dangerously, like fireworks in the quiet.

“It is fake though, isn’t it?”

Craig froze. He turned towards Tweek with unspoken questions behind his eyes.

“What do you mean.”

Tweek and Craig stared each other down in silence, Tweek probably trying to read Craig’s mind, Craig just trying to think any exhausted thoughts at all.

Tweek’s head tipped towards Craig’s shoulder for just a moment before he straightened again.

“Nothing. Let’s switch.” Tweek dropped the ice into Craig’s hands and lay his head across Craig’s outstretched legs.

“Oh.” Craig concluded, moving to gently place the ice against the giant purple bruise on Tweek’s cheek. Tweek grabbed onto Craig’s hovering hand, and redirected it to his swelling eye, dropping it there roughly, without even a wince.

“Sorry.” Craig apologized, though he wasn’t really sure why.

Tweek covered his forehead with his forearm, looking exhausted. Craig felt the urge to scoop Tweek up in his arms and hold him until he wasn’t hurting anymore.

Tweek melted under Craig’s touch as he began raking his long fingers through Tweek’s electric blond hair.

“I can see your roots from here.” Craig chuckled, swirling the bright locks under his stretched fingers.

Tweek smirked up from his lap, cracking one eye open to look up at Craig.

“Yeah, my hair grows fast because I’m more evolutionarily advanced.” He joked, reaching an arm up to pet the back of Craig’s head. His arm came up just short, and Craig straightened his long back, forcing Tweek to strain and stretch out of reach.

“Yeah? Is that so, shorty?” Craig smirked down at him.

“I’m not short anymore, you’re just freakishly tall.” Tweek shot back, a small smile visible under his giant fucking attitude.
“One might call that an evolutionarily advantage.” Craig straightened his back with mock superiority.

“Well, your nails can’t grow for shit.”

“But they’re so pretty.”

“You need glasses.”

“You got me.” Craig admitted jokingly, “You are the more evolutionarily advanced human.”

“Exhibit A.” Tweek chuckled sarcastically, suspending his hand mid-air, where it trembled and shook, at eye level with Craig.

Craig grabbed a hold with his steady fingers and held it firmly.

“That was kinda scary today, huh?” Craig mumbled, feeling kinda weird about this sudden outburst of vulnerable admission. He felt like he needed to say it, though. Craig busied himself by tracing his thumb over the soft skin on the back of Tweek’s hand.

Tweek shrugged nonchalantly, “I didn’t really have time to be scared.” That was probably true. Tweek was paranoid about a lot of things but when the going got tough and passion overrode fear, Tweek had proven himself to be the bravest person Craig had ever known.

“You scared me.” Craig confessed, studying the stray piece of thread at the end of his sleeve meticulously. *Why was he saying this?*

“I did?” Tweek chirped, *adorably.*

“Yeah.” Craig admitted. “The way Cartman was wailing on you, and Clyde said you were out cold—"

“My concussion is *mild,* at *best.*” Tweek quipped dryly. Craig snorted a laugh that actually kinda hurt his bruised nose. He heard a giggle erupt from his lap. Craig looked down, enchanted by the way Tweek’s eyebrow quirked underneath his smile.

“You came to my rescue.” Tweek joked, a little patronizingly.

“Okay…” Craig brushed him off, a little embarrassedly.

Tweek sat up slowly, and turned to face Craig, a strange look of sadness behind his grinning, green eyes.

“Super Craig.”

Craig’s mind drifted back to sweet memories of Tweek bundled in his arms, one rainy weekend in 9th grade, the first day Craig decided to dig up his old black frames instead of bothering with contacts: *‘You look like Superman’, ‘Clark Craig’, ‘Craig Kent’… ‘Super Craig’.*

Craig tensed, as Tweek leaned closer, brain just about to short circuit when Tweek turned his head and reached for the phone on the opposite side of Craig.

‘Oh. *Yeah… I knew that*’ Craig lied to himself as Tweek pulled back, typing something into the phone as he leaned back against the wall next to Craig.

Hm… Tweek still had some blood crusted to the side of his face under his ear. Craig followed the
trail of blood with his eyes, watching it curve around the side of Tweek’s jaw and down his slender neck. Before he could stop himself, Craig reached up and dragged a thumb lightly over pale, lily skin, unmarred by the rusty gore next to it.

Tweek jumped, looking at Craig questionably. Craig felt his face heating up to match Tweek’s instant blush.


Maybe Craig was the one with the concussion…

“Oh.” Tweek brought his hand up to his ear and inspected it. “Come on.” Tweek grabbed Craig’s hand as he started to pull him off the bed. “You’ve got some too.”

Craig’s feet hit the ground, bringing him to an idle wobble right in front of Tweek. He was still standing very close to him and he was still holding onto his hand.

As if reading his mind, Tweek looked down and quickly dropped Craig’s hand, staring up at him for a moment before making a small unintelligible noise and speed walking to the bathroom, shoulders tense and fingers flexed.

Tweek dug through the neatly folded basket of clean towels for a small washcloth— one that would most likely end up in a messy pile on the floor with all the rest of the towels. Then they would be cleaned, folded, and placed neatly back in the painted, wicker basket to repeat the cycle once again.

Tweek ran the salmon colored cloth under cold water before turning around to face Craig.

In poor timing, Craig reached for the cloth right as Tweek brought it up under Craig’s bloody nostrils.

“Oh.”

“Oh, I thought you wanted me to.”

“If you want.”

“I can see better… better angle.”

“I was gonna do it myself…”

“Oh, well, here.”

“No, go ahead.”

Craig clasped his hands behind his back and silently cursed his awkwardness.

Tweek exhaled a laugh and stepped closer. Craig winced as the wet cloth pressed against his skin, cold but soft.

“I’m sorry.” Tweek apologized as he blotted the crusted blood all around Craig’s face. “It doesn’t look broken.” He noted optimistically. At least that was good news. “How’s your head?”

“I think I’m supposed to be asking you that.” Craig commented dryly. Tweek ran his fingers through his frizzed hair self-consciously.
“I don’t think I need to go to the hospital or anything. But it fucking hurts.” Tweek admitted, running the cool cloth across Craig’s blood smeared cheek.

“Mine too.”

Tweek nodded, now brushing the cloth along the corner of Craig’s split lip, lingering just a little too long. “…You’re pretty much done!” He announced briskly, clearing his throat dryly. Craig’s mouth twitched into a smirk at the flustered way Tweek was staring at him.

Tweek stepped back and admired his work. He nodded to himself and held the cloth out for Craig to take. Craig didn’t miss the way their hands brushed against one another mid-transaction.

“Um. I’ll get a band aid for that.” Tweek pointed to the small split on the bridge of Craig’s nose.

Craig turned to look at himself in the mirror as Tweek rushed out of the room.

The inner corners of his eyes were a deep purple, the small gash on his nose still bleeding freshly, though just a trickle now, as if from a paper cut. He touched his swollen lip carefully, poking at the puffy flesh, aggravating the freshly cleaned cut next to the mole below bottom lip.

“Don’t mess with it.” Tweek commanded gently as he unwrapped the small bandaid in his hand.

He stretched it across Craig’s nose carefully.

“Thanks.” Craig nodded. Tweek smiled. As he turned his head to toss the paper backings into the trash, Craig caught glimpse of the blood still stuck to Tweek’s face.

Craig walked over to the sink and turned on the faucet.

“Come here.” He beckoned warmly, as he rinsed a clean corner of the cloth.

Tweek stepped in front of the taller boy.

Craig tipped Tweek’s face to the side with a small tap of his index finger.

Running the cloth down his soft face, the water mixed with the blood, creating a pink hue against the purple bruises.

“...All done.” Craig announced quietly. Tweek took the cloth and tossed it near the hamper. Close enough, at least.

“Thanks, Craig.” Tweek smiled his small, lopsided smile.

“No problem.” Craig cleared his throat, trying his hardest not to sound like his heart had just skipped a beat.

“Do you want something to drink?” Tweek asked.

Tweek buzzed around his kitchen like a bumblebee, the bitter smell of coffee mingling with the sweet scent of cocoa.

The dim yellow of their cheap lightbulbs cast a warm glow in the rustic, Tuscan kitchen.
Craig leaned against the counter and watched Tweek, as he stood in front of the microwave, checking the time every two seconds, regardless of the fact that there were still 45 seconds left on the clock.

“It doesn’t go any faster if you watch it.” He deadpanned. Tweek flipped him off for exactly 41 seconds.

Craig watched in fond adoration as Tweek made Craig’s hot chocolate: meticulously adding in exactly one and a half packets of hot chocolate mix, stirring it thoroughly until it was perfect. He added one drop of cold milk, before topping it off with extra marshmallows from the bag in the cupboard.

“Do you remember what I said to you,” Craig wondered out loud, “when I came to the coffee shop in fourth grade?”

Tweek burst into a small fit of laughter, watching the mug carefully as he shuffled over to hand it to Craig. “Which time?” He asked, giving the marshmallows in the cup one last stir before handing the hand-painted mug over to Craig.

“The first time.”

“Oh yeah,” Tweek giggled, “I believe you walked straight up to the counter and said ‘I hate coffee.’” Craig snorted at the spot on nasality of Tweek’s impressive impression of a young Craig.

“‘GAH! Then why do you order it then?!’”

“Rude.” Tweek scolded as he pretended to be offended at Craig’s exact portrayal of little Tweek, through his fit of giggles. “Seriously though, you came into that coffee shop multiple times a week — sometimes every day — to order—”

“Caramel Machiatto.” Craig recited with Tweek. “Yeah, I remember.” Craig smiled down at his hot chocolate and took a sip.

“There were plenty of other things on the menu.” Tweek teased. “I even remember offering you hot chocolate instead.”

“I like Swiss Miss.” Craig sassed in a nasally impression of his younger self.

“My dad kept wondering why I kept stashing Swiss Miss boxes in the back room after that.” Tweek chuckled.

“Wait… you did that for me?” Craig felt stupid, but yeah, he genuinely thought it was a coincidence that Tweak Bros. started serving powdered hot chocolate from a packet not long after that day.

“Duh.” Tweek giggled.

“I thought you liked it to…” Craig smirked.

“I drink coffee, Craig, where have you been?” Tweek chuckled, jumping up onto the counter opposite Craig. “I seriously can’t believe you ordered macchiatos every day for weeks, it was weeks, Craig.”

“What else was I supposed to do, say ‘hi’?” Craig mused as he walked over to jump up onto the counter next to Tweek.
“Thank God we’re not antisocial anymore.” Tweek deadpanned sarcastically, stoic expression cracking into a smile at Craig’s high-pitched, surprised laugh.

“Yeah, remind me to thank him next time we’re watching videos on my phone in the middle of a house party.”

Damn Tweek was cute when he smiled like that.

Slowly, as if to put painstaking thought into each movement, Tweek placed one hand in-between Craig and himself, and used it as leverage, shifting his weight, scooting closer to Craig. He tilted his head and brought it to rest on Craig’s shoulder. They sat there silently, listening to the tiny dripping noises coming from the coffee maker and breathing in the scent of chocolate and warm milk.

Craig closed his eyes and leaned against Tweek comfortably.

“And then you ran away.” Tweek spoke softly.

“Hm?” Craig hummed.

“After you blurted about how much you hated coffee, you ran away. You ran outside and your mom made you turn around and come back in.”

“Nooo.” Craig groaned burying his face in Tweek’s hair.

“I forgot about that.” He winced, “Well, at least I got you to come over after that.”

“What did you say?” Craig could hear the grin in Tweek’s voice.

“I don’t remember, ‘wanna come over’, probably.” Craig shrugged.

“No, no, I remember your exact words because they confused and terrified me.” Tweek sat up excitedly and turned to face Craig. Tweek counted the sentences on his fingers as he listed them off. “You said, ‘you seem pretty cool. You don’t have any friends. Wanna come to a sleepover at my house?’”

“Ew!” Craig cringed. “I said that?”

“Yes!” Tweek yelped. “I spent the whole next week self conscious about not having any friends!”

“Whoops.” Craig pseudo-apologized, flatly. Craig remembered that night. He was so nervous about his new friend coming over that he ended up ignoring Tweek for the first half of the night. Even Clyde and Token were awkward about the new boy nobody had introduced them to. Good thing Jimmy was there to keep him company, the two bonded over their various ailments and medications. It was fucking cute. In fact, it wasn’t until Craig overheard Tweek and Jimmy talking about Red Racer that he spoke to him at all, ‘you like Red Racer?’

“Life was simpler back then.” Tweek responded sadly, staring up at Craig with his captivating doe eyes. Craig nodded.

Tweek reached for the side of his blond head slowly, only to let his hand fall into his lap instead. Craig grabbed it. He wondered what had gotten Tweek so down all of a sudden as he held his hand firmly.

Craig balanced his mug on his lap carefully as he shifted closer to Tweek.
“What’s wrong?” Craig spoke soft and low, like the world would shatter if he spoke too loud.

“Nothing’s wrong.” Tweek lied.

“I’m your boyfriend, Tweek, I know when something’s wrong with you—”

“Fake boyfriend, remember?” Tweek corrected, eyeing their clasped hands.

The two teens stared each other down, neither really sure what was going on in the other’s head.

“Tweek… I—”

Both boys jumped as the shrill ‘ding’ of the coffee maker pierced the silence and startled both of them.

“I’ll get that.” Tweek mumbled as he swung his legs off the counter and scurried over to the freshly brewed pot across the room.

Nobody spoke or made a sound, they existed separately in maddening stillness until Craig couldn’t take the silence anymore.

“Do… you remember what you said to me?” Craig wondered, barely smiling at the goofy memory.

“When?” Tweek questioned distractedly, as he dug in the cabinets for a suitable mug.

“When we first met. The first thing you ever said to me.” Tweek finished pouring the brown liquid into his Lego brand mug, and placed the glass pot gently back down, leaning against the counter heavily as he did. He listened, but he didn’t turn around.

Craig continued telling his story to Tweek’s back. “You ran up to me on the playground — and I remember thinking you wanted to fight me because you were so wound up — and you just screamed ‘YOUR BRACES ARE COOL!’ And ran away.” Craig chuckled. “And I was like, ‘who is this kid?’ That impression was branded in my brain but I didn’t even know your fucking name, dude. That’s why I started going to the coffee shop—”

“I can’t do this anymore, Craig.”

Craig stopped. He stopped talking, he stopped breathing, he just stopped.

“Do… what?” He wondered, though it came out as more of a statement.

Tweek turned around slowly, fingers gripping the counter with all of his strength, knuckles white and wrists shaking.

“This.” He whispered. “This… this whole fucking ‘fake boyfriend’ bullshit.”

Fuck. Tweek’s words hit Craig like a punch to the gut, like a kick to the teeth.

He wanted to beg Tweek to stop talking, but in some kind of sick, masochistic torture, he let him continue.

Tweek took slow and deliberate steps towards the tall boy, eyes pleading, shoulders trembling.

Tweek grabbed both of Craig’s hands and looked up at him warily.
“I can’t do it anymore, Craig, I’m driving myself crazy.”

“Okay.”

“Craig, stop crying.”

“I’m not.”

He was.

“Craig.”

“What?” Craig casually wiped his cheek on his shoulder in vain, as another hot tear rolled down his cheek simultaneously.

“Craig, calm down.”

“I am…” shaky breath “so calm.” Sniffle. “I’ll just… show myself out, um… I’ll see you at school, yeah? Good. So, uh,” Craig awkwardly held out his hand for a handshake and immediately retracted it. “No, I’ll just… I’ll see ya.”

“Craig wait!” Tweek chased after him “Craig, listen to me!”

“I don’t want to. Just text me.” Craig opened the front door, letting cold, frigid night air blow into the warm house that smelled like home. Tweek slammed the door from over Craig’s shoulder and pinned the taller boy against the door with both hands. Craig stared him down frustratedly, trying to ignore the feeling of the tears rolling down his cheeks.

“Relax!”

“Ok.”

“Listen to what I’m saying.”

Tweek reached a shaking hand up to rest against Craig’s cheek before he continued.

“I’m saying I’m done pretending.”

Craig froze.

“What?”

“I’m done pretending Craig, I’m done pretending like it doesn’t make my heart race when you ‘joke around’ with me. I’m done acting like I don’t want it to be real, I’m done with the games! It may be a joke to you still, but it’s not anymore, not to me.”

“It’s not!” Craig promised, loudly, for some reason losing a grip on his volume control. He cleared his throat and continued, “It’s not a joke for me anymore, I promise! I thought you knew that?”

Tweek blinked at him disbelievingly.

“You thought… I knew?… Are… you… KIDDING ME?! You just ASSUMED that I could read your mind?! I’VE BEEN STRESSING ABOUT THIS FOR WEEKS, CRAIG!”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry… ok, ow?!?” Craig blocked Tweek’s tiny fists, as they lightly beat down on
his chest in a confusing mix of anger and relief.

“I just… AH! You just decided that we’d moved on… and forgot to TELL ME?! WHAT THE FUCK CRAIG?!”

“I thought we had grown organically, you know? I just thought you weren’t as obvious about it.”

Tweek stared at Craig skeptically, fists balled up against his chest. Craig wondered if Tweek could feel his beating heart against his wrists.

“So, you don’t want this to be fake anymore either?” Tweek stepped closer, green eyes only inches away from Craig’s blue ones. Craig instinctively draped an arm across Tweek’s lower back, feeling the curve of his spine in the crook of his elbow.

“I want you, for real, every day,” Craig promised. Tweek’s hands twitched against Craig’s chest as he balled and released his fists contemplatively.

“You do?” He chirped innocently, tilting his head.

Craig didn’t answer, he didn’t have to.

Instead Craig leaned down, curled his fingers underneath Tweek’s trembling jaw, and brushed his lips against Tweek’s gently, softly, almost nervously.

The two looked at each other, before shutting their eyes once more.

Tweek pulled Craig closer to him, sighing against him as he draped one arm across his shoulders, the other one running up and down his waist.

Craig raked his fingers through Tweek’s hair, a small groan emanating from the little blond, Craig’s other hand gripping Tweek’s skinny hip, his thumb absentely tracing back and forth against his baggy t-shirt.

Craig could feel Tweek’s pounding heart against his chest, a small smile breaking out across his lips as he decided he maybe liked the taste of coffee now.

It was a real, foot-poppin’ kiss.

They pulled apart slowly, eyeing each other’s red lips and flushed cheeks.

“Wow.” Craig chuckled under his breath. Tweek smiled and brushed his thumb along Craig’s lower lip, purple and bruised, now aggravated and swollen. Craig would say it was well worth the pain.

“So we’re really doing this?” Tweek whispered feebly.

Craig nodded, brushing his lips against the bruise under Tweek’s eye tenderly.

Tweek tipped his head up and caught Craig’s lips once more.

They stood by the door, quiet in their tender moment.

That is, until Tweek started giggling quietly to himself.

“What?” Craig questioned self consciously, was it his kissing technique? Did he even have one? What the fuck was so funny?!
“You cried,” Tweek teased with a smile.

Oh.

“You cried over me.”

Craig shrugged him off as Tweek’s smile broke out into full on laughter.

Craig blushed. “I can’t help it, you make me lose control of my emotions.”

“I know. I know,” Tweek collected himself, looking up at Craig with a glint in his eye. “You do that to me too.”

Craig found himself stretched out across Tweek’s bed once more, now with the little blond bundled up in his arms, underneath a canopy of lights. They listened to music and talked about the stars, falling asleep beneath the open window as the chilly scent of Autumn breathed down on their faces.

Chapter End Notes

YES, Tweek dyes his hair! It was natural as a kid, but now that he's older it's darkened and he dyes it to keep it the same shade of blond. (I imagine it looks sort of like Evan Peters’ during season one of AHS). His parents are both brunettes, this is cannon.
POV - Eric/Cartman

Beep... Beep... Beep... Beep... Beep...

Shut that fucking noise up.

Cartman cracked his eyes open under blinding florescent lights, a sharp pain in the back of his head radiating all throughout his skull. As his eyes adjusted to his new surroundings, Cartman took in the room: he was hooked up to some kind of a beeping machine that said ‘EKG’ on it. He felt a pinch as he wiggled his fingers, and looked down to find a needle sticking out of his hand, attached to some kind of a saline drip above him. He was in a white room, with white bedsheets and white blankets, with ugly, off-white wallpaper that stretched in swirly designs around the length of the room. Cartman swore it was yellow, and that he was about to go insane.

Beep... Beep... Beep... Beep... Beep...

He sat up slowly, wincing, radiating pain everywhere, and frantically scanned the room for another living person.

A passing nurse seemed to notice him, and briskly walked over to the desk to whisper something in another nurse’s ear.

Not long after, a man in a white coat entered the room, staring down at his chart and not making eye contact.

“So, a fight at school and then a tumble down the stairs?”

Cartman slumped over and blinked slowly, condescendingly. “I guess so.”

“I’m Dr. Mathis,” Cartman grimaced at the doctor’s outstretched hand. Dr. Mathis retracted his outstretched arm and went back to flipping through the chart.

“You’ve suffered quite a few injuries, nothing serious. You’ve fractured your left fibula, sprained your ankle, and dislocated that knee as well.” Cartman looked down and saw his leg in a massive cast all the way up to his thigh. “Makes it a little easier because you’ll still have a good leg to favor once you’re on the crutches.” Cartman was not amused. He glared up at the doctor as he continued to list off his ailments. “You’ve broken several ribs, and those will heal over time.”

“Great.” Cartman rolled his eyes sarcastically.
“You’ve sprained your neck, but modern medicine has ruled out the neck brace for minor injuries, so we will have a nurse come in and work with you on small exercises to strengthen the muscles until they are well again. I can refer you to physical therapists to continue the treatment when your stay with us is complete.” Cartman sighed loudly and stared at a dusty corner of the ceiling, bored of this monotone voice’s laundry list of cracks and bruises.

“You have a mild to moderate concussion. You may feel some nausea but that’s completely normal.” Cartman mimed vomiting all over the bed. The doctor ignored his theatrics. “Your head has stopped bleeding,” Cartman felt a soft bandage in the back of his head, “and you didn’t need any stitched, but you will be wheeled down to get an MRI in just a minute to make sure there’s no need for surgery.” JESUS CHRIST! “Aaaaaand you’ve fractured some fingers on your left hand, but other than that just some cuts, bumps, and bruises.” Dr. Mathis closed Cartman’s chart and grabbed a chair, the teen boy scowling harder and harder the closer he wheeled to the bed. “Oh goody.” Cartman glared at the annoyingly blunt doctor. “Glad it’s nothing serious.”

“According to your friends, you fainted.”

“UUUUGH!” Cartman rolled his neck to the sky, instantly regretting it as sharp pain shot through his spine.

“So we did some tests and you appear to be severely dehydrated, and fairly anemic as well. Nothing to worry about, some people are just built that way. But we believe the combination of your… disagreement… with your classmate,” Ha! “and these factors caused you to fall down those stairs.” Dr. Mathis paused, leaning in towards the hospital bed, making sure Cartman understood the seriousness of his next statement. “You’re honestly lucky to be alive, some people die from falls like this.”

Cartman slapped his thigh excitedly. “Well, this sounds like quite the collection, and I would be very happy to curate all of these treasures in the ‘What The Fuck Is Wrong With Eric Cartman Museum’—”

“This is serious.”

For once in his life, Eric Cartman paid attention to what was being said, instead of brushing it off. The way the doctor was looking at him, fragile and carefully, it scared him.

The doctor looked down at his clipboard and shuffled through some papers as he continued to address the wounded teenager in the hospital bed.

“Yes, well, let’s count that as a good thing.” Cartman dropped his fake smile and rolled his eyes exhaustedly. “We will have one of the hospital volunteers bring in your food later tonight, and we will be asking her to stay with you and make sure you eat something ok?”
“Ok.” Cartman mocked.

“I know you don’t take this very seriously, but I promise you it is.” Cartman looked down at his IV, ashamedly. “Trust me, you are in good hands here. Once you’re well enough we will send you home, most likely in time for school on Monday.” Cartman mimed shooting himself in the head, and all the blood spraying out the other side. The doctor gave him a disapproving look. Whatever. “We promise to do our best to get you out of here as soon as possible, and to make your stay as comfortable as you need. We always have nurses on call plus our wonderful volunteer staff, that I train myself, is here 9-5 every day.” Cartman was just about to shoot himself for real when the doctor’s boring speech was interrupted by a brisk knock at the door. “Oh good, here’s a volunteer now.”

“I’m sorry, I just had a quick question—”

“Well, well, well…” Cartman drawled at the rigid back of the candy striper, her shoulder length, black hair whipped around her slim shoulders, brown eyes widening at the sound of his voice, “look what the cat dragged in.”

Chapter End Notes

AAAHHH!! IT’S WENDY!!
It’s the start! Of something new! It feels so right! To be here with you, oh!
Do hospitals even do candy stripers anymore? Oh well, this one does.

I really did my best to do research on diagnoses and hospital things but I really know nothing about it on my own, so if anything is blatantly inaccurate I apologize. xx
A Simple Kind of Life

Chapter Summary

Stan decides he wants to visit Cartman after the game.

*I do not own any of the ‘No Doubt’ lyrics I end up using, all credit goes to the band, I do not own any of those words!*

Enjoy the football game, I honestly know more about Quidditch.

Chapter Notes

Fun fact, I literally had to google videos of Football announcements to write this chapter.

Fully calling myself out: I googled things like “what’s the touchdown line called?”, “Who does the touchdowns?” And “Does football have a buzzer?” XD. XD. XD.

I played basketball in middle school, ok, we’ll get to that when it’s winter, Kyle.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

POV - Stan

“M-Marsh at the 30 yard line… it’s a lateral… he’s going… he’s going… and t-t-t-t-t—”

The crowd went wild as Stan dove across the goal line, into the end zone, in the final seconds of the game.

“Touchdown!” Jimmy’s voice boomed over the P.A. system.

The crowd roared.

Stan rolled over, the smell of sweat and fresh grass underneath him.

“Yeah-heh-heh, Stan!” The triumphant cheers of his teammates overrode the sound of the racing heartbeat in his ears. A huge smile stretched across his face as blurry bodies in green and black uniforms piled on top of the panting quarterback, obstructing his view of the blinding stadium lights that hovered above the field.

“Good job, Marsh.” Coach pat him on the shoulder as he sat up.

With a tied game and only seconds to spare, the Cows had won the game, all thanks to Stan.
And he was feeling a little cocky right now.

Stan stood up and took off his helmet, whipping his hair as he did so. He grinned at the small herd of cheerleaders tittering up to him, singing his praises before they’d even breached his personal space.

“Stan, that was amazing!” Red clapped him on the back enthusiastically.

“OMG, Stan, that was so good!” Heidi brushed a hand against his arm.

“That was so good!” Annie stepped closer and flipped her hair over her shoulder.

“That was very impressive, Marsh.” Nichole smiled and tilted her head.

“Hahahahaha!” Lisa Berger just giggled and bounced around in front of him, with no real contribution to the conversation.

“Oh, well, thanks… it was nothing.” Stan brushed it off humbly, only making the girls giggle harder and his ego grow larger.

“Ladies, ladies, one at a time, there’s enough of Stan to go around!” Clyde schmoozed jokingly from where he hung off of Stan’s shoulder pads.

“Ew, Clyde, come on.” Stan shoved him off.

“I’m just saying.” Clyde turned what was probably supposed to be a charming smile to the now put-off cheerleaders.

“Well, Red doesn’t need any of Stan, thank you very much!” Bebe announced herself as she snuck an arm around her girlfriend. “Hey, babe.”

“Hey, babe.” Red and Bebe made out for a little while, until they caught Stan and Clyde ogling, and flipped them off. “Boys are born without brain cells I swear to God…”

“Nice play.”

Stan turned around, eyes alight before he even caught sight of the gangly redhead — the one who’s voice had floated effortlessly beneath the squealing cheerleaders’ and grabbed Stan’s undivided attention.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

“Good job out there.”

“Thanks.”

Kyle was clutching a small notebook to his chest, arms folded around the leather-bound journal, hip cocked and head tilted. The pen twirled easily between his fingers as he spoke, a small smile on his lips.

“It was interesting. A game that was actually exciting for once.” Kyle smirked up at Stan.

“Oh, ha ha.” Stan folded his arms across his chest triumphantly. “It’s just never usually this close because we always toast the competition.”
“Maybe a light toast.” Kyle squinted his green eyes skeptically. Stan rolled his eyes and shook his head, chuckling at his best friend.

“Where’s Ken?” Stan wondered, looking over Kyle’s shoulder at the thinning crowd.


“Concessions?” Stan guessed.

“Nope.”

Just then, Stan caught sight of Kenny, sneaking out from under the bleachers, pulling Butters by the hand.

“Of course.”

“Hey. What happened, we heard it was a good game.” Kenny snickered as he walked up to the duo, wiggling his eyebrows and nudging Butters with his elbow.

“Jesus, Kenny, shut the fuck up, damn!” Butters muttered, shoving Kenny away and looking all around him to see who had heard.

“Sorry.” Kenny uttered, expression only a little hurt — for just a moment — before the familiar Kenny McCormick smile eased onto his freckled face.

“Whatever happened to the Butters who only said ‘hamburgers’.” Kyle wondered with a chuckle, at the string of profanity that had just flown out of Butters’ mouth.

“He’s dead.” Both he and Kenny recited, easily. It was spooky. Stan shivered as Clyde walked up to the group.

“Have you guys seen Creek?” Clyde’s stupid nickname he used whenever he wanted to refer to Craig and Tweak in the same sentence. Kenny spit a laugh through his lips but didn’t say anything else.

“No, we haven’t.” Kyle answered. Clyde nodded as he continued typing on his phone. Stan looked over to the mostly dissolved hoard of cheerleaders and saw Token talking with Nichole, Bebe, and Red.

Actually, now that he thought about it, Stan hadn’t seen ‘Creek’ since the fight…

Clyde finally sighed and looked up from his phone. “Oh hey!” Clyde pointed his phone between Kenny and Butters, who were standing pretty close together, though probably by accident. Butters eyes grew wider with every twitch of the phone. “You guys telling people about this, now?—”

“No!” Butters lunged forward and covered Clyde’s mouth with his hand. Clyde’s eyes widened in surprise as Butters leaned in with a domineering stare.

He spoke slowly and assertively. Kenny folded his arms and watched on amusedly as Clyde stared down fearfully at the tiny Stotch kid intimidating Clyde.

“I’m gonna take my hand off your mouth, now. But you have to shut the fuck up, and not talk about… this… in public again. To answer your question: ‘no’, always assume ‘no’, and do not ask again. Do you understand?” Clyde nodded. Butters watched him pointedly as he removed his hand, slowly. It almost reminded Stan of how mob bosses in movies always got their way without
ever uttering an official threat. It was bizarre.

“Sorry.” Clyde apologized.

“Damn what does a guy have to do to get that kind of treatment in the bedroom?” Kenny muttered to Kyle, who cringed and stepped closer to Stan, distancing himself from the perverted blond.

Stan shivered once again.

“I found Creek.” Clyde announced to no one in particular, despite the fact that he and Stan were now the only two left in the locker room. Clyde continued to ramble, Stan barely listening as he finished getting dressed. “They texted and said they were still recovering, and that they’d fallen asleep and just woken up. They also said they’re dating now? But I always kinda thought they were… maybe it’s just more serious now, not so casual, you know? I think it’s sweet, good for them. You know, Token and I were just saying how—”

“Ok, Clyde?” Stan closed his locker and turned to face his babbling teammate. “No offense… but I really don’t care.” Clyde shrugged, looking more or less un-offended by Stan’s short remark.

Then he paused, appearing suddenly and abruptly to be overcome with a very specific thought. Clyde shut his locker slowly, in an almost trance.

“Stan?” He asked, carefully. Stan looked up from where he was tying his other shoe, and saw Clyde nervously fiddling with the bottom of his hoodie. “Is Cartman… ok?”

Stan blinked, shocked that this seemed to be what was worrying Clyde right now.

“Um… I don’t know. I mean, he’s gotta be out for the season, but… I only heard from his mom that he’s ‘hurt but ok’, I don’t really know what that means…”

Clyde nodded gravely, eyebrows knitted together as he thought quietly to himself.

“Do you think…” Clyde looked down at his hands and sighed, silent, before continuing with a small plea. “Can you just tell him that I hope he’s ok?”

Stan paused.

“Uh… Yeah.”

Clyde smiled and threw his backpack over his shoulder.

“Thanks. See you later, Stan!”

The metal door clanged shut and Stan was left alone in the hauntingly empty, echoing room.

“What a weird day…” Stan muttered to himself as he packed up his shit.

Stan decided he would visit Cartman today, with Clyde’s good wishes in tow.

Stan strolled over to the parking lot, noting the way the air in South Park was already beginning to chill on this early September night.
He shrugged into the car that his Dad lets him borrow whenever Randy doesn’t feel like picking up his own damn kid, and turned on the heat.

The tired teenager sat his head back against the headrest and closed his eyes before running his hands over his sweaty face tiredly.

Stan’s No Doubt CD clicked on, and the last track on their debut album, “Brand New Day”, sparked over the quiet hum of the ratty engine. A song that, Stan felt, seemed to be mocking him at this very moment.

‘At the end of the day, you are worn out. You are worn out…’

“You said it.” Stan muttered to the inanimate radio as Gwen sang on.

Stan backed out of that ghost town of a parking lot, past some kids making out in the back of a pickup truck, and sped off to the hospital.

“Hi! I’m here to see Eric Cartman?” Stan muttered politely to the reception girl at the front desk of the lobby.

The woman appeared to be about 25, with an attitude that would put any 15 year old to shame. She glanced up at Stan through her thick eyelashes and went right on back to filing her nails.

“...Um… hello…”

“Visiting hours are almost over.” She sighed, never looking up at the uncomfortable kid in front of her.

“But… they’re not over yet, right?” Stan smiled what he knows is always usually a winning smile. The kind that could get him out of late slips, and tests, and Saturday detention, and even once Mall Jail (but that one was mostly Kenny and Cartman's fault, anyway).

But this bitch was not having it.

She glared up at him. “…Room 205. You’ve got 15 minutes.” She smiled at him rudely.

“Thank—”

Stan found himself talking to a shirtless picture of Justin Bieber, as the receptionist raised up a magazine in front of her face and pretended to read it.

“Um. Thanks, I guess?” Stan muttered, shaking his head perplexedly, as he speed-walked down the hallway, checking his watch and looking for 205.

“Stan?” He heard as he almost passed right by Cartman’s open door.

“Hey dude!” Stan entered the room with outstretched arms, a wide smile on his face.

“What are you doing here?” Cartman looked at him skeptically, though his expression softened as his friend drew closer.

“I came to say hi! And see how you were doing.” Stan pulled up a chair, scratching across the linoleum loudly as he dragged it, carelessly. “Everybody says ‘hello’. Oh! And Clyde says he hopes your ok.”
A weird look of guilt flashed across Cartman’s face, for just a second. Stan was just about to ask him about it when Cartman changed the subject.

“So how was the game? Who did they get to play my position? Somebody lame?” Cartman smiled cockily and leaned back against his fluffed pillows.

“Kevin Stoley, and oh man, dude! The game was awesome! Ok, picture this…” Cartman rolled his eyes, but leaned in, unable to help but be captivated by Stan’s gift for illustrative storytelling — something he picked up from his Dad, actually. “We were losing — narrowly, but still — and everybody thought the game was over. When, by some miracle, mere moments left on the clock — the other team swarming him —” Stan paused, jumping out of his chair to mime the powerful pass that had made him a hero, “Bill throws a Hail Mary pass across the field, caught by yours truly,” Stan gestured to himself, “and with only seconds left… the Cows win the game. Oh, man.” Stan chuckled. “It was epic, dude, I’m sorry you missed it.”

“Well, it feels like I was right there,” Cartman joked half-heartedly. A small silence passed between them as Cartman stared down at his bandaged leg. “I’m gonna be out the rest of the season.” He admitted to Stan with forlorn self-pity.

“I know.” Stan looked at the floor. This kinda thing always made Stan uncomfortable, this whole dealing-with-other-people’s-problems thing. He didn’t even deal with his own…

“It’s my own fault.” Cartman chuckled self-deprecatingly, with an egotistical mask smirked across his arrogant face. But then the mask fell. Cartman looked down at his hands, bandaged and bloody-knuckled, and spoke in a whisper so small Stan wasn’t even sure if he was meant to hear it. “Maybe I deserve it.”

"Why would—"

“*Ding!* Attention all hospital visitors. Visiting hours are now over. Please make your way to the exits, now. Thank you.”

“Well,” Stan pointed in the general direction of the hallway, where the automated voice message had originated from, “I should get going, but, it was good to see you, man.”

“Yeah, thanks for coming down.” Stan gave Cartman a small high five on his un-splinted hand and nodded at him encouragingly.

“Feel better.” Stan turned and started walking, only to accidentally almost completely bump into and knock over a small brunette girl entering the room in a red and white uniform.

“Sorry!— Stan!”

“Wendy?!”

Yep. There she was. Standing right there, face to face with Stan, and all he could do was stare. His mouth hung open dumbly.

He hadn’t expected to see her here of all places, and… fuck, he hadn’t had time to get a haircut since their last confrontation, fuck!

“Heyy! Kitchen wench!” Cartman called to her lazily.

“Stop calling me that!” Wendy shrieked at him, fists balling, unfortunately misdirecting that wrath at Stan as a result. “WHAT?” She snapped at her comatose ex-boyfriend.
“Wha-wha… what are you doing here? Are.. wait... are you here to see Cartman?” The wheels had started turning in Stan’s stunned head now, and he was jumping to conclusions faster than... idk, something that jumps; Stan was too stressed to think clearly right now.

“Why, would that be a problem?” Wendy crossed her arms defiantly and cocked her hip.

“A little, yeah.” Stan admitted.

“Oh, really, Stan?” Wendy stepped closer, eyes narrow and ego tall.

“A little, yeah!” Stan reiterated, only slightly offended at Wendy’s lack of ability to answer simple questions that were gnawing at Stan’s brain like maggots.

“Well, for your information, what I do or don’t do with my time is none of your business anymore.” Wendy scoffed.

“Babe, it’s been two days…"

“Ok, first of all: you don’t get to call me that anymore.” Ouch. “And secondly: come to think of it, it was really never any of your business what I did with my time when we were together, and now that we’re broken up it’s really not any of your business. Ok? Now if you don’t mind, I have a job to do.”

“WHAT?! WHAT KIND OF JOB, Oh my God…"

“I work here, Stan.” Wendy explained to him demeaningly. "I volunteer at the hospital Thursday through Saturdays now.” Wendy condescended with expert percision, sharp tongue wielding the ax that chopped Stan’s balls off one by one.

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

Stan smiled at her shakily. “So how’ve you been?”

“No, Stan.”

“You been good? It’s been… two days...”

“Stan, go home.” Wendy rolled her eyes and crossed her arms, the Pavlovian response to the familiar action only infuriating Stan more; her eagerness to have him leave only making him more suspicious. Stan snapped, passive aggressive pouting on full force as he rounded on her.

“So is this like, a thing now? You and Cartman?” Stan turned towards the broken boy in the hospital bed as he guffawed in mock disbelief. Wendy shook her head, flabbergasted at the ridiculousness of Stan’s accusation.


“No, ‘cause, like, it’s cool, just please tell me. I’d like to know if my girlfriend would rather be with my friend.” He shrugged sarcastically, voice raising in spite of himself.

"EX-GIRLFRIEND!” Wendy screeched, closing her eyes in an attempt to collect herself. "And I don't have to tell you anything. You've lost that right!” She hissed, pointing a bony, manicured
finger in his face.

Stan made some kind of unintelligible sound halfway between a scoff and a whimper. Either way, he wished it hadn't just come out of his mouth.

Cartman interrupted the lover’s quarrel. “There’s nothing to tell, Kitchen Wench just brings me my food and my pills and shit until 9pm and then she’s gone and I don’t have to hear her whiny voice in my room anymore.” Cartman shrugged.

“STOP CALLING ME THAT!” Wendy exploded.

“Well, it was good to see you, Wendy.” Stan turned towards her, afraid to meet her eyes. “Maybe, we can get together sometime? To talk?”

“No, thanks. I’m good.” Wendy folded her arms defensively in Stan's peripheral vision.

“Oh.” Stan sulked at the floor morosely.

“Bye Stan.” Stan looked up at Wendy, her expression steady, determined, confident. Well, her mind was made up. There was no changing it. There was nothing else he could do...

“Yes.” Stan conceded, "Yes, I am leaving now.” Stan cursed the awkward stiffness in his expression. He decided to make fun of it, instead. They can’t laugh at you if you’re already laughing at yourself! It was a bad choice. “Yes, Lea-ving-now. In-a-ro-bot-voice, haha…” Cartman was staring at him with an elatedly entertained expression on his face, Wendy deep in confusion and anger. You idiot, Stan... "Bye.” The wounded boy waved hastily and bounded out of the room.

Stan ran past the ex-love-of-his-life and sprinted down the hallway. He pressed the elevator button six times before he decided to race down the stairway instead. Stan ran all the way to the parking lot, throwing open the car door once he got down the simple rhythm of unlock first, then yank on the door handle repeatedly.

Stan slumped into his seat and stared out his windshield at the pale, concrete wall in front of him. He stared at it like it was a captivating work of art, but really he was just numb. He studied the boring gray like his sanity depended on it, which it totally did. Someone had stuck their gum to it.

The sound of another nearby car shutting it’s doors started Stan back to reality. Ugly, cruel, wicked reality. Stan’s first real interaction with Wendy since his embarrassing chest-beating-contest in the hallways yesterday had not gone over like he’d rehearsed in his head!

She’d moved on. That was it.

It was really over this time.

No more Stan and Wendy.

Stan let out a choking sob. He covered his mouth as he tried to suppress another one.

But it was no use. Gasping wails flew out of his mouth, strangled by Stan’s aching chest… but no tears would come.

“Dammit.” Stan had gone too far the other way, and now he was just tired and numb. ‘Whatever, I’ll just cry at home, I guess,’ he thought to himself as another shaky sob instinctually bubbled up from his chest.
Stan started the car. His Dad’s fancy apple CarPlay must’ve read Stan’s mind and immediately locked onto his malaise.

Melancholy guitar and static-y drums floated warmly in the air around Stan’s aching head.

‘For a long time, I was in love.’

Stan groaned and rested his forehead against the steering wheel, ignoring the small beep that resulted. Why. Why, why, why was life so fucking ironic all the time? What is it supposed to be funny? Some kind of joke? Who’s laughing? NOT FUCKING STAN!

Stan took a deep breath and buckled his seatbelt. He and Wendy had broken up many times before. Why was this time so fucking hard?

He knew why. This one was permanent.

Stan shook off his lack-of-tears, and breathed deeply, numbness spreading from his head to his fingertips with each long drag of stuffy, parking lot air.

‘And all I wanted was the simple things, a simple kind of life.’

“You and me both, Gwen.” Stan sighed as he backed out of the parking space. “You and me both.”

Chapter End Notes

XD Idk why I have this head cannon that Stan’s a ginormous No Doubt fan, but it makes me so happy. XD
I debated even writing this chapter because it seems a little reaching and it was never part of the plan. Well guess what, Cupcake, LOVE DOESN’T FOLLOW A PLAN!!!

Really what happened is I was writing Stan calling Kenny in the last chapter and I was like no… this could go somewhere all on its own… plus it adds more fuel to the fire for later on. And who wants small flames?

A sane person.

Enjoy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

POV - Stan

“Ugh.” Stan looked down at the empty bottle in his hand, fully regretting the ridiculous events that had just transpired not more than 30 minutes ago.

In his post-broken-hearted spiral, Stan had decided to get himself a little something to take the edge off. So he’d driven down to the local liquor store, and paid some creepy old guy to buy him booze. Something he could drink quickly, nothing too gross.

He came back with wine.

Then it had all happened so fast. Stan had meant to wait till he got home, but he’d twisted off the cap, just to smell it. It smelled really good, so he had a sip.

The next thing he knew, Stan was wine-drunk in the passenger seat of his dad’s car, crying into the leather seat behind him.

“Kyle.” Stan spoke out loud to himself between sniffles. “I need to call Kyle.”

Stan dialed the phone number he’d had memorized, practically since birth, and waited patiently for the ring.

And another.

And another.

Ring.

Click.

“Hi, you’ve reached Kyle—”
“DAMMIT” Stan slammed his phone down and whined as he settled on calling Kenny instead, though the conversation still ended up revolving around Kyle.

“Hello?”

“Kenny.”

“Hey Stan… you ok? You don’t sound ok.”

“I wanna talk to Kyle.”

“Then call Kyle.”

“I’m so sad, Kenny…”

“Do you wanna talk about it?”

“No, I wanna talk to Kyle.”

“Call Kyle?”

“I TRIED! He’s not answering.”

“Stan. Calm down. And then call Kyle.”

“Ok.”

“Call me if you can’t get a hold of him.”

“Ok.”

Stan hung up the phone and breathed in shakily. “You better pick up, dude.” He muttered to himself as he dialed again.

Stan was relieved when he’d heard the click of the receiver on the other end.

“Hey dude.”

“Wendy and I broke up.”

“…on Wednesday?”

“No!”

“…Uh-huh… and?”

“And it’s really over, Kyle. I don’t know what to do. No more Wendy! Forever!”

“Jesus Christ. Ok, you want to come over?”

“I can’t, I’m drunk on car wine.”

“Stan Marsh, you fucking idiot! You stay right there and don’t fucking move, I’ll come get you. Drop me your location.”

“Thank you.” Stan was about to hang up the phone what he remembered something very important. “Wait, Kyle!”
“What, Stan.”
“I love you.”
“Yeah… I love you too. Be right there.”

About 20 minutes later, Kyle rolled up to the liquor store, in his mom’s gold sedan, a sweatshirt thrown over his pajamas, and an irritated look on his face. A smaller, Canadian version of that was sitting next to him.

“What’s Ike doing here?” Stan wondered as he watched the smaller Broflovski hop out of the passenger seat.

“He’s gonna drive my Mom's car back home to our house.” Kyle explained, reaching across Stan for the empty bottle in the center console. Stan glanced over and watched Ike jump in on the other side, pajamas on his back and fuzzy slippers on his feet.

“He’s 14, he doesn’t have a license.” Stan reasoned. Turning his head slowly to face the fuming redhead. There’s no way he was too drunk to realize this was a bad idea. Kyle tossed the empty bottle into a nearby trash bin, angrily, the glass clattering noisily against other empties at the bottom. Stan watched, dumbfounded, as Ike adjusted the seat and checked all the mirrors.

“Yeah!” Kyle stormed over, voice angrier than his light grip on Stan’s arm as he led him to the passenger seat of the other car. “So you better hope we don’t get pulled over or you’ll be paying his citation fine!” Kyle slammed the door in Stan’s face, as he turned walked over to the other car, to give some kind of a small lecture to Ike. Or maybe it was a pep talk. From Kyle, they both sounded about the same.

The two boys drove in silence, Stan resting his aching head against the cold window and Kyle frantically glancing in the rearview mirror every two seconds at the nervous 14 year old driving alone behind them. Kyle lectured Stan about how he was an idiot, and how he couldn't keep doing this, and how he owed Ike a huge apology as well as a giant 'thank you'. Stan nodded against the window he was using as a headrest. Kyle crawled along the residential streets, careful to avoid busy roads or complicated intersections. It had just occurred to Stan, as they eased on past his house, that he didn’t really know where they were headed.

“Where are we going?” He mumbled.

“I’m taking you to my house.”

“Ok.” Stan leaned back against the headrest and closed his eyes. Wait! “Wait! Kyle! I need to tell my parents I’m not coming home!”

“I already texted your parents. They're pissed you didn't call. And Kenny for that matter, he was worried about you.”

“I have the best friends.” Stan sighed as he settled comfortably against the window again.

“So what is ‘car wine’.” Kyle asked after a moment of silence. Stan looked over and saw Kyle’s knuckled gripping the steering wheel tightly, his jaw set sternly.
“Wine that you drink in your car.” Stan slurred casually.

“Where did you get this ‘car wine’?”

“Bought it.”

Kyle nodded wordlessly, eyes front, an unreadable expression etched into his familiar face.

“All set?” Kyle asked as he finished tucking in his drunk best friend. Stan nodded. “Ok, I’ve got a bucket here… just in case…” Kyle pulled a face as he pointed out the plastic bin to Stan, probably picturing the last time Stan had drunk-vomited all over his bedroom. “And I’ll just be right down here, so you can have the bed all to yourself. You know… in case you throw up in it…”

“I’ll be fiiiiiiine.” Stan promised. Though he really had no real way of knowing if that would end up being the truth or not. He guessed only time would tell.

“I’m gonna turn out the light. Do you need anything else?” Stan shook his head.

Kyle reached over and clicked his lamp off, before fluffing Stan’s pillows one last time, in a very Sheila-like fashion.

As his eyes started to adjust, Stan could start to see the shadowy outlines of Kyle’s hunched form watching him from the edge of the bed. Stan settled in and snuggled against the pillow. It smelled like him. Like Kyle. Stan’s Super Best Friend. He loved Kyle. He always smelled like Moroccan oil, whatever the fuck that is.

“You take such good care of me.” Stan mumbled into the darkness in front of him. “I don’t know why, but you do. Goodnight.”

Kyle hesitated, stiff and silent like he was thinking of something important to say. Instead, he stood up slowly and addressed Stan coldly. “Goodnight.”

Chapter End Notes

Don’t worry, Kyle isn’t gonna enable Stan forever, it bothers me that he is right now. But he’s human-fiction so, even though he’s a perfect smol bean, he’s also an imperfect being. Damn, this storyline gets me hyped. Moving on!
Chapter Summary

I thought it would be freaking adorable if we saw Ike sweat over asking Karen out over text.

In true teenager fashion, nobody says what they mean and everybody's a little confused.

Good luck.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**POV - Ike**

He’d been thinking about her. A lot.

The beautiful girl with the scrappy sense of humor.

Karen McCormick.

The way her smile always seemed mischievous but her eyes were always sweet. The way she had welcomed him back into her life after he’d practically abandoned her and Ruby not long ago.

The way her voice sang like angels and her laugh strung St. Cecilia’s harp.

Ike had gotten her new number only recently, at school yesterday. He wanted to reach out and say something clever, but he didn’t know where to start.

Ike paced around his room, agonizing over the pros and cons of the various ways to break the ice and plunge headlong into the fresh waters of a very important conversation.

How many y’s should he put in the word ‘hey’?

‘Hey, Karen.’ No, too formal. ‘Heyyyy, Kare.’ Way, way, way too casual. What about, ‘Heyy’ with just one extra? Maybe that just looks like a typo… Should the ‘h’ be lower case?

Ike stared at his screen, typing and retyping the same message, fretting over it carefully over and over again, procrastinating, fearing the moment he would finally, actually press ‘send’.

Even as his finger impulsively brushed over the send button, Ike instantly wished he hadn’t added that fourth ‘y’ so recklessly, and banged the phone against his head in regret.

**To Karen: Heyyy beautiful**
NoooooOOOOO! It looked desperate, but it was too late now. Ike clutched the phone tightly, staring at the screen so intensely that it actually scared him when he saw her message flash across the blue light.

From Karen: Heyyy, Ike! ;)

Oh my God, Ike was gonna crawl under a rock and die, Karen McCormick was flirting back with him. He had to type fast before he lost his nerve.

To Karen: Wat r you doing?
To Karen: U was just thinking about you
To Karen: I* was
To Karen: Haha

Ugh.

From Karen: *crying laughing emoji*
From Karen: really?
From Karen: What about me?

To Karen: Just you.
To Karen: Your eyes
To Karen: They're so pretty...

Karen was typing. And then she wasn’t. And then she was, and then she wasn’t again. Ike’s blood pressure spiked with every ellipses that flashed across his screen.

From Karen: Oh?
He had to do it. Ike took a deep breath and typed like the wind.

To Karen: Yeah. *heart eyes emoji*

To Karen: I was thinking, I had a lot of fun with you on Wednesday, and I’d like to do that again sometime.

To Karen: A date I mean.

To Karen: If you want to.

To Karen: Maybe… officially be my girlfriend if you want to?

To Karen: Haha

Ike smacked the phone against his forehead a few more times. He couldn’t even bring himself to look at the ‘dot dot dot’ that was sure to be flashing on and off of his screen while his proposal hung in the air.

...

From Karen: Sure *blushing, smiling emoji*

From Karen: I’d like that *smirking emoji*

Ike jumped onto his bed, cheering quietly to himself as he danced around triumphantly. Ike took a calming breath and typed the next part.

To Karen: Maybe I can kiss you on the lips next time...

Ike threw his phone against his pillow and paced around on top of his mattress. He dove back against the rumpled sheets as the familiar ‘ding’ text tone let him know Karen had responded.

From Karen: Maybe… *sly face emoji* *blushing emoji* *laughing crying emoji*

Ike nearly dropped the phone. She said yes. She said yes! Well, kinda… Ike did a quick little victory dance and got back to typing the comment that would seal the deal. It had to be blasé, it had to be nonchalant. It had to be cool.
To Karen: Cool. *sunglasses emoji* *thumbs up emoji* *snowman emoji*

Chapter End Notes

So goddamn adorable!
I love dorky Ike! What a nerd baby!
Little does he know that there’s probably a 99% chance that if Ruby was not there in person to help Karen type all of this, she was DEFINITELY on the phone talking her through it, while Karen stressed in the background. XD That’s the way it goes!
Dreams

Chapter Summary

Probably my favorite storyline in this series.

Token Black at the breakfast table with his parents.

POV - Token

“Have you thought any more about what colleges you’re applying to? I’m assuming some Ivy League, brainy, shit somewhere?” Tweek asked Token over breakfast one day.

Token was the only one of their friends who was smart enough (or dumb enough) to graduate early as a junior. The only other person in the school who was on the same no-bullshit path as him was Wendy Testaburger, and they were always in constant competition with each other for student body president, or valedictorian, or something or other ‘brainy’ like that. At a certain point it had become exhausting.

Next year they would both be gone.

About a year ago, Token had sat all his friends down and told them about how he’d accelerated his class schedule and compiled his course load in such a way that he would be able to graduate early and get out of this shit town a year before them. Craig and Tweek said they would miss him, but they were also really happy for him. Clyde, on the other hand, had cried for hours after Token had told all of them at Tweak Bros. Their sensitive friend just couldn’t understand why Token would want to leave when everyone he’s ever known was here.

Little did he know that was precisely the reason.

That was why it was always best to have these conversations quickly and privately, while Clyde was piling eggs and breakfast burritos onto his lunch tray across the room.

“Um. Yeah, ha, I’ve started applications to a few Ivy Leagues”, Token fiddled with his sleeve while he spoke. “I want to apply to a few local and state schools elsewhere as well, as a back up, you know? And there’s always the option of travel… but my parents would kill me,” Token gave a sad laugh. “I pretty much have very few actual options, but I’m expanding my horizons within the application process nonetheless.”

“Sounds like a smart plan.” Tweek smiled warmly, though it came across a little bit forced. “I could help you narrow your choices down if you want, when the time comes. I know it’s a stressful situation. I know if it were me I’d want all the help I can get.”

“Ha! You don’t know the half of it.” Token rubbed his hands over his face in frustration. “Thank you, Tweek. I may take you up on that offer… if the time comes.”

Tweek glanced at Token with a knowing look in his eyes.
Token had confided in Tweek before about his real hopes and dreams, ones that didn’t include a finished law degree by the age of 23. But he knew that his parents would never approve of anything less. Not for their precious baby, Token. They’d named him Token, for fuck’s sake!

Token put his head on the table in front of him and wondered if he would ever start to feel like he was in control of his own life again. Based on the countless drama shows and comedy podcasts Token indulged in on the weekends, he guessed not.

“I’m just gonna become a drifter and sell hats to tourists in Barcelona.” Token whined under his breath.

“Buddy, you do whatever the hell you want to do. As long as it makes you happy.” Tweek nudged Token with his thermos, offering up his most precious possession for Token’s comfort. Token grabbed the silver cup and took a few much appreciated gulps. “But seriously, all joking aside: what are you gonna do?”

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“Token! Breakfast!”

Token snapped out of his thoughts at the sound of his mother’s voice. Any lingering semblance of encouragement had melted away, his lengthy prepared speech whittled down to a vague feeling of ‘I’d rather not’.

Token stood up from where he sat at the edge of his bed and sighed grudgingly. Here we go. Now or never… Or maybe next month.

No, no, now. He was gonna talk to them now.

Token trotted down the stairs and into the kitchen. His father was sitting at the head of the table, reading the paper and sipping his orange juice. A black cup of coffee steamed next to him, cooling off. The backdrop: a spacious kitchen window — proudly displaying Mrs. Black’s lovingly tended-to rose garden and citrus fruit trees. He looked straight out of an all-American sitcom.

Token sat down at the place setting to his father’s right: a light blue placemat, a neatly folded napkin, some actually silver-silverware, a glass of fresh squeezed o.j. from the orange tree outside, and the sports section folded neatly across his place setting, courtesy of his father.

Mom was busy over by the stove, flipping French toast high up in the air before catching it back on the plate, humming and singing while performing her theatrics.

Despite the Blacks having fuck tons of money, and a giant house with an expensive landscaper’s bill, the inside was quite humble. Yes, the rugs were imported and the paintings were won at various auctions, but there was also a sense of ‘home-y-ness’ that money just couldn’t buy. There were plenty of sentimental pieces from Home Goods and Ross from the beginning of their marriage that Mrs. Black would never dream of upgrading, because that table was the first piece of furniture that Steve had bought for Linda with his first real lawyer’s paycheck, and that was the carpet Token learned to walk on. Every weekend you could see mother, father, and son, cooking their own breakfast, doing their own chores, and snuggling up on their couch to watch movies as a family — despite the fact that they had enough money to hire maids and cooks for years to come.

Yes the Blacks had a lot of money, but their well-dressed unit functioned just like any other loving, stable family’s, despite their obvious wealth.

“Oh.” She announced as she brought over the beautiful stack of French toast and a small bowl of
berries for the table. “Breakfast is served!”

Token and his dad thanked his mom gratefully as everybody excitedly dug into Mrs. Black’s cinnamon French toast.

Wow. Wow, wow, wow they were good.

Token’s mom had studied at a culinary school in her early 20’s (after quite an embarrassingly unsuccessful bout at law school ages 18-19), before she finally decided to go back to school for what she had always been good at in high school: chemistry. Linda Black had finally found her current career path at age 25, graduating with her Master’s degree six years later, with a newborn baby Token walking with her across the stage, nestled warmly in her arms. Now she was a chemist for a pharmaceutical company, through she had never lost her passion — or her gift — for comforting, gourmet food.

“You’ve done it again, Linda.” Steve praised through a mouthful of food, moaning dramatically as he took another bite.

“Did you add something different?” Token wondered, shoveling bites in his mouth so fast there was a decent chance he would end up choking on this magnificent breakfast.

“A chef never reveals her tricks.” Linda winked, smiling over a sip of tea from her grandmother’s antique tea set.

“I think that’s a magician, honey.” Steve chuckled, reaching for his own coffee mug.

“Spices’ then.” Linda shrugged, grinning to herself proudly as she took another blissful bite of her latest culinary creation.

“How are applications going, son?” Steve asked casually, an uncomfortable silence following the very simple question as Token debated lying to his father.

“Um.” Token swallowed slowly, then reached for his orange juice and chugged the whole thing, buying himself thinking time. “Oh shit, ok Token, relax, breathe, just change the subject. Or say yes. You’re silent! Say something!”

“Good.” Token lied. “Good.”

It wasn’t a total lie, Token had been working on the online applications just in case, but it was much more begrudgingly than excitedly that he was doing so.

“Any top picks yet? I was thinking we can visit a few different campuses over Thanksgiving break. Anywhere specific you wanna go?”

‘Belgium.’ Token thought to himself dryly.

“You know, maybe Harvard? Yale? I’ve always wanted to see those old, historical brick buildings...”

“Absolutely, and those are really great schools as well!” Token’s dad praised

“Yeah.” Ok. He was gonna do it. Just start hypothetical. “What if.” Token found himself at a loss for words as he parents waited for him to continue. “What if I didn’t go to college right away?” His parents looked at each other, silently communicating horror between them. “I mean, I obviously want to go but... what if I waited a year? What if... I traveled the world? Saw the
world? Just for a year… Hypothetically.” Token waited.

His mom spoke up first.

“Well, you have to go to school Token, don’t be silly—”

“Let’s talk hypothetically…” Token interrupted his mother’s protests. She shot him a worried look of some kind, but Token was having a hard time deciphering it.

Steve on the other hand was looking at Token perplexedly. The patriarch at the head of the table cleared his throat and sat up tall, leaning in to talk with his son. His expression grew serious and his body language expanded, going from Dad to lawyer in a matter of seconds. It made Token sweat.

“Well,” Steve folded his hands neatly atop the wooden table, “I commend you for your adventurous heart. Traits like that are what separate the good lawyers from the great ones.” Token’s heart sunk. “But I’m just worried that if you wait a year, schools will see that as lazy, or as if you’re not ready. I mean look at your resume.” Token watched with an unimpressed expression as his father listed his son’s achievements one by one. “A near perfect GPA, important roles on the debate team, Latin club, tutoring, early graduation… it would be a sin to throw all of that away on some... romantic notions about adventure in the great, wide world.” Just hearing it phrased like that made Token’s heart race and his soul itch for freedom.

“Why don’t you plan a trip for when you graduate?” Steve reasoned. “You can invite anyone you want, I’ll pay for their flights. That can be your reward for finishing school, and maybe some incentive to graduate early! Become the youngest working lawyer in the state!” That would be easy, if this stupid town represented anything close to the state as a whole. “I just think it would be best if you stick with our plan. As your parents, we know more, we’ve been through more, and we know what’s best.” Steve smiled and wrapped an arm around his wife’s shoulders. A united front. “Sound good?”

Token stared at his dad blankly.

It seemed like he didn’t really have a choice.

“Yeah.” Token forced a smile as convincingly as he could. “Sounds good.”

“That was… hypothetical, wasn’t it son?” Linda looked at her boy worriedly, a complex blend of emotions behind her concerned expression.

“Yeah,” Token lied. “of course it was. I was just curious about it, that’s all.” Token shrugged and pretended his heart wasn't breaking. “Can you pass the berries?”
Tweek does something so fucking relatable at the gas station it makes my heart hurt XD
High five if you've ever embarrassed yourself while driving!
Craig gives Tweek a driving lesson, with an adorable ending.

POV - Tweek

“Ok,” Craig turned to face Tweek. “What’s step one?”

Tweek was staring straight out the windshield, past the Whole Foods across the parking lot, zeroing in on the massive mountains in the distance. He looked down at the 5,000 lb death machine in his hands.

He squeezed the steering wheel tighter, not trusting himself to take a hand off of it. ‘It’s ok Tweek, don’t panic, the car’s not even on. It’s not going anywhere.’

Tweek would have sighed if he wasn’t holding his breath. He reached for the seatbelt, finally submitting to the idea that he just has to suck it up and embark on the terrifying adventure that is driving lessons.

“…And?” Craig waited, unimpressed as Tweek’s seatbelt clicked into place.

Tweek groaned and adjusted the mirrors. ‘Ok, …this is starting to feel too real now…’

“Good. Now you’re safe to turn it on.”

Tweek started nervous laughing, maniacally — no fucking way was he gonna just ‘turn it on’ so casually.

“Oh no, no Tweek,” Craig put a hand on Tweek’s forearm in an attempt to calm down the giggling Batman villain next to him. “Tweek, you can do it, just turn… on… the car.”

“What are the steps, what do I need to do?!” Tweek screeched, laughing uncontrollably, staring at the mountains in the distance again and shaking his head negatively.

“THE STEPS FOR TURNING A KEY?!” Craig sassed, irritated.

“YES!” Tweek’s head whipped to face him in a panic, he could feel tears prickling his eyes.

“Oh my God…” Craig moaned frustratedly, rubbing his hands over his bruised face in a dramatic display of disapproval. Craig was so fucking fed up, and Tweek didn’t blame him.

“Well, SO-RRY!” Tweek yelled sarcastically, teary-eyed. “Sorry I don’t want to turn on the car
the wrong way, and plow us into a tree and ruin our day by killing us!!”

“It won’t move if it’s in park! Just… ok you want steps? Here’s step one: put your hand on the key.”

Tweek did obediently as he’s told. Craig laughed at him a little bit for his urgency, and then he continued.

“Put your foot on the break.” He did. “…yeah, and press down on the break.” Tweek nodded and did so. “Now,” Craig leaned closer, his voice quiet and stern, the smell of his cinnamon gum wafting into Tweek’s nostrils. It calmed him down. “With your foot still pressing down on the break, turn the key. And this car is shitty so just hold it down until you hear the engine start.”

Tweek glanced at Craig panickedly.

“No, no! The car is fine! It’s just a little old, everything is fine.” Craig promised. “Just start the car.”

Tweek looked down at his feet.

Foot, press, turn.

Tweek did as he was told, listening for the signature rumble that told him he’d done it.

…Hey! He’d actually done it!

“Yeah! Awesome, now just… open your eyes.” Oh. Tweek didn’t even realize he’d shut them. “Now you need to release the parking break, are you ready?” Tweek nodded. “Keep your foot down on the break, and press this button here with your thumb. Then pull up a little bit and let it down gently.”

“Ok… ok…” Tweek mumbled nervously as he liberated the emergency brake.

The pedal lurched a little bit underneath his foot, like a steady resistance had suddenly been released. Tweek’s eyes widened as his body froze. Slowly, Tweek was beginning to feel less and less in control of this vehicle…

“Good. Good.” Craig praised, though unless you knew Craig you’d think his tone was a little insincere. It’s just because he wasn’t coddled as a baby, so Tweek forgave him for his monotonicity. “Are you ready to start driving?”

Tweek started nervous laughing again. He covered his face with his hands and chuckled until frustrated tears streamed out of his eyes. “No-o-o-o-o-o.”

Craig sat silently next to him, eyes blank and aloof, patiently letting Tweek have his little moment.

Tweek sat back, looking over at Craig’s unimpressed expression, willing himself to settle down.

“Are you done?” Craig finally asked when Tweek’s chuckles simmered into erratic whimpers.

“Yes. Good lesson. N-next week we’ll roll down the windows.”

“Ha-ha, very f— Tweek!” Craig grabbed onto the dark blue hoodie of his that he’d let Tweek borrow, right as Tweek opened the door at attempted to make a run for it.
“Ok, Listen to me, Tweek.” Craig crabbed Tweek’s face gently between his huge hands and stared Tweek in his freckled face “You’re gonna be fine.”

“Only if I don’t crash… and what if I do? That’s way too much pressure!” Tweek stressed, reaching for his hair despite the fact that Craig’s stupid arms were in the way.

“Tweeeek…” Craig batted Tweek’s arms away with his elbows dismissively as he continued to caress his cheeks fondly. “I’ll be here to help you the whole time.” Craig reasoned.

Tweek’s eyes nervously scanned the vehicle he was somehow in charge of.

“It is getting kinda late thought, right? We should probably call it… take this up again next week… or never… I don’t know if I’ll be any good at this, AH!”

“Babe! Look at me.” Craig sort of shook Tweek lightly by the shoulders before petting the side of his head in a desperate attempt to get Tweek to hear him over the ugly roar of anxiety in his ears. “You can do it, Tweek!” Craig was looking into his eyes deeply, it felt like he was looking right into his soul. “You’re capable of more than you think.”

Tweek looked between Craig’s blue orbs in a trance. Something about the way Craig seemed to have so much confidence in Tweek gave him a little boost of confidence, himself.

“…Ok.” He whispered determinedly.

“Do you still wanna learn how to drive today?” Craig asked, a slight tinge of caution in his voice.

Tweek exhaled shakily.

“Yes.”

“Then you’re going to have to trust me.”

Tweek nodded as Craig ran a hand through his messy, blond hair. “Ok.” Craig pointed down at the leather-stick-thingy in the center console. “Now whenever you shift between these gears listed here — P for park, R for reverse, N for neutral, and D for drive — you’ll need your foot to be pressing on the break. You got that?” Tweek nodded.

Craig leaned back in his seat coolly.

“Drive.”

JESUS CHRIST.

Ok, ok….

Tweek took a deep breath, to remind himself that he was safe with Craig. Even if there was no way to prove whether or not that would or could actually be the case in all circumstances and situations in his life, it was a comforting thought above the surface.

‘Relax.’

‘Breathe.’

‘Drive.’

So he did.
Tweek pressed his foot down on the break, shifted into drive, and very slowly released the break, refusing to step on the gas just yet.

Craig chuckled through his nose. “This isn’t driving, man, this is rolling.” Tweek would have said something snarky if he wasn’t completely nervous right now. “Try the gas pedal. You can do it… just go slow.”

He did. Tweek slowly eased onto the gas pedal, speedometer now reading 15 mph. Craig waited patiently as Tweek cruised around the mostly empty end of the parking lot, gradually picking up speed until he was zooming around at a proud 30, taking on the curves and bends easily; releasing the pedal on turns, as Craig had suggested, after a rather jerky attempt at switching to the breaks in a moment of panic.

“Hey you’re kind of a natural at this.” Craig observed. Tweek smiled to himself as he rounded another corner, getting the hang of the rhythm the more he practiced.

“Do you wanna take this on the road?”

“ACK!” Tweek slammed on the breaks, jerking the car to a stop as he turned to face Craig. “I’ve only been practicing for fifteen minutes! Is that even enough time to prepare for the road? I don’t know if I’m ready, it’s WAY TOO MUCH PRESSURE!”

“Then don’t.”

“What?”

Tweek turned to look at Craig, who was just sitting there, picking at his nails casually.

“Don’t take it on the road, doesn’t matter to me… If you’re not ready, you’re not ready. We’ll do it another time.” Tweek narrowed his eyes, trying his best to decipher the stony expression on the cool passenger in the seat next to him. Craig stared right back and shrugged apathetically.

“You… you don’t mind?” Tweek asked, skeptically.

“What do I care,” Craig leaned in slightly to stare down Tweek, with a light smile slowly growing behind his blazing eyes, “it’s your driving lesson.”

Something about the indifference in Craig’s voice, or the daring look in his eyes settled under Tweek’s skin aggravatingly. ‘So that’s how it’s gonna be, huh?’ Tweek suddenly felt very compelled to prove him wrong.

“Oh, I’m taking this thing on the road.” He muttered as he shifted into drive. Craig looked out the window amusedly, biting his cheek to hide his smirk.

Tweek actually did pretty well. He drove back and forth between the Whole Foods parking lot and the Post Office parking lot next door, getting more and more used to the small stretch of road in between and the random drivers he was sharing it with.

At a certain point something on the dashboard dinged.

“Hm, we’re almost out of gas.” Craig acknowledged. “Wanna drive us to the nearest station?”

A small panic washed over Tweek as he made another smooth turn into the Whole Foods parking lot. He parked sloppily in a row of open spaces and stared at the wheel intensely.
“Hello…?” Craig drawled rudely.

“I’m thinking.” Tweek responded. He looked down at his shaky hands. They’d been doing a good job for him so far, hadn’t let him down with an awkward jerk of the wheel or a yank on the break, or anything like that. He had technically been on the road and nobody had died… yet… He was happy with what he’d done so far, but he knew he’d feel really proud of himself if he’d driven to a whole other location on his first lesson.

Plus, Craig believed in him.

Tweek decided with an electric shock of bravery that he wouldn’t let Craig — or more importantly, himself — down.

“Ok. Map it.” Tweek ordered confidently. Craig let out a quiet, yet impressively good, Chewbacca impression next to him as he typed lazily into his phone.

“STARTING ROUTE TO CHEVRON.” Craig’s phone announced with less enthusiasm than either of the Tucker kids on any given morning.

Tweek followed the directions of the GPS, doing very well, until he arrived at his destination.

“Oh, Fuck. Oh, Jesus.” Tweek whimpered as he pulled into the very busy gas station.

“W-where do I go?”

“Just pull behind any of the ones on the left side and just wait until someone leaves.” Tweek did as he was told, shivering minimal, halfway between frozen in fear and vibrating with nerves. He parked behind a small, silver Toyota and waited.

“Oh Jesus…” A giant, red pickup truck pulled up behind Tweek.

“It’s ok, they’re just here to wait for gas like everybody else.” Tweek tensed up in nervousness nonetheless. He had started picturing horrible scenarios of angry fellow drivers, despite Craig’s confident tone.

At a certain point, while the car in front of him was still busy filling up, the last car in the row began to pull away.

“Pull up there and take that one.” Craig gestured to the empty pump two spaces down. Tweek muttered encouragements out loud to himself under his breath as he slowly curved around the cars that were still being served and pulled up way in front of the last pump. “Good, now just back up slowly, and I’ll give you directions. Keep your wheel straight.”

Tweek was internally screaming as he executed brand new driving tasks out in the real world, ones that he hadn’t practiced or even talked about before! He breathed in through his nose and out through his mouth as he tried to appear as cool and collected as possible.

“Mnm… am I too close?!” Tweek shuddered. He was shaking a little bit more than usually now, but still more or less in control.

“Nah, you’re good.” Craig drawled, looking out the back window. Tweek felt like he was too close. And Craig seemed too casual, Tweek didn’t completely trust his ability to pay full attention with everything going on around them. He started turning the wheel away from the pump just in case he would hit it. “No, don’t do that, you’ll be too far away.”

“I’M TOO CLOSE!” Tweek exclaimed.
“You’re not!” Craig argued. “Ok, stop. Just… get out and see if you can still reach the pump.”

Tweek shifted the car into park and hopped out. He grabbed the black handle and stretched it as far as it would go. It stopped just short of the incredibly crookedly parked van.

“Shit!” Tweek squeaked.

“I’ll help you fix it.” Craig offered from the passenger seat.

“No, just direct me. I wanna do it!” Tweek ordered stubbornly, feeling sort of like a small child demanding another turn on the ps4. Craig stared at him for a moment, as if calculating the risks of letting Tweek continue to drive. He finally sighed, and leaned back into his seat. Tweek hopped back in the driver’s seat and shifted into drive.

“Now you have to go forward since you’re so far back and crooked from not listening to me the first time.”

Tweek was *not* a fan of Craig’s righteous attitude right now, but he was too nervous to speak. He flipped him off as he pressed on the pedal, multitasking as best as he could.

A honk made Tweek jump and scream, as the silver Toyota behind him swerved around them to leave the station.

“That’s ok, some *asshole* just wanted to make sure you knew he was there, the *dick.*” Craig half consoled Tweek, while half scolding the other driver. Tweek decided it might be way less nerve wracking if instead of attempting to back up again, he just drove around to pull in on the other side. *Or was this way easier because he didn’t have to make a turn… TWEEN DIDN’T KNOW WHAT TO DO!*

“JESUS CHRIST!” Tweek whipped around in as narrow turn to the other side, slamming on the breaks just short of hitting the car in front of him.

“Fuck, Tweek!” Craig scolded, grabbing his chest from the small scare.

Tweek didn’t say anything.

“You wait here, I’ll fill it up. I’ll teach you how another day, just *stay in the car.*”

“You wait here, I’ll fill it up. I’ll teach you how another day, just *stay in the car.*”

“I’m *not* gonna try and run away again, I’m not a child.” Tweek mumbled defensively, crossing his arms, like — you guessed it — a child. Craig just raised his eyebrows and looked at him warningly. “I won’t!” Tweek insisted. Though good on Craig for reading Tweek’s mind… running away was *exactly* what he wanted to do right now…

To be honest, Tweek hadn’t even looked when he’d recklessly whipped around the tiny gas station pumps, and he *could have* and *would have* gotten Craig and himself into an accident if it wasn’t for sheer dumb luck and the fact that there just so happened to be nobody on the other side. Tweek began to beat himself up in his head over his *stupidity*, and he felt horrible.

Once Craig was finished, he walked up to the open window on the driver’s side, where Tweek was still staring straight ahead and strangling the wheel with white knuckles and slumped shoulders.

“Do you want me to drive now?” Craig asked warmly, a gentleness in his voice that he seemed to reserve only for Tweek. Tweek shook his head. No, he would fix this. He was gonna end up with a positive driving lesson by the end of the day if he had to drive all night! Or at least until sunset.

“Are you sure?” Craig double checked. Tweek nodded. Craig leaned in and kissed Tweek on the
cheek sweetly. “Ok, babe.” He whispered, making Tweek smile just a little bit as he watched Craig crawl back into the passenger seat.

‘Stay positive: I can do this,’ Tweek told himself encouragingly. He took a deep breath and put the car in drive. He wanted to get out of there and to a more secluded location as soon as possible.

Everything would have been fine if he hadn’t gone the wrong way out of the gas station.

Cars were honking, people were upset, and the only thing Tweek could do was apologize, feel like shit, and crawl forward slowly until there was enough space for all the cars to pass.

At the very end of the row, a girl in a silver Nissan actually stopped in her slow-moving tracks, gave Tweek the ugliest look, shook her head in disapproval, mouthing “what are you doing?” to the guilty blonde in the van.

Ouch. Tweek lost it. He burst out crying, so suddenly in fact, that the girl in the Nissan looked shocked and horrified. She sped off awkwardly once she had enough space to squeeze past Tweek and his sudden breakdown. Craig slowly turned to look at Tweek in absolute terror.

“Are you crying?” He asked incredulously.

“NO, I’M SO FUCKING HAPPY THAT EVERYBODY’S GLARING AT ME, YES I’M CRYING!” Tweek admitted, guilt consuming every cell in his body as he rattled off the reasons. “I inconvenienced everybody, and I probably RUINED that girl’s day.” Tweek wiped his eyes and suddenly became aware that he was still blocking the wrong way entrance. “AND NOW I’M JUST SITTING HERE CAUSING MORE TRAFFIC! PEOPLE HATE ME, THEY DON’T EVEN KNOW ME BUT THEY HATE ME!”

“I’m… sure that girl will forget about you in an hour…” Craig attempted, flatly.

“WELL I WON’T!” Tweek screamed, before covering his face and groaning in frustration.

“You’re overreacting, everything is fine. You need to calm down.” Craig chuckled uncomfortably.

“THAT’S NOT HELPING.”

Damn Craig and his inability to deal with emotions like a well-adjusted person…

The taller teen sighed. “Look, no one’s coming, just switch with me and I’ll drive us out of here.”

Tweek was out the door and yanking on the passenger side handle before Craig had even finished his sentence.

“Hey, slow down.” Craig held Tweek by the shoulders and looked into his eyes. Craig tilted his head down, resting his forehead against Tweek’s as he rubbed his arms. “You’re ok.” He cooed, smoothing Tweek’s hair down before placing small kiss to Tweek’s little nose and walking around to the driver’s side, flipping off a honking car who had just attempted to drive next to the road-blocking van.

Craig wordlessly drove them to a frozen yogurt place as Tweek stared out the window with his temple resting on the glass. The silence on the drive helped Tweek to clear his head and calm
down a little bit, though he couldn’t stop thinking about all the people out there in the world who
would drive home today and tell their friends and family about ‘this idiot, asshole at the gas
station’ that they didn’t even really know. He only pulled on his hair and scratched his hand once,
but he moved so slowly that Craig didn’t even notice.

Craig bought Tweek a coffee flavored cone, himself a chocolate one, and they ate sitting on the
hood of the van, looking out at the setting sun behind a forest of trees.

Craig reached down and held Tweek’s hand.

They ate in silence for a while with the radio humming quietly in the background. Tweek kept
feeling tears well up in his eyes every time he thought about how someone out there in the world
had a bad impression of him and he didn’t even get the chance to explain himself. He blinked the
tears away fiercely, breathing shallowly as he attempted repeatedly to relax.

“Did I fail to mention that other drivers are assholes?” Craig joked flatly, with a horrible sense of
timing, tossing his cone wrapper in a nearby trashcan from where he lounged on the hood his van.

Tweek glanced at him out of the corner of his eye. “So that wasn’t a rare occurrence? That’s just
how driving is?”

“Yep.” Craig shrugged closer to Tweek.

“Great.” Tweek stared down at his mostly uneaten cone, noticing that it was starting to melt.

“Tweek, honey,” Craig sighed, Tweek raised his eyebrows at the unusual, but not completely new,
pet name, “everybody has days like that, especially when they’re still learning. Multiple times in
their lives, in fact. I’d say most people have a 70% chance of driving like an asshole every time
they sit behind he wheel.” Where were these statistics coming from, Craig? “Even when they’ve
been driving for 40 years, someone can still make a mistake, it happens, that’s life. Odds are that
won’t even be your last mistake.”

Well, that was the wrong thing to say.

Tweek leaned back to lay against the hood of the van, glancing up at the stars — the way they used
to when they were kids — not feeling any less guilty at Craig’s damn rationality.

Craig followed him, laying next to him and tilting his head to look at him worriedly. Tweek’s eyes
remained focused straight ahead, though he could feel Craig’s eyes burning into him, and see it
through his peripheral vision.

“Oh, look,” Craig gestured in front of him with his hands, “gas station incident aside, you did
really good for your first lesson.”

“Whatever.” Tweek shrugged, sitting up a little bit to lick the edges of his cone, though he wasn’t
really hungry.

“No, I’m serious.” Craig sat up to look down at him. Tweek tilted his head and looked at his
boyfriend: the one with worried eyes and a softened expression, who was trying so hard to make
Tweek feel better. “Think about it,” he insisted, “when you were just driving around the parking
lot, you got the hang of it really fast. It seriously took me three lessons to not jerk the car around.”
Tweek smirked up at him wryly. “So what I’m hearing is that I was better than you.”

Craig chuckled, a small, relieved expression on his face.

“Yeah, whatever… I guess…”

Tweek smiled a tiny smile and sat up to face Craig, who was beaming at him lovingly. “And you drove really smoothly actually, it takes most people years to learn not to just slam on the pedals.”

Tweek smiled (in spite of his attitude) at the way Craig was praising him.

“What else?” Tweek joked. His boyfriend chuckled.

Craig scooted closer and leaned in. “You have to admit you were kind of a natural.” Tweek shook his head, unsure. “Admit it.” Tweek looked up and saw Craig smiling his rare smile. The one that made Tweek’s heart race in his chest. “Admit you did a good job.”

Tweek continued to pout, though the more that he thought of it, he did do a pretty good job in the beginning…

After a moment of silence, Craig wrapped his arms around Tweek, suddenly.

“Well, I’m proud of you. Even if you’re not.” He whispered against Tweek’s hair.

Tweek melted even faster than his frozen yogurt cone.

Tweek tilted his chin up and kissed Craig sweetly.

Craig froze in surprise, then moaned a little bit as he softened into it, holding Tweek sweetly as the blond boy held his melting cone awkwardly.

As they pulled apart, Craig dipped his head down to take a bit out of Tweek’s frozen yogurt.

“Rude!” Tweek scolded half-heartedly. The adorable look on Craig’s face made his heart pound mercilessly. “You don’t even like coffee.” Tweek accused through a smile as his heart ached beautifully in his chest.

“Oh, I’m starting to love the taste of it.” Craig purred as he went in for another kiss, his tongue brushing up against Tweek’s with the absolute lightest touch. It made Tweek’s head spin feverishly. Tweek felt Craig brush against his free hand, before intertwining their fingers sweetly and holding his hand steadily. Tweek’s steady Craig.

Tweek pulled away and stared up at Craig while his heart sang.

“Ok.” Tweek conceded.

“What?” Craig mumbled distractedly, proceeding to kiss Tweek all over his face until the blond was blushing all over.

“I admit it.” Tweek sighed. Craig ran a hand through Tweek’s hair as he waited for him to continue. Tweek smiled. “Before the gas station… I was pretty proud of myself.” He admitted in a rush.

“And you should be!” Craig screamed excitedly. “Babe, you did amazing.”

“’Babe’,” Tweek mocked, affectionately.
“Is… that ok?” Now it was Craig’s turn to blush. “It kinda just slips out sometimes. Do you not like it?”

“I fucking love it.” Tweek chuckled as he licked his coffee flavored cone, amused that it was Craig who was flustered for once.

Craig snorted, “Yeah, I think I said ‘honey’ too, and I have no idea where that came from, I had no control over that.”

“Yeah,” Tweek giggled, “and the first time was the other day, before we’d technically started dating…. You slipped up.” Tweek teased, shoving Craig lightly with his shoulder.

“I was so hoping you hadn’t caught that, then.” Craig chuckled, now blushing wildly.

Tweek rested his head on Craig’s shoulder and wrapped a hand around his bicep. Craig kissed the top of his head and leaned against him. A touch of affection that was years familiar, but only now deeply meaningful. They sat like that, content in their silence, while Tweek finished his cone.

“Are you still upset?” Craig whispered gently as Tweek sat back down on the car, after walking over to place his wrapper in the trash can.

“No.” Tweek smiled. And it was the truth. “Thanks, Craig.” Craig smiled back at him. It was the sweetest sight Tweek had ever seen.

“Hey,” Craig jumped off the hood of the car to stand in front of Tweek, “you know those romantic comedies you pretend you don’t like?”

“Yes.” Tweek answered skeptically, not sure where he was going with this.

“Get up.” Craig smirked.

“Why?”

Craig smiled dopily. “Come dance with me.”

Tweek stared at him in shock as Craig walked around to the driver’s side window, and reached in to turn up the volume.

Tweek’s jaw was practically on the floor by the time Craig had walked back around to face him again.

“You hate dancing.”

“I know.” Craig nodded with an astonished laugh.

Tweek blinked bewilderedly.

“I literally have not even seen you shuffle your feet musically since your parents made you take Latin Ballroom in elementary school.”

“And I haven’t since.” Craig smiled, reaching out a hand to offer to Tweek, who just snickered from the hood of the car in disbelief.

“Wha— You wouldn’t even dance with your sister at your cousin’s wedding.”

“But I’ll do it for you.” Craig sing-songed, in what almost sounded like a sarcastic tone, though
Tweek could tell he was completely serious.

Craig waited patiently, as Tweek reached out hesitantly. Craig pulled him down off of the car, Tweek’s feet landing firmly on the concrete right in front of Craig.

“But… I don’t know how to dance.” Tweek reasoned, taking another step closer despite his protests.

“It’s ok,” Craig smirked as he pulled Tweek to the middle of the parking lot, “just follow my lead.”

The two wrapped their arms around each other, swaying to the music as their fingers intertwined. Tweek looked up at Craig with wide eyes, before timidly resting his head against his broad shoulder. Craig leaned against him. They swayed dreamily as A Great Big World’s ‘Say Something’ started playing over the radio.

“‘Anywhere I would have followed you.’” Craig sang quietly in Tweek’s ear.

“Craig this song is incredibly sad.” Tweek piped up as he listened to more of the lyrics.

“Shh, shh, shush.” Craig chuckled as he wrapped his arms tighter around Tweek, smoothing blond hair between his fingers. Chills rolled down Tweek’s neck as Craig played with his hair. He grabbed on tighter to his boyfriend, and buried his nose in the fabric of his warm sweatshirt, safe and warm in an oversized Craig Tucker sweatshirt of his very own.

Music rang through the empty parking lot, and Tweek and Craig danced blissfully, awkwardly, under the stars.

‘Say something I’m giving up on you...’
A Skiing Accident

Chapter Summary

Wendy helps Cartman escape for an hour.
Apparently not everything is exactly as it seems.

POV - Wendy

“…Bye.”
Stan bolted out of the room like his life depended on it, leaving Wendy behind in the doorway, confused, and mildly irritated.

“That sucks.” An even more irritating voice belched from across the room. “Don’t worry, he’ll come around, Stan’s kind of a wuss.” Wendy balled her hands into fists, feeling narrow eyes on her from the bully at her back.

“Well?” He called to her. “Whatcha got for me?”

Wendy fought the urge to throw the paper cup at him, scattering his pills all across the floor. She imagined it. It was glorious.

But she knew she couldn’t. Then she would get fired, and then she’d have nothing important to say on her college applications.

So she stalked over and slammed the pill cup on Cartman’s bedside table.

“It’s iron, I think. They don’t really tell me but it looks like a vitamin.” She mumbled as she crossed her arms impatiently.

“Ok… and um… can I help you?” Cartman tilted his head patronizingly as he stared up at her.

“I’m supposed to make sure you actually take it.” Wendy explained rudely. “So come on. I’m done for the day after this.”

Wendy could see Cartman internally debating over the pros and cons of dragging this out just to infuriate her. Luckily, he picked up the cup, and swallowed his pills instead.

“Thank you.” She acknowledged with insincerity.

“Wait!” Cartman called desperately from his hospital bed right as she was about to walk out the door.

“What is it?” She sighed with a hand on her hip.

Cartman smirked at her. “Do you think you can bring me a Martini next time? You know, since you’re waiting on me like a 1950’s housewife?”
Boy, if Wendy didn’t have supervisor’s watching her through the window she would have chucked a nearby pillow at his dumb, stupid, ugly… dumb head!

“I hate you.” She spit through a growly whisper. Cartman erupted in laughter as Wendy gave him the finger discreetly in a way that her boss couldn’t see.

“Fuck you too! See you tomorrow, Kitchen Wench! I’ll miss you!” He guffawed and cackled as Wendy shook with rage. She flipped her hair in aggravation and turned on her heels to storm out of the room, Eric Cartman’s hyena laughter echoing in her head like a disgusting ear worm.

The next day when Wendy showed up for her shift, Eric was not in his room.

Wendy stood next to his empty bed wondering where the Hell he could be when suddenly, she felt tentative hands tap her from behind.

“Kitchen Wench!” He whispered.

Wendy jumped, scared out of her skin, until she realized who had tapped her.

“Oh! I said not to call me that!” She panted as she caught her breath.

“Kitchen Wench, listen to me.” Cartman pleaded, only a dim sparkle in his eye at the small act of disobedience. “I need your help.”

That was when Wendy really took in the sight in front of her: Cartman was out of his hospital gown, and wearing the clean set of clothes he had specifically asked his mother to bring for him. A yellow baseball cap covered his messy hair, and his bruised covered eyes were pleading. Wendy also noticed a fading choke bruises around his neck, but she didn’t remember hearing about that in regards to the fight with Craig…

Normally Wendy would tell him to fuck off and get back in bed, but she was a good person. Or at least she hoped she was.

Wendy sighed, and put down the tray of food, drawing the curtain so passing nurses wouldn’t see their exchange.

“Ok. Explain. You’ve got one minute.”

Cartman sighed in relief and began his explanation. “I need you to help smuggle me into the old people’s wing.” Wendy scoffed at him and folded her arms. “No, I’m seriously! My grandma lives there, and she’s dying, and she has been for a few months now. My mom never visits her, and she doesn’t even know that I visit Nana.” Yeah right, this seemed just like a typical, manipulative Cartman scheme to do something horrible under the guise of humor. “Anyway, it’s Saturday, and I always visit my Nana on Saturdays. She doesn’t really know what’s going on or what day it is, but she’ll know if I’m not there this week, I just know it. Please!”

Wendy cocked her head mockingly and scoffed obnoxiously.

“I’m not gonna help you break into the hospice wing to prank the old people.”

“Do you really think I’d do that?!?”

Wendy glared at Cartman judgmentally, arms folded, and her eyebrow raised suspiciously.
“Don’t answer that.” He dismissed. “Just listen, Wendy, please.” Wendy’s skin chilled where Cartman’s cold hands brushed against her. “You’ve got to help me!” he begged her, the way he said her name, ‘Windy’, grating her nerves and sending chills up her spine.

“And… this isn’t just some ploy to unknowingly sneak you out of the hospital for good?” Wendy double checked, just to be sure.

“What? No.” He looked at her, as if wounded by her accusation, and for once in all the goddamn years she’d known him, he looked sincere. “This is real. I promise. Will you help me?”

Wendy didn’t know if she was going crazy, soft, or both. But something in Cartman’s pleading expression convinced her. She couldn’t believe it, but Wendy Testaburger was about to help Eric Cartman.

“Get back in your bed.” She told him. “Then you have to eat, and I have to make my lunch rounds to all the other patients. Some of them get an afternoon round of pills, and then I have a break around 5:00. We’ll go then. But we have to be quick! Do you understand me?” Eric nodded.

“Fifteen, twenty minutes tops. Then we’re back here, and you’re back in bed like nothing ever happened, just in time for dinner, do you get that?”

“Yes.” Then Cartman surprised both of them by smiling — not snarling or smirking, but actually smiling — at Wendy warmly. “Thank you.” He mumbled uncomfortably, almost inaudibly, before booking it back to the bathroom to change back into his hospital gowns.

Wendy finished her rounds in a trance, still thinking about the strange interaction she’d had only a few hours before. She said hello to the nice woman in 204, and ignored the pervy old man in 203 with his nasty, flirty, filthy comments.

By 5:00, she was practically vibrating from the nerves. She wasn’t even sure if what she was doing was completely legal, but she knew more or less how the nurse’s schedules worked around her area, so she knew they could get away with it. Why she was even going through with it at all was lost on the brunette completely.

“Ok.” Wendy whispered as she entered the dark room with Eric Cartman standing in the corner of the room in his sweater and matching baseball hat. “There was just a shift change, so I assume the new nurse just checked in?”

“Yeah, she did. I told her I wanted to sleep so she dimmed the lights for me.”

“Good thinking.” Wendy muttered. Only just now realizing that it was the sneaking out of the room that seemed the biggest hurdle. “How should we get out of here?”

“How should I know, I thought you were coming up with the plan!” Cartman hissed.

“Ok, hold on, just let me think!” Wendy hissed right back. “Ok. We’ll sneak past the desk until they can’t see your face anymore. Then I’ll just pretend you’re a guest that I’m guiding to someone’s room — assuming nobody notices the giant cast. Then we’ll sneak onto the elevator when no one’s watching, and boom! We’re in!”

“This better work, Testaburger.” Cartman grumbled as he pulled his hat low over his eyes.

“Shut up. I’m the one putting my job on the line for this.” Wendy whispered with a poke of her bony finger.
“‘Volunteer-position’. ‘’Cartman corrected with a condescending chuckle.

“Do you want my help or not?” Wendy folded her arms and waited for an answer.

“Yes, please.” He mumbled with his head down.

“Ok.” She put her hand on the door handle and turned the knob slowly. “Then let’s go.”

The two teens crawled along the hospital floor, against the wall of the nurse’s station, until Cartman’s back was to the cluster of nurses.

“Ok… stand up… now!” Wendy instructed, looking over his shoulder to make sure nobody was looking as she helped pull Cartman up, his casted leg dragging behind him as he leaned on her with his good leg. A nearby visitor looked at them strangely, but otherwise didn’t acknowledge them. Wendy was thankful to avoid that potential scene. Luckily, a lot of the adults in South Park had grown up too jaded to give a damn.

“Let’s go, quickly!” Wendy ushered the two of them along, past the receptionist, and to the elevator.

“Ya, but did you hear what she said to Jason? Yeah, now it’s all over the internet, huge gossip right now.” The bored receptionist (that one Wendy never liked) blabbed on to someone on her cell phone. No doubt to someone who was also a disinterested bitch, though Wendy was trying not to judge other women too harshly… unless they deserved it… which, to be fair, many rarely did… some did… this one did.

Wendy and Cartman snuck onto the elevator and pressed the button for three floors above them, crossing their fingers that no one entered with them.

At the last minute, someone did.

“Whoa, whoa, hold the elevator, there!” Some middle-aged goofball laughed as he stuck his arm between the closing doors. Cartman groaned, but Wendy shot him a look, silently reminding him to shut his mouth and not draw attention to themselves.

“So where are you kids headed? Hospice wing, huh? Sorry about that. I’m headed to the maternity wing, I just got off on the wrong floor. My kid-sister-in-law is going into labor any minute, and I’m real excited. Hey! You’re a candy striper, huh? What are you doing riding the elevator, shouldn’t you be helping patients? Or has volunteering changed since my day?” He chuckled even though there wasn’t a joke.

Wendy stared at this man as politely as she could muster. ‘Will this dude ever shut up?’ She thought to herself. One glance at Cartman and she could tell he was thinking the same thing. After a moment of quick thinking, Wendy explained herself.

“Part of my job is to show people around the hospital if they get lost. This guy was visiting a patient on this floor, and he asked me to show him to his grandmother’s floor so he could visit her next. Once I drop him off I’m supposed to come right down here. Does that answer all of your questions?” Wendy hoped her short temper didn’t betray her in her tone of voice.

Either she was as polite as she’d hoped to be, or this dude was as dumb as he looked. He smiled at her happily and continued. “Oh, that’s great! You know, I’m wondering if you can show me where the cafeteria is? My guess is labor takes a really long time and I’ll probably wanna grab something for everyone who’s waiting. Would you mind taking me there when you’re done?”
Thankfully, the elevator dinged, signaling that Wendy and Cartman has arrived on their desired floor. “Oh, I’m really sorry, but this is our stop, so…” Wendy rushed out of the elevator with Cartman in tow.

“Well, I can wait for ya!” The guy smiled politely.

“No need!” Wendy reached in and pressed the ‘close door’ button. “It’s on the third floor. Bye!” She waved politely as the door closed on the slightly confused man.

“Damn, Kitchen Wench,” Cartman chuckled, “that was blunt.”

“Shut up and follow me.” Wendy rolled her eyes.

The two teens walked up to the counter and Wendy smiled at the receptionist warmly.

“Hi! I’m here to drop him off for visiting hours. May we please have some visitor passes?”

The receptionist looked at the two of them skeptically.

“Why are you in a candy striper’s uniform?”

“Oh! That’s because I am one.” Wendy beamed proudly. “This young man was visiting another patient downstairs in my wing and asked me to escort him up here.”

“Yes, we recognize Mr. Cartman, he’s here every Saturday.” Well at least he wasn’t lying about that. Cartman gave Wendy an ‘I told you so’ face as the receptionist continued. “But I’m afraid if you’re supposed to be working, you should really go back downstairs.”

“Oh, no, I’m on my break.” Wendy explained, pulling her timesheet out of her pocket and showing it to the receptionist as proof.

“Well, I’m afraid only family members or volunteers of this wing are allowed inside. Mr. Cartman is welcome to visit Ellen, but I’m afraid you’ll have to wait out here. You’re welcome to take a look at any magazines you want, or if I can get you a water, or a coffee—”

“She’s my grandmother too.” Wendy lied easily. “His mom and my dad are siblings.” Cartman and the receptionist gave her matching shocked and skeptical looks. No way was she letting Cartman out of her sight, no matter how believable his story seemed to be at the moment.

“Is this true?” The receptionist turned toward the bruised and bandaged boy, obviously suspicious as to why he looked like that. Luckily, Cartman was just as quick on his feet.

“Yes, she’s my cousin. She’s just a horrible grandchild so I could only convince her to come today after bribing her with my resort tickets to Vail.” He chuckled amusedly. “Lord knows I’m gonna be a little shy on the slopes for a while after my little accident last week!” To Wendy’s horror, and pleasant surprise, the receptionist laughed along with Cartman’s believable story and began making them temporary visitor passes.

“Snowboader, huh?”

“Skiing, actually.” Cartman leaned on the counter casually. “My step-dad’s family takes us every holiday, and let’s just say Labor Day weekend is not one I’m going to be celebrating next year!” He schmoozed charmingly.

“You superstitious?” The receptionist asked with a chuckle.
“Oh, very!” Cartman nodded, giving Wendy a comical shrug once the receptionist’s back was turned. Wendy smiled only for a second.

“Well, here you go. I’m really glad you’re here to see Ellen, she may not have much time left.”

“Yeah.” Cartoon agreed, a slight tinge of sadness polluting his easygoing smile. “Thanks, Roseanne!” Cartman pulled Wendy along as quickly as he could before the Rosanne changed her mind.

“Quick thinking.” Wendy praised.

“Quick thinking in the elevator.” Cartman returned.

The two teens walked down the corridor to the common living room, where the smell of old and outdated perfumes and colognes, dust, and general hospital smell wafted into their noses.

“Nana!” Cartman smiled, as he limped over to a white haired woman, shaking with Parkinson’s disease and shriveled with age. She was sitting in a wheelchair, with a few blankets draped over her lap, watching Wheel Of Fortune in the corner of the room with some others. Her eyes lit up when she saw Cartman.

“Eric! How lovely! Sam, Sam!” Ellen nudged some sleeping old guy next to her until he awoke with a start. “This is my grandson Eric!” She boasted. “Give me a kiss, sweet boy!” She cooed. To Wendy’s absolute shock, Cartman bent down and happily kissed his grandmother on the cheek.

“Hi, Nana. Sorry, I don’t have anything for you today.” He apologized.

“Oh, that’s ok dear, my room is brimming with flowers as it is.” ‘What is happening?!’ Wendy wondered if she had slipped into some other alternate universe, one where Cartman was actually fucking nice sometimes. Was she on some game show? Was she about to be Punk’d or something? “Oh!” Ellen exclaimed, addressing Cartman’s battered form, “What happened dear?”

“Skiing accident.” Cartman lied. It was probably better than the truth anyway.

“Sit down, dear, sit down. Sam. Sam! Scoot down so my grandson could have a seat!” Nana Cartman demanded with all the superiority and leadership of her grandson.

“Did you know I was on Wheel of Fortune in my 30’s?” She asked him proudly as he fell against the couch with a wince.

“Yes, you’ve told me that before.” He grumbled, holding onto his sore ribs.

“Oh!” She exclaimed in surprise. She turned her wide smile to him lovingly. “So what are you doing here?” She asked him sweetly

“I just came to say ‘hi’. It’s Saturday. And I always like to come visit you on the weekends.” Cartman smiled — fucking smiled — at this old lady like she meant the world to him. Maybe she did…

“How’s your mother?” Wendy heard her ask quietly, as the off-duty candy striper leaned against the far wall casually, watching this interaction play out with fascination, and so many questions.

“Still so busy, with her new job,” She heard Cartman lie again. “Mom wished she could come, but she just couldn’t get away from the office again.” Now Wendy knew that wasn’t the truth.
“I see.” Nana Cartman tilted her chin up proudly, most likely seeing right through Cartman’s thinly veiled attempt to protect his mom’s dignity. “I’m glad you make time for me.” She smiled at him gratefully.

“Of course!” Cartman smiled. Well, who’s to say a Momma’s boy can’t also be a Grandma’s boy?

“Eric,” Ellen muttered, staring directly at Wendy, leaning against the doorway not 10 ft away. “Who’s that pretty girl over there?” Wendy startled, feeling like she was caught doing something wrong, and turned around to hide herself but finding no such luck and simply waving awkwardly instead. Eric made a mockingly disgusted face.

“Kitchen W— I mean, Wendy? She’s just a candy striper on the floor I’m staying on. She helped me come up here and see you.”

“She’s very pretty.” Ellen praised, before waving at Wendy and calling her over. “Hello, dear!”

“Hello!” Wendy smiled politely as she walked over, Eric silently begging her to stay put.

“You’re very pretty.” Ellen told her once she got closer.

“Thank you!” Wendy acknowledged, with a small glance of superiority at the tense teen to Nana’s right.

“You work here?” Nana wondered.

“I volunteer a few floors down.” Wendy explained.

“Oh, that’s lovely.” Nana praised. Then she turned to face her grandson. “She’s a good one. Don’t blow it.” She told him, amusement spread across Wendy’s face as Cartman’s jaw dropped in shock.

“Gross.” Cartman grumbled, just quietly enough so his grandmother couldn’t hear, but loudly enough that he made sure Wendy did. He was looking right at her, for Goddess’ sake.

Then, something changed. The energy in the room shifted; calm, like just before a storm.

Wendy watched on in horror as Nana Cartman went quiet, a confused look spreading over her face.

“Fuck.” Cartman uttered under his breath, panic clear on his face. “Nana? Are you ok?” Nana Cartman looked around the room dazedly until her eyes landed on Wendy.

“Hello, dear. You’re very pretty.”

“Thank… thank you.” Wendy muttered awkwardly, sending a confused look Cartman’s way, only to be met by a sheet white face, and eyes as wide as if he’d seen a ghost.

“What’s wrong?” Wendy asked him quietly.

“And who is this handsome, young gentleman.” What?

“Nana, it’s Eric, remember? Liane’s son? Liane is your daughter. I’m your grandson.” Eric explained to no avail, as Ellen looked at him skeptically. Time seemed to slow down. Wendy felt sick to her stomach, tears pricking her eyes as she watched Eric Cartman try desperately to get his grandmother to remember his face.
“Oh… yes.” Ellen lied, feigning recognition though her eyes were glazed over and wandering.

“Come on, Eric, let’s leave her be.” Wendy whispered, horrified at the events unfolding before her.

“Hang on a second.” He whispered back, tensing his jaw as his expression saddened.

Eric pulled out a young picture of his mom and himself on his cell phone and showed it to Ellen.

“Remember us?” He asked, almost pleadingly. “This is Liane, and this is Eric, are they starting to look familiar yet?”

Quickly, a light seemed to click on behind Ellen’s eyes as a smile spread over her face beautifully.

“That’s a lovely picture! That’s my daughter and grandson, you know.”

“Yeah!” Eric agreed hopefully. “That’s me.” He pointed to a picture of a younger version of himself. “I’m all grown up.”

“Oh, that’s lovely!” Ellen clapped her hands together, still not completely lucid, and clearly not believing that her grandson was any older than that 10 year old picture. She continued to portray cognizance in her semi-lucid state. It was breaking Wendy’s heart, and she just wanted to get Cartman and herself out of there.

“Cartman, I don’t think she’s really present—”

“I can get her back.”

“You can’t—”

“Just let me say goodbye.” He muttered, not looking at Wendy. “Remember, Ellen, last week, I gave you roses? Remember what roses smell like, Nana? Think really hard.”

Ellen closed her eyes and thought about it.

Cartman partially turned towards Wendy, eyes not leaving his grandmother’s face. “You might need to go in her room, and—”

Suddenly Ellen opened her eyes with a smile on her face.

“Eric! My sweet boy! This is such a lovely surprise!” She cheered as she clapped her hands together excitedly.

“Hi Nana,” Cartman cupped her cheek lovingly. “Listen,” He whispered, “I just came to say hello, but I’ve got to get going, ok?”

“Oh ok. Tell your mother I said hello.” Nana requested.

“I will.” He whispered. “Bye, Nana.” Eric leant over to give her a kiss on the cheek, and she smiled at him gratefully.

Wendy helped Eric stand up and walked him out of the room.

“Is she always… forgetful… like that?” Wendy asked him carefully as he leaned on her, limping out of the room and holding onto her elbow for support.
“Sometimes.” He explained expressionlessly. “This time she wasn’t completely gone, but sometimes she is, and those times it scares her. Then she throws a fit, and I have to call the nurse. I’m glad this was time it wasn’t one of those.” He sighed. “It didn’t used to be that bad. Last month was better. Now, it’s not as bad as it will be next month. She’s just gonna keep getting worse until she dies here, alone.” Wendy looked up at Cartman, his blank expression unreadable.

“That’s incredibly sad.” Wendy sympathized.

“Yeah.” He agreed, limping ahead of her as quickly as he could, to push the elevator button, sighing deeply, as Wendy stared at his slumped form.

Wendy was able to sneak Eric back into his room, and sign in from her break like nothing ever happened. She made her rounds with the dinner trays, making sure to hit Eric’s room last — partially because her orders included making sure he eats for some reason, and partially because she felt he deserved some company after the incredibly lonely interaction he’d had moments ago.

“Hey.” She greeted as she brought his tray in.

“Kitchen Wench.” He drawled half heartedly.

“I told you not to call me that.” She muttered distractedly as she set his tray down in front of him. Eric stared at it blankly for a moment before picking up the pudding cup.

“You know, you shouldn’t eat dessert first, you’ll spoil your appetite for dinner.” Wendy explained as she pulled up a chair and rested her feet against the edge of his bed.

“God, do you ever stop talking?” Cartman hissed under his breath.

“I’m just trying to help you!” Wendy defended.

“Well, thanks, Mom.” Eric drawled sarcastically, taking a small bite of his pudding cup and eyeing her, annoyed. She looked down at her phone, that she technically wasn’t supposed to have, and gave him some privacy while he ate.

“Your Nana is lucky to have a grandson like you.” She whispered. Cartman scoffed and took another bite of pudding.

“If she knew the real me, she wouldn’t want anything to do with me.” He muttered.

“That might be true.” Wendy agreed jokingly. Cartman, however didn’t think it was very funny.

“Thaaaaaanks.” He droned, knitting his eyebrows together and shoving three consecutive spoonfuls into his mouth forcefully.

“Why doesn’t your mom come visit her?” Wendy wondered.

Eric put down his pudding, and sighed.

“She just doesn’t care. Plain and simple, it’s ‘too hard’ to see Nana like that, so she’d rather put her out of her mind and forget she even exists.”
“That sucks.” Wendy tried her best at an attempt of consolation. It wasn’t a great one.

Cartman just nodded, looking down at his cut up knuckles.

“How did you learn that ‘roses’ trick?” Wendy wondered. “That was pretty impressive.”

Cartman shrugged. “I read that smells can trigger memories. It’s ironic because the disease actually knocked out her sense of smell a year ago, but if she focuses on the distant memory of a smell sometimes that works just as well. Usually it doesn’t…” His voice trailed off.

“Eric,” Wendy tried again, “I wasn’t kidding when I said your grandmother’s lucky to have you. Because she is. The look on her face when she saw you walk in there… you clearly mean a lot to her.”

“Thank you, Kitchen Wench.” Eric smiled mischievously through his softened expression.

Wendy rolled her eyes.

“Shut up and eat, I wanna get the fuck out of here.” Wendy scowled, mostly to hide the smile that crossed her lips, if only for a brief moment.

“Oh, crap, well, Jesus Christ.” Cartman muttered amusedly as he smirked at her above his pudding cup.

She stayed with him until he’d finished, taking his empty tray out to the hallway.

“Hey.” She called to him from her doorway, at the end of her shift.

“Who’s that? It can’t be Kitchen Wench because that’s not her uniform and I wouldn’t recognize her face without a name tag underneath it.” Cartman joked disgustingly from his bed.

“Shut up, I came in here to say ‘bye’… and to ask you something… but you don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to…” Wendy thought very carefully about the wording of her next question. “Why are we supposed to make sure you eat?”

“Guess.”

Wendy nodded.

“You gonna make fun of me?” Eric grumbled.

“What the fuck?!” No.” Wendy was taken aback by the assumption.

“Hm.” Cartman hummed in response, expression frozen, deep in thought.

“I’m off tomorrow.” Wendy changed the subject. “I’m sure you’ll give one of the other volunteers a hard time instead?”

“Oh, absolutely, I’m gonna give ‘em Hell, just for you.” He winked at her, obnoxiously.

Wendy rolled her eyes. “Yeah, well, I’ll see you at school on Monday.”

“Thanks for tak-ing me on a John Hughes- style escape-adventure through the hosp-it-al to-day.” He called, mewling to her childishy as she turned to leave.
Wendy turned around to face his devious grin and mocking eyes.

“Um… No problem… just call me Molly Ringwald.” She eyed him suspiciously, watching his face soften into a genuine smile at her response. She chuckled at him and turned to leave.

Wendy was fine, until she heard his usual, disrespectful drawl, calling after her playfully, the smirk audible in his voice in a way that sent chills up and down Wendy’s spine.

“See ya later… Wendy.”
Playgrounds and Cigarettes

Chapter Summary

This one gets a little scandalous, I love it!
We won't really hear much from Kevin or Shelly for the rest of the first installation, but they are officially an item now.

POV - Shelly

Monday had rolled around again, and Shelly wasn’t scheduled to go back to her Anger Management meeting again until tomorrow.

Which made it very surprising when she got a text from Kevin, today.

At 8:00 at fucking night, of course.

Shelly was a little bit hurt, she thought the way she and Kevin had connected last week meant something special. Now he was calling her up for a booty call. At 8:00? Why, so he can be back in bed by 10:00? Asshole!

From Kevin: Meet me at the playground

To Kevin: Excuse me?

To Kevin: You think I’m just gonna come because you call me like a dog?

She would go, though, that was definitely happening. She just wanted to make sure Kevin knew his place, and knew that Shelly had grown up since they last were a thing. She was a grown fucking woman now, and she was not gonna take shit from any man.

From Kevin: I’m sorry, Marsh. Come, please?

Fuck, he’s good.

Kevin had Shelly wrapped around his little finger, and he fucking knew it.

Well, Shelly thought to herself as she tossed her phone back onto her bed and watched it carefully, arms folded in defiance, she would just have to keep him waiting.
From Kevin:  I wanted to see you again. At our special place.

From Kevin: Bring back old memories ;)

God. Dammit.

Shelly whimpered in frustration as she struggled to not pick up the phone and text back, immediately.

After carefully cultivating exactly what she should say in her head, Shelly grabbed at her phone and typed her response.

To Kevin: Whatever.

Shelly squealed a little bit as she threw her phone against her bed and rushed over to the mirror.

She ran a brush through her hair, then fucked it up again a little bit so it wasn’t, too perfect.

She put on her sluttiest top, and then her most conservative. She decided to settle somewhere in the middle with a black, strappy bralette underneath a lace tank top, all underneath a cut up, Ramones t-shirt, sleeveless and open down the sides, tied the waist. The hollowed-out scoop neck was just low enough to show the extra straps of the bralette without showing any cleavage. She paired it with jeans and high-top chucks. All black. Shelly threw on Kevin’s sweatshirt for an added touch of suggestion, and added a little bit of lipstick. She then wiped it off embarrassedly, knowing full well she would look like she was trying too hard. And Kevin didn’t deserve her effort.

Shelly gave herself a congratulatory wink with her black, rimmed eyes, and agreed with herself that she looked hot. She gave her mousy hair one more flip, and kicked out her window screen.

Shelly walked to the park in silence, remembering days of romance past, where she and Kevin would meet down at this playground after school, or late at night, to make out and smoke cigarettes. The following year, when they got older, and their meetings became more scarce, the foreplay became riskier, and the smoke billowed darker.

They would then run through the streets of South Park, laughing and racing each other until the wind whipped most of the weed smoke out of their clothes.

Her trip down memory lane was interrupted, an embarrassing smile playing across her lips, as Kevin’s tall and broad frame blocked her view.

“Whatcha daydreaming about?” He whispered interestingly, rolling on the balls of his feet, hands in his pockets, smirking at her with carefree ease as her face reddened instantly at the question.

“Don’t sneak up on people.” She hit him gently in the arm.
“You’re face is too cute.” He cooed, brushing it gently with his hand as it darkened an even deeper crimson, cackling like a hyena as she brushed him off.

“What do you want McCormick?” She asked agitatedly, though admittedly not as much so as she would have liked.

“To see you.” He grinned easily. ‘Goddamn McCormicks…’ Shelly narrowed her eyes, internally cursing the irresistible McCormick charm that all McCormicks seemed to possess in spades, and Kevin had seemed to have inherited tenfold.

“For what? Why are you here?” Shelly crossed her arms stand-offishly, and looked him up and down. He was wearing baggy, black jeans that were ripped in the knees, though that appeared to be more of a homemade job in order to make the jeans more or less resemble a similar designer pair. He had leather, motorcycle boots on, despite the fact that Kevin had never ridden a motorcycle in his life. ‘Or maybe he had’, Shelly realized with a slight pang in her chest, ‘I guess I don’t really know who Kevin McCormick is anymore’. In a much more casual display than the week before, Kevin was simply wearing a plain, white t-shirt, a leather jacket, and a red flannel tied low around his waist. Fuck, Shelly wanted to wrap her arms around that waist…

Kevin smirked out of the corner of his mouth as he caught her staring. He returned the favor with a far more obvious appraisal, looking her up and down slowly, tilting his head and leaning his body slightly to get a good look at her sideview, from where she stood fuming in front of him. “Same as you.” He mumbled distractedly, before closing his mouth in an expression of approval, and standing up straight again, folding his arms and leaning on his hip as a wild smile broke out across his face. “I just couldn’t stay away.”

FUCK.

What a fucking pig, fucking… wild animal! Kevin was a wolf, and he was not to be trusted around lambs.

Ah, who was Shelly kidding; she was no lamb. She was probably more like a… lizard. Something with spikes that shoots blood out of its eyes.

He was a shark, and she was an easily manipulated minnow.

“Mhm.” She hummed skeptically. Don’t get her wrong, Shelly was so down to see Kevin again like this, but it was more the nature of the late night text that had her concerned. What were his intentions, what were his expectations? Why was he so hard to read, yet so observant of her every move?! Goddamn animal…

“I see you’re still wearing my sweatshirt.” He smirked, digging into his pocket for a half-finished cigarette.

“You can have it back, I’ll take it off right now.” Shelly promised, making it clear that she didn’t need Kevin… She just wanted him really, really, badly.

“No you can keep it I don’t… mind.” Kevin’s voice trailed off as Shelly pulled off his hoodie, only to reveal the strappy, lacy, don’t-give-a-fuck, ripped t-shirt ensemble underneath. “Fuck.” He observed so eloquently, as he took in the sight of her.

“Like what you see?” She purred, happy to have the upper hand again.

Kevin blushed — for once — and cleared his throat as he tilted the cigarette carton towards her.
“No thanks.” She waved him off disinterestedly.

“Damn, you really make a man work for it, huh?” He chuckled around his tobacco stick as he fished out a lighter from his flannel pocket. Kevin leaned against the wooden playset behind him and lit his cigarette. He took a long drag as he stared at her intensely. Shelly stared right back. Kevin leaned his head back and exhaled, blowing perfect smoke rings at the sky, showing off. Shelly watched his long neck stretch along with the movement, and wondered absently with it would feel like to run her fingers down his throat and feel his muscles twitch beneath her skin. To feel his body again, this completely new body. His bangs fell perfectly in front of his smoldering eyes as he tipped his chin back down to look at her.

“Let’s face it Shelly, you and I are supposed to be together.” He explained matter-of-factly as he went in for another drag.

Shelly rolled her eyes. “Yeah until the next girl comes along.”


“You still never told me what happened to you.” Shelly spoke softly, walking over to lean against the playset next to him.

“In regards to what?” He grumbled disinterestedly as he took another drag.

“Why we stopped talking. Why we’re seeing each other now. What this all… means?”

Kevin paused mid-puff and narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. He scowled into the distance as he breathed smoke through his nose.

“I don’t know.” He answered honestly. “To any of it.” He turned to look at Shelly, softly, brown eyes no longer guarded and boastful. Shelly could see a ghost of the old Kevin she used to know — unsure and insecure — staring down at her under dark lashes.

“I don’t know if I can trust you again.” She whispered cautiously.

“I know.” He hung his head, bangs falling into his softened eyes.

“You disappeared.” Shelly snapped unrelentingly.

“I know, Shelly, just… please.” Kevin begged in irritation. “I know I messed up. And I didn’t think it mattered because I didn’t think you cared, that’s my bad.”

“Yeah.” Shelly agreed.

“But… just give me a second chance?” Kevin pleaded, his voice timid but his smile wicked.

Shelly looked at him, at the way he was watching her like he knew how to play her, irresistible smile stretched proudly across his high cheekbones, framed by dimples above a sharp jaw…

“You don’t deserve it.” She snarled.

“Yeah? Well neither do you.” He spat furiously, flicking his dead cigarette butt off to the side, ignoring her gaze like she was nothing but the trash he’d just littered onto the concrete.

“What, me?” Shelly rounded on him, stepping directly in his path confrontationally.
“Yeah.” Kevin shot up from where he was leaning against the wall, glaring down at her intimidatingly. “Don’t act like this is all on me, you abandoned me too!!” He yelled thunderously, misery apparent in his hurt voice.

“When?!” Shelly exclaimed shakily, throwing her hands up in the air, gesturing all around her furiously as she screamed at the top of her lungs with all the anger and sadness she’d kept bottled up for years. “When I flunked out of four classes, because I was too busy fucking around with you? Or when I waited after school for you, for months! At a high school you were barely attending anymore?!”

“When you stopped… calling.” Kevin explained slowly and harshly, through clenched teeth, jaw shaking, a pained look on his face. No… Had she really been the one to phase him out? No, Shelly distinctly remembered him not calling her back… and then she never called him again…

“Look,” He began again, “let’s just start over. Forget the past, and start here, now.”

Shelly scoffed, tears brimming her eyes. She looked up at Kevin, shaking her head, eyes sad, her next words leaving her lips in a whisper.

“I don’t want to forget.”

Shelley lunged at him, wrapping her arms around his waist, under his jacket, grasping her hands behind his back. She rested her head against his chest as she held onto him tightly.

Kevin was shocked; he held his breath, arms stretched out at his sides stiffly like he’d never seen a person hug someone before. After a moment, he leaned down, and wrapped his strong arms around her. He kissed the top of her head sweetly, as if for the very first time; as if atoning for all those years apart when he should have existed with his arms around her.

“I don’t know how we’ll get back there again,” Kevin murmured quietly in Shelly’s ear, “but I’ve missed you. I wanna kiss you again without… without our braces getting stuck together.” He chuckled, Shelly’s shoulders tensed as she held him tighter. “Shelly,” He purred in her ear, smoothing her hair down as he continued to whisper in her ear. “I don’t know how I can get you to forgive me, but whatever it is, I’ll do it.”

Shelly tipped her head up and looked at him curiously, vulnerability played out all over his face, to the point where he crumbled uncomfortably under her gaze, shifting his weight nervously as he waited for her verdict.

Shelly smirked playfully. “I think I have an idea.” She hummed seductively, leaning in ever so slowly. Right as their lips were about to touch…

“Race ya!” She shoved Kevin backwards and took off running.

“Oh! No fair, Marsh!” Kevin called as he sprinted after her.

The two raced each other down their usual route, Kevin barely able to keep up with Shelly, just like the old days. At a certain point he caught her, picking her up by the waist and placing her behind him, giving himself a small head start, which she easy closed and surpassed, moments later.

“Hold on! Hold on, I can’t.” Kevin called out in surrender to the teasing girl who kept slowing down, running around him, only to speed off ahead of him later. He put his hands on his knees, panting and out of breath from the effort.
“That’s ‘cause you smoke too many cigarettes, McCormick! Shit’s bad for you.” Shelly smirked from where she gloated in front of him. He exhaled a laugh, looking up at her over his raised eyebrows before bowing his head in defeat again. “Shoulda quit.” She bragged, walking over to him slowly. “Like I did, when you and all your blunts disappeared from my life.”

“You should be on the track team.” Kevin wheezed.

“I was, but my grades are shit.” Shelly shrugged, though in hindsight it was something that had always bothered her.

Kevin coughed and hacked as the tar in his lungs threatened to strangle him. Dumbass even whipped out his inhaler. Kevin spit on the concrete next to him as Shelly stepped in front of him.

“You’re disgusting.”

Kevin straightened up in front of her, tilting his head, leaning forward to cut off Shelly’s cocky retort with a passionate kiss. Shelly could feel his tongue lapping its way inside her mouth, his fingers grabbing her hair, her ass, her chest, re-familiarizing themselves with her body — older now, with more to her than when he’d last traced his fingers across her collarbone and felt her flesh peeping out from her top.

He stepped closer to her as he grabbed her chin, tilting her head back to allow him deeper access into her soft mouth, feeling her body pressed against his as her hands roamed across his broad back.

Kevin pulled back slightly, pulling his tongue out of her mouth, hips leaning lazily against hers, and peppering her lips with soft, innocent kisses, his fingers dancing across lace and skin.

Fucking animal…

Shelly lay in Kevin’s bed and looked him over very carefully.

His sharp jaw puckered with every drag and exhale of smoke. His long eyelashes fluttered against his sun-tanned skin as his eyes drifted closed with every deep inhale. His dark eyes smoldered underneath his furrowed brows, watching her. Kevin brushed the hair out of his eyes, purposely showing off and flexing his strongly defined tricep as he looked at her.

Shelly had never seen someone so fluent in the language of flirting that they sometimes spoke it in beautiful tongue, unintentionally.

It felt as if she was looking at a soulmate from a past life; this was the same Kevin McCormick she’d known most of her life, the familiarity of feeling him in the dark just as if he’d never left. Yet he was bigger now, and stronger, and knew how to use his hands. It was the exciting whirlwind of a new fling with the haunting scent of an old flame.

Shelly had changed too — grown up, learned some new things here and there, and, as Kevin so eloquently put it when they met up again for the first time last week, she’s got huge tits now.

Shelly absently ran her fingers over the ripples of Kevin’s abdomen, feeling each muscle twitch underneath her fingertips.

“Well,” Shelly prompted, stealing the joint from between his fingers and taking a long drag off of it, “Was it better than you remember?” She smiled, blowing gray clouds to the ceiling.

“Was it better than losing my virginity in the bushes outside of the park when I was 14? Yeah,
Shelly, it was better than that." Kevin snorted, a slight meanness to his response that Shelly tried to ignore. She remembered that night, almost 6 years ago exactly, right before his 15th birthday — in that small stretch of the year when they were almost the same age, right before he surpassed her again, like he seemed to do with every other aspect of their lives.

It was clumsy, and they were nervous... it was the last time she saw him...

Shelly watched as a familiar constellation of moles and freckles rise and fell on his chest as he leaned over with his lighter and took another drag from the rolled paper in Shelly’s hand.

“I didn’t know I’d missed you so much…” Shelly spoke softly as Kevin kissed the side of her poised hand before exhaling to the ceiling.

He smiled. “But…” He kissed her shoulder and encouraged her to continue.

Shelly reached over Kevin to place the joint on the bedside table’s ashtray. Shelly lay down on her side, so close she could feel his body heat as she looked deep into his beautiful brown eyes, “…But being with you again,” Kevin’s soft eyes drifted closed as she ran her thumb across his jaw, caressing his cheek, “it’s like nothing changed. It’s like nothing, and no one in between then and now… matters. It’s just you and me, like it’s supposed to be… Does that make sense?”

“Shelly, Shelly, Shelly, Shelly...” Kevin breathed in a whisper, the sound of his voice sending chills up and down the back of her neck, and down to the tips of her toes. “Shelly...” He whispered again, before he kissed her gently, running a hand up and down her arm as they lay next to each other. Shelly looked into his eyes, vulnerable with worry and fear of rejection, she felt like she was back in eighth grade, looking into these same eyes, telling him she wanted him for the very first time.

Kevin chuckled embarrassedly, looking down at his bedsheets. “You talk too much.” He joked, his knee-jerk instinct to push her away if she go too close. “But I like it.” Shelly looked up at him surprisingly as a pink tinge spread across his cheeks. “And…” Kevin buried his face in her neck, nuzzling her shoulder and kissing her soft skin before chuckling to himself, shaking his head in disbelief. “…I know exactly what you mean...” He admitted in a whisper.

Shelly gently pushed against his shoulders, urging him to look at her. He pulled back and gazed down at her.

“Don’t make me admit that again.” He joked, Shelly swatting him in the chest as she rolled her eyes.

He kissed her briefly, before reaching over to pick up the white joint from his ashtray. Kevin sunk back down next to Shelly.

“I have to ask,” Shelly sat up, ignoring the way Kevin comically stared at her naked breasts so blatantly. She grabbed his hand and pulled his arm out straight beside him. “What the fuck is up with this tattoo?”

Kevin laughed effortlessly, the kind of laugh that Shelly had not heard in a long time.

“Oh, this?” He stretched his arm out straider and smiled down at the sloppy ink on the inside of his bicep, to reveal a small set of sloppily written words that read, ‘Kenny was here!’ and in careful cursive, ‘Karen too!’ on his left arm.

Kevin chuckled at the memory as he began telling the story.
“I was throwing a small rager in my house when I was, I think, sixteen, so Kenny would have been twelve, I think… and Karen was ten. Anyway, some friends invited their friends, and by the time everyone’d arrived I ended up only knowing like three of the ten people that were hanging out. One of them turned out to be a tattoo artist, he was like 25 — who knows why he was hanging out with a bunch of kids.” Kevin paused to take another drag, before passing it to Shelly so he could continue talking with his hands.

“Anyway, everybody got shit faced, and I was passed out on the couch when Kenny and Karen come home from school — oh yeah this shit all happened before 3 o’clock, by the way” Shelly nodded and took another drag. “And apparently Kenny’s like ‘tattoo gun? Cool!’ And the shit-faced tattoo artist just thinks it’s hilarious so he lets him write on my arm — shows him how to and everything.” Kevin chuckles and rolls his eyes, “Now it’s funny, but I was so mad at the time… Well, I wake up, just as he’s finished writing the exclamation mark and I’m like what the fuck? Get out of here!” Shelly could imagine the hilarious look on his sibling’s faces as Kevin drunkenly flailed around in front of them. “And apparently Kenny’s like ‘tattoo gun? Cool!’ And the shit-faced tattoo artist just thinks it’s hilarious so he lets him write on my arm — shows him how to and everything.” Kevin chuckles and rolls his eyes, “Now it’s funny, but I was so mad at the time… Well, I wake up, just as he’s finished writing the exclamation mark and I’m like what the fuck? Get out of here!” Shelly could imagine the hilarious look on his sibling’s faces as Kevin drunkenly flailed around in front of them. “And apparently Kenny was like ‘tattoo gun? Cool!’ And the shit-faced tattoo artist just thinks it’s hilarious so he lets him write on my arm — shows him how to and everything.” Kevin chuckles and rolls his eyes, “Now it’s funny, but I was so mad at the time… Well, I wake up, just as he’s finished writing the exclamation mark and I’m like ‘what the fuck? Get out of here!’”

Shelly felt the smile fall off of her face. Her eyes drifted downward with guilt. “I used to bully your sister.” Shelly admitted ashamedly.

“You… you did?”

“Yeah.” Shelly bit her lip, watching Kevin’s eyebrows pull together as he stared ahead, lost in thought. “And I shoved your brother into a wall.” Shut up, Shelly! “The other day.” Why was she even admitting this? Shelly guessed she just felt guilty after fucking the love of her young life and seeing the names of the victims of her wrath tattooed on his body so lovingly.

“Yeah, that’s all gotta stop…” Kevin demanded firmly.

“I know.” Shelly bowed her head shamefully, the best version of an apology that she could muster. She kissed his shoulder absentely, passing the joint back to Kevin. “It will.”

Kevin snaked a hand around her neck as he pulled her back down to him, blowing smoke into her mouth before snaking his tongue in after the dark clouds. She pulled away and took the small joint out of his hands, taking a very small drag before placing it back on the ashtray on the nightstand to his right.

“So that’s your favorite tattoo, huh?” Shelly changed the subject, smirking at him as she slid onto his lap. Kevin grabbed her hips as she rolled them slightly, but didn’t say anything else. “I like… this one.” Shelly bent her head and kissed the simple, line-work cross adorning Kevin’s muscular chest. She felt his breath hitch beneath her lips. “Or this one.” Shelly slid down his body, dragging her tongue along his torso to the small angel wing on his right hip. “Or this one.” Shelly found her way across his hips to the wing on the other side, watching his stomach rise and fell deliciously with each panting breath.

Then there was a knock on Kevin’s door.
“Go away.” Kevin called, groaning under his breath as he grabbed onto Shelly’s hair.

“Can I come in?” Kenny called through the door.

“Fuck no, I said go away!” Kevin yelled at the door, tipping his head back with a sigh as Shelly looked up at him from under the thin, dirty sheet, tongue dragging across his skin.

“I have to ask you something!”

“Fuck off, I’m with someone in here, we’re busy!”

Kevin whimpered quietly, biting his lip, fists balling up in the sheets — Shelly couldn’t tell if he was just really angry at Kenny, or if she was just doing a reaaaally good job.

“Jesus Christ, ok, guess I’ll just fuck the fuck off then…” Shelly could hear Kenny mutter comically as he walked away. Shelly chuckled, her throat vibrating. Kevin moaned, biting his knuckles as his eyebrows furrowed and raised, twitching like the tense in his thighs as Shelly traced her fingers over his skin.

“Well, I’m gonna get going,” Shelly announced later as she crawled out of bed, picking up her many discarded articles of clothing strewn about across Kevin’s floor.

“No, Marsh!” He whined, grabbing her hand as she walked away, thumb rubbing against the back of her hand in a way that reminded her of something he’d done just a few minutes earlier. “You can stay over, I’m sure the floor is very comfortable.” Kevin teased with a smirk. Shelly picked up his discarded boxer shorts and threw them at him.

“Tempting, but no thanks.” Shelly snarled. She felt arms around her torso the minute she turned around. Kevin’s hands roamed across her exposed stomach and she felt his hot breath in her ear. She could feel his bare skin pressing up against her back.

“Don’t go.” He requested simply.

“I have school tomorrow, remember? I’m still suspended.” Shelly explained as she pried Kevin’s arms from around her waist one by one and turned to face him.

“This isn’t the last time, I swear.” She muttered gently, caressing his tense cheek with her hand. A look of worry flashed across Kevin’s face, for just a second; it was gone as soon as it had come, replaced with a cocky smirk so quickly it was as if it had never even happened.

Shelly threw on her t-shirt, over her bra, tossing the bralette and tank top into her purse hastily. She pulled on her jeans, as Kevin sat on the edge of his bed — now wearing only his boxer shorts — watching her get dressed. It was weirdly uncomfortable, no matter what kind of history she had with him. Shelly wordlessly sat next to him to put on her socks and shoes.

Kevin tilted his head in her direction, without really looking at her. When she finished getting dressed he cupped her chin with his hand and kissed her deeply. Kevin was not a man of many words, in fact too many words sometimes got him in trouble. But with that kiss, Shelly felt like she had gained access to a piece of his mind, and she heard everything he wished he could say.

“Bye.” She whispered, pulling away and walking towards his door before she’d even opened her eyes, she didn’t want to look at him.
She knew then she’d stay.

“You forgot something.” Kevin called after her as she turned the doorknob to leave. He was standing over by a chair in the corner of his room, wearing only his boxer shorts, body chiseled like a greek god. He grabbed an article of clothing off of the chair and tossed it to her with a whistle.

Shelly caught it. It was Kevin’s sweatshirt. She looked at him, puzzled.

“Keep it, sweetheart.” He nodded his head with a charming smirk, leaning against the wall and folding his arms casually.

Shelly flipped him off, turning it into a heart, and he did the reverse.

She smiled to him as she slinked out of his doorway.

“Oh, sorry.” Shelly almost ran into Kenny who was on his way back from the kitchen. He stared at her in wide-eyed horror as she ran past him and out the door. “Later, twerp!”

Shelly ran out the door and all the way to her house, smiling to herself the whole time. In no time at all she was back at home, scaling the side of her house with the retractable ladder she’d left hanging out of her window, and crawled back into her bedroom. Shelly fell back against her bed, Kevin’s sweatshirt clutched to her chest as she daydreamed about playgrounds and cigarettes, leather jackets and soft brown eyes.
POV - Kevin

“Um… am I on fucking drugs or did I just see Shelly Marsh run out of this house?” Kenny asked accusingly, pointing behind him in the general direction of the front door.

Kevin shrugged noncommittally, “I don’t know man, what’ve you been smokin’?” Speaking of, Kevin reached over to re-light and take another clean inhale of smokey air.

“Nothing. Can I come in?” Kenny fidgeted in the doorway.

Kevin gestured for him to come in, pulling a t-shirt over his head from a dirty pile of clothes on the floor.

“Is it safe to sit down?” Kenny asked tentatively, as slight edge of annoyance to his voice.

“Mm, I wouldn’t.” Kevin shrugged.

“Gross.” Kenny scoffed, “Shelly fucking Marsh…” He muttered disbelievingly to himself, dragging in a desk chair from across the room and sitting down.

“You know you’re fucking the devil, right?” Kenny accused as he put his feet up on Kevin’s bed. Kevin knocked his feet off, only for them to be put right back a second later.

“Come on, man, it’s Shelly.” Kevin shrugged, jaw tight. He passed the joint to Kenny, who took one small inhale and handed it back.

Kenny narrowed his eyes. “Ok, I know you used to be, like, kindred rebel hearts or something but she disrespected Karen, and she used to bully her in middle school.”

“Fuck, yeah, I know that, alright? She told me. And I told her she couldn’t be doing that anymore... You think I wouldn’t defend her?” Kevin yelled agitatedly, voice rising in spite of himself.

“Whatever, I’ll just let Karen chew you out when she finds out…” Kenny rolled his eyes and folded his arms.

“Yeah? Let her.” Kevin spat combatively. Kenny could be so irritating sometimes. “Grow up, Kenny, just because Shelly was a bitch to you, or whatever—”

“I don’t give a shit about me, I give a shit about my sister, and you should too!” Kenny yelled
“Hey, you guys talking about me? What’s going on?” Karen’s head appeared in the doorway, concern wide on her small face.

“Nothing.” Both boys snapped.

“Jesus. Fuck me then I guess, ok…” Karen muttered as she made her way to her bedroom and slammed the door.

“You know that’s not fair.” Kevin grumbled, pointing a finger in Kenny’s self-righteous face, feeling just a little bit guilty that yeah, maybe he doesn’t always know what goes on around here anymore. Actually, he felt a lot guilty. “I care about Karen — and what I do, or don’t do with Shelly Marsh is literally none of her, or your, goddamn business. You got that?” Kevin growled.

“Fine. Whatever.” Kenny conceded, folding like a flower under the confrontation. “Fuck! Just… I didn’t come in here to fucking fight with you, ok? I really need to ask you something…” Kenny looked down at the floor apologetically.

Kevin shook his head, blowing smoke over his shoulder carelessly. “Whatever it is, ask someone else.”

“Who, Dad?” Kenny glared at Kevin hurtfully. Kevin’s little brother had very little respect for their father anymore, and honestly Kevin was right there with him. Their parents were doing very well for a lot of years, but one slip up a year ago and they both fell back on the pipe and back into the unemployment office. Kevin wondered if any of their friends even knew half of what their kids knew their life was like…

Kevin had grown up doing more fathering for his siblings than his own father had ever done for him. It wasn’t until Kevin was 15 that they finally cleaned up their act again for what was supposed to be the last time. By that time it was too late for Kevin: he was failing everything, fucking up his life. But it wasn’t too late for his brother and sister.

The siblings stuck together like their lives depended on it, and for his younger siblings, it literally did. Kevin cooked their meals, and made sure they had clean laundry. At the time, his siblings were still impressionable enough that Kevin could drill a more positive influence in their heads, even if it was more of a ‘do as I say, not as I do’ type of technique.

But now his parents were slipping in and out again, and his siblings are right around the same age as Kevin was when his life completely changed. It’s important that Kenny and Karen knew they had someone at least partially reliable to turn to… well, at least more reliable than struggling, off-the-wagon-booze-and-meth-heads. Sure Stewart and Carol have jobs now, and they seem to be doing ok, but they’ve only been a few days sober, and while Kevin was one to talk, he also knew the difficulty of staying that way.

Last year, Kevin was even tempted to call up Laura Tucker again, like he had in middle school — see how his mom liked her little habit when her best friend wasn’t so kept in the dark about it. It’s what worked the last time. Apparently something else made them put down the pipe and stick to the bottle instead, but Kevin was so shit-faced every day that he couldn’t really know what. The fact that Mom seemed to love her best friend more than her kids only further drove the nail through Kevin’s heart. That was just one thing that his siblings never knew that he’s shouldered for them over all these years, and Kevin’s muscles were starting to ache. But he didn’t really care. He was used to it, and Kevin would harbor a thousand more secrets if it would protect his family.
They needed each other.

Kevin stared at his brother: his blue eyes pleading, but his body poised and ready to leave, used to rejection.

Kevin sighed. “What do you need?”

“Can I borrow your truck this weekend?”

“Can’t you take an Uber?”

“It’s 45 minutes out of South Park!”

“What is?”

“Where I need to go.”

“Where?”

“Lake George”

“For what?”

“Butters’ Birthday.”

“Split an Uber.”

“I’m not making him pay for his own Birthday!”

“Then don’t. You have a job, don’t you?”

“Yeah, and I already spent $30 getting us tickets to the fair, plus I’ve put aside another $70 for games and dinner, and $20 for drinks, that’s a full week’s paycheck, Kevin, I can’t take an Uber, please!”

“I see.” Kevin smirked, folding his arms as he leaned back.

Kenny narrowed his eyes, “What?”

“Nothing.”

Kevin had heard them before, on late night phone calls as Kevin stumbled in from a bar at 2 am; they’d be whispering to one another on the phone, telling secrets in the dark like their existence depended on it.

Kevin had only had his suspicions before now, but the particularly red shade of Kenny’s face had just confirmed it.

“Whatever you’re thinking stop.”

“I’m not thinking anything.” Kevin smirked.

“Good. So can I?”

“Ok.” Kevin shrugged. “But only on the condition that you drive me everywhere for the rest of this week… and next. I’m tired of walking home from the bar.”
“Yeah, whatever. Fine. I don’t care. Do we have a deal?” Kenny held out his hand.

“Sure.” Kevin slapped it away, rather than shaking it.

“Oh,” Kenny added cautiously, “and I also need you to buy us beer.”

“Tsk tsk, little bro.”

“You are so annoying. Can you get it or not?”

“Yeah ok, we’ll go tomorrow.” Kevin walked over to his jeans to pull his car keys out of his pockets. He held them out to Kenny, only to pull them out of reach at the last second. Kevin narrowed his eyes and looked into his brother’s freckled face. “Don’t drink and drive.”

“Wasn’t gonna.” Kenny jumped at the keys, but being much shorter than Kevin, it was no use. “Kevin!” Kenny exclaimed. Kevin tossed his little brother the keys and sauntered off to sit back on his bed again.

“So you and Butters, huh?” Kevin asked, lighting a mostly-finished cigarette he’d fished out of his pocket.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Kenny paled.

“Right, well, while I’m busy fucking the devil maybe you can convince your boyfriend to finally take your v card.” Kevin pestered his little brother.

“Kevin, whatever you think you’re taking about, don’t. Ever.” Kenny’s jaw tightened threateningly. But his voice softened as he spoke his name, “For Leo’s sake.”

Kevin guffawed. “Oh, so he’s Leo, now?”

“Kevin!”

“Ok, whatever, I ‘don’t know anything’…” Kevin chewed around his cigarette, making air quotes with his free hands.

Kenny chuckled. “Besides, did you forget about Tammy?”

Kevin scrunched up his face. “Ew, almost.”

“Don’t be mean, she was plenty nice.” Kenny defended.

“And plenty skanky.” Kevin drawled.

Kenny smirked charmingly. “Lucky me.”

“You guys are gross!” Karen called from the hallway as she passed by with a glass of water in her hand, on her way back to her room that technically used to belong to Kenny.

“Anyway Butters and I are taking its slow. But you don’t know anything about it, so don’t tell anyone!”

“I got it, I got it!” Kevin held his hands up defensively. “You’re gay secret is safe with me.”

Kenny narrowed his eyes, looking over Kevin carefully, before nodding his head and smiling.
“Thank you.” Kenny scurried out of the room.

“I knew it.” Karen teased him from where she was leaning against the wall, listening in the hallway.

“Shut up!” He bellowed harmlessly, putting up his hand to block her face as he walked straight past her into the converted storage closet he calls his room. Karen giggled as she sauntered off to her room at the end of the hall.

“Don’t get pregnant this weekend, Kenny! Tell Butters to use protection!” Kevin called mockingly across the hall.

“You’re disgusting!” Both siblings called back as doors finally slammed shut.

Kevin laid back on his bed and thought about the exact moment, hours ago, that he’d heard those same words uttered through the lips of Shelly Marsh.

Kevin smiled to himself as he remembered it. ‘You’re disgusting’. For some reason the insult gave him sick pleasure coming from that mouth, along with all the other things she’d said on her knees, or on his lap, palms digging into the sheets, nails scraping along the back of his neck.

Kevin was jolted out of his thoughts when his parents came home a few minutes later. 11:00. That was a good sign. He heard them shuffle past his room, saw them exhausted in their separate work uniforms, but holding their heads high after a hard day’s work. Good, maybe things would turn around for now.

Kevin switched off his light and contemplated texting Shelly. He called her instead. She didn’t pick up, but he was met with a voicemail. One that still hadn’t changed after all these years.

“Thisth is Shelly Marsh,” a much younger and higher-pitched brace-face spat through the phone, “the fuck you want? Leave a messthage.” *beep*

“Wow.” Kevin chuckled, only just now realizing that he was in the middle of leaving a message. “Haven’t changed outgoing since middle school, huh? That’s a trip… anyway, Shelly… Shelly, Shelly…” Kevin breathed in a whisper, mimicking himself from earlier. “I just wanted to say goodnight. So… Goodnight.” Kevin murmured softly, before hanging up the phone and laying back down against his pillow.

In a moment of curiosity, Kevin went to Facebook and typed in Shelly’s name. He clicked on her profile picture — a slutty looking selfie shot with black-rimmed eyes and tits hanging out — and clicked backwards. Shelly had very few actual pictures of herself from middle school, she mostly used TV characters as profile pictures until she got her headgear taken off.

But there was one.

September 15, 2011, two days before Kevin’s 14th birthday, eighth grade. Shelly was holding her phone sideways and sticking out her tongue, standing next to an innocently smiling Kevin with a cigarette clenched between his teeth, her head barely resting on his shoulder. The caption read, “‘I’m shaking at your touch / I like you way too much / My baby, I’m afraid I’m falling for you.” with a black heart emoji and music notes. Her hair was darker, and his face was chubbier, but the look in her eyes was exactly the same.

Kevin whispered to himself, “Shelly…”, closing his eyes and falling asleep.
Chapter Summary

I’m a little late, but HAPPY BIRTHDAY BUTTERS!

But more importantly… HAPPY BUNNY WEEK!!!

Ok, I did A LOT of very unnecessary research for this chapter about what big Colorado cities would be closest to South Park, and what Colorado cities host fairs, and what times of year those go on, blah, and I couldn’t find anything that really existed or at least matched with what I wanted, so:
*In this fantasy dream world, there’s a town fair about 45 minutes southeast of South Park, and it hosts a summer county fair with Strawberry fields & outdoor summer concerts & rides, and it’s open June 1-July 25 when it then becomes an autumn-themed, pumpkin patch, hayride type of place September 1-October 31 (though the pie stand and orchard/farmlands are open year round). Think of it as a Wightman’s farm meets the Del Mar Fair, for anyone who know what those two things are. Anyway, it’s a beautiful place.

I hope you guys enjoyed the hipster Bubblie I threw in there for no reason ;)

Here we go, pt. 1 of the “mid-season” finale.

Chapter Notes

***I know tweek and Craig went to Denver in the Put It Down episode, but according to maps that’s literally 2 hours away and Kenny and Butters don’t have time for that so it changed, but it is “supposed” to be the same place. Just for a fun little reference.

LEO’S BIRTHDAY PARTY, PT. 1: POV - Butters

“Kenny, where are we going?” Butters muttered, readjusting the blindfold over his eyes.

“You’ll see!” Kenny’s excited voice drifted over from the driver’s seat.

“Well… how much longer? Shouldn’t I just put the blindfold on when we get closer?” He wondered, seeing as how they’d already been driving for 20 minutes, and all Butters had seen since Kenny had kissed him and masked his eyes was the back of a black piece of cloth.

“Sure, hold on.” The world sprung into color as Kenny pulled off Butters’ blindfold with his free hand, his smirk-y, smiling face the first piece of this colorful new world that consumed Butters’ vision as he blinked, adjusting to the light.
“Is it really fucking bright, or is that just a really good blindfold?” Butters blinked up at the pale sky.

“Here.” Kenny chirped, offering Butters the sunglasses off of his own face.

“No, you keep those, you’re driving.” Butters dismissed, taking in the scenic landscape around them. “Where are we?” He whispered in awe, nothing but green grass, tall trees, and those same familiar snow-capped mountains, now behind them in the distance, set behind a light blue sky and getting smaller by the second.

“Southeast. Somewhat. At least that’s where we’re headed.” Kenny explained, biting his lip excitedly and practically squirming out of his seat.

“But you won’t tell me where we’re going.” Butters clarified.

“Nope.” Kenny smirked.

“And you won’t tell me what we’re doing.”

“Nope.”

“Alrighty then.” Butters rested his head against the window and looked out across the scenic stretch of highway guiding them towards their mysterious destination.

“Ok, Leo.” As Kenny merged into the right lane to exit 15 minutes later, he tossed the blindfold back at Butters. “You know what to do.”

“Aw, geez…” Butters muttered at the sheer ridiculousness of it, but did as he was told.

He listened to the quiet music drifting up from the radio, and did his best to make mental guesses as he counted Kenny’s turns and stops. It was obviously no use, but it was something to do while his vision was compromised.

Eventually, Butters felt the car roll onto a dirt road, where it finally came to a stop.

“Don’t move!” Kenny instructed, a small laugh audible in his voice. Butters heard the engine cut, and the driver’s side door open and shut. ‘Don’t move!’ He heard again through the rolled up window. Butters felt dry air brush against his face as the passenger side door opened suddenly. “Keep it on, but follow me.”

“Blindly.” Butters joked. He reached forward and felt Kenny’s familiar hands grasp his, pulling him forward one step at a time.

“Ok… almost there…”

“I know I can’t see anything, but I bet people are giving us weird looks.” Butters muttered as they shuffled.

“And I’m ignoring all of them.” Kenny responded. “Ok… stand there.” Butters felt Kenny place his hands on his shoulders, positioning him exactly where he needed to be.

Light raided Butters’ vision again as the blindfold was ripped over his head.

“Happy Birthday!!” Kenny cheered. Butters opened his eyes to see his boyfriend standing in front
of him, arms out, blindfold hanging off his slender fingers, gesturing behind himself to a giant backdrop that read ‘County Fair & Amusement Park Entrance’.

"Wha… What?!” Butters screamed excitedly.

“Yeah!” Kenny nodded enthusiastically.

“We’re going here… for my birthday? You did this for my birthday?!” Butters exclaimed joyously, his walk breaking out into a run as he jumped into his boyfriend’s arms.

“Yeah!” Kenny laughed, picking up Butters as they hugged, and spinning them around in a circle elatedly.

Butters kissed his boyfriend’s face all over, as he lowered him back down to the ground.

“Thank you… well what are we waiting for let’s go!”

Butters practically dragged Kenny behind him as they ran up to the entrance. Kenny produced the tickets he had purchased online, and the two boys walked into the grounds, hand-in-hand, jaws on the floor.

The place was massive!

Butters had to strain his eyes to see all the way down the enormous, rectangular-shaped fair grounds.

To their left there was a small corner store (apparently converted from a real farm house), that advertised that they sold various pies, and jams, and honey in glass jars. The smell of that section alone was making Butters’ mouth water. Behind that, there appeared to be some actual farmland, though it was gated off, and still very much a part of the grounds. In it, there was a pumpkin patch that offered hayrides inside, a small, 5 ft tall corn maze that was definitely meant for little kids based on the size alone, and a sign, advertising ‘orchard this way’ pointing to the back of the property, behind everything else, where variations of fruit trees provided the backdrop as far as the eye could see. For $7, you could pick your own pumpkin, or there were some for sale in a pile at the entrance. To the right of the orchard, they advertised what was apparently a locally famous garden and a tiny strawberry-picking-patch, though there was a little sign that warned that the berries were out of season at the moment. And that was just the left hand side.

To Butters’ right, there were games, and rides, and fried food on a stick. There was a small animal pen with pigs and chickens, apparently displaying this years winners of the Summer County Fair’s Best In Show Animal Competition. You couldn’t pet them but they were freakin adorable to look at. There was a small greenhouse that Butters would have to go into that housed this summer’s winners of a variety of green-thumb competitions, PLUS a butterfly room at the back. There were small thrill rides, and themed rides, and a glowing ferris wheel in the distance, covered in lights that would spark to life at sunset.

There were hay bales and potted plants adorning the empty spaces, and strings of lights stretched across the sky above them. There were little gray informational plaques everywhere, peppered throughout the grounds as far as Butters could see. The first one, right at the entrance told the story of the original land-owner who converted this space into a county fair in the 60’s, and detailing the land’s journey up to what it is today. There was even a black and white, smiling picture of the man, sitting on his front porch — one that looked exactly like the pie stand at the front.
It was literally the most adorable place Butters had ever seen.

“Damn, it’s even better in person.” Kenny chuckled in amazement, both kids frozen in their tracks, other fairgoers having to walk around them as they took in all that they could see from the entrance. “What should we do first?”

There was a small haunted house ride on the other side of the park, next to a music-themed, circular, mini-roller-coaster ride, the ferris wheel, and a children’s carousel.

Kenny, being Kenny, immediately gravitated towards it, and Butters followed along happily.

They sat down in a narrow car on a rickety track.

“…Arms and legs inside the vehicle at all times…”

“I wonder, what if it’s all, like, broken down and shit…” Kenny muttered to himself excitedly, looking around the dark hall, littered with fake spiderwebs and purposely crumbling wallpaper. Kenny was one dark weirdo. But a lovable one.

The sound of an evil laugh shook the walls, distorted in the speakers, and the ride jolted to life with a jerk. It made Butters jump, which made Kenny laugh. Kenny slung an arm around his boyfriend’s shoulders, as Butters seriously contemplated just getting off the ride altogether. The ride weaved around what was supposed to be the inside of a haunted house, with a werewolf butler, ghost residents, and a witch cooking in the kitchen. There was even a graveyard, complete with dancing headstones à la The Haunted Mansion in the backyard. The worst part of it were all of the ‘haunted’ dolls in the bedroom, but due to the family-oriented nature of the park, the ride was overall not very scary.

“Aw, that didn’t even scare me!” Kenny pouted, folding his arms, probably wishing for a full on exorcist scene or a killer clown or something horrible like that.

“It was cute, though!” Butters commented.

He caught eyes with a uniformed worker, silently telling Butters that he planned to scare the sour, complaining Kenny.

‘Do it’ Butters mouthed.

“So it didn’t scare you?” Butters asked again.

“No. Lame!” Kenny called, just as the guy jumped out and roared at Kenny. That’s what he gets for complaining.

Kenny screamed and hid behind Butters. Butters started laughing hysterically and reached over to high-five the man as the ride passed him.

“Welcome back… w-we hope you enjoyed your scare, please exit to the right…” The guy announced over the speaker system, chuckling the whole way through.

“You knew he was there?” Kenny panted, clutching his chest and catching his breath.

“Of course.” Butters shrugged.

“Oh, lame!” Kenny accused, still startled. “For that, now we have to go look at the animals.”
“Why did you say that like it’s a punishment?” Butters laughed.

“It’s not, but you don’t get to choose the next thing because you were an ass, Butters.” Kenny explained.

“What happened to ‘Leo’?” Butters questioned with a chuckle.

“You’re ‘Butters’ again to me now.” Kenny scolded, folding his arms in a huff.

The two stepped off the ride and walked across the way to the pig pen. As they walked down the wide stretch of dirt road, Kenny tentatively caressed the edge of Butters’ hand, brushing against it shyly, testing the waters. Butters reached out and wrapped his pinky around Kenny’s timidly, both boys smiling down at their feet.

“Hi, Mr. Pig! Let’s see, what’s your name…” Kenny mewled to the animal, looking around to see if there was a plaque.

Boy was there ever.

“KEVIN BACON, NO WAY!” Kenny screamed excitedly, “Oh, that’s so dark! On so many levels! Kevin Bacon, oh my God.” Kenny chuckled.

Butters stepped closer to Kenny and intertwined their fingers, looking up at him — this was the first time they’d ever actually held hands in an actual public setting before. It felt like the first kiss, the first touch, the first army of butterflies whose wings had flapped a hurricane in Butters’ chest the first time Kenny had purred, ‘Leo’. It felt right, though it still made Butters a little bit nervous that someone they knew would see them and tell his dad.

Kenny beamed at him happily and squeezed his hand, and all of Butters’ worries flew out the window. As long as he was with Kenny, nothing else mattered.

They walked through the greenhouse to the butterfly room, holding hands the whole way — even as a Butterfly landed on Kenny’s brightly colored jacket, which Butters had to take a picture of, of course. Butters inspected all of the plants, completely nerding out with his green thumb.

Butters pulled Kenny by the hand, and led him back out onto the main grounds to explore some more.

“Oh, Ken, you don’t have to, I can pay for myself.” Butters insisted.

“Oh, your birthday? Don’t be ridiculous… look at aaaaall this money I get to spend on you!” Kenny fanned out one $50 bill and one $20 like he was carrying thousands of dollars in cash. He waved the whopping two pieces of paper in front of Butters’ face comically.

“But you’ve already done so much… I feel bad.” Butters admitted.

“Hey, when it’s my birthday you can spoil me.” Kenny winked, and Butters was fully aware of his double meaning. Butters shoved him lightly.
He thought about it, tongue peeking out between his lips as he considered the options. “Ok then… let’s share a cotton candy.”

Kenny walked up to the colorfully striped cart and ordered one pink cotton candy. He proudly presented it to Butters, stopping him just before he was about to take a bite.

“Wait! You have to make a wish, wait a second… hold on…” Kenny dug around in his pockets carefully until he found what he was looking for.

“What — you’ve been carrying that around this whole time?!” Butters exclaimed as Kenny dug a single birthday candle out of his pocket and stuck it in the middle of the cotton candy cone.

“Yeah, and I gotta take it back home after.” He chuckled, “Well you said you don’t like cake, and I wasn’t sure what to get you so I came prepared”, Kenny explained lighting the white, spiral-striped candle carefully, holding the base with his fingertips as he told Butters to make a wish.

“Well, gee… fuck… what is there even left to wish for?” Butters joked, kinda seriously, gesturing around himself at the perfect personification of autumn romance all around them. He blew out the candle anyway, sucking on a piece of cotton candy happily as he watched Kenny literally lick the hot candle wick until it was cool enough to place back in his pocket. Butters chuckled at him ridiculously, as Kenny wondered out loud “what the fuck [was] so weird about it?”

They wandered around some more, looking inside the cute little shop at the entrance and checking out the pumpkin patch just for fun.

The sound of a nearby bell and resounding cheers rang out across the way, and Butters was drawn instantly to the classic game.

“Come on!” He pulled his boyfriend along behind him. “One please!” Butters exclaimed, presenting a gaming ticket to the ticket taker.

“Go for it.” He announced, backing away to give Butters room to swing the giant mallet. “Three tries.”

Butters took a deep breath and swung the mallet as fast as he could.

The little, sliding indicator in the middle of the giant display rolled up to about the ’70’ mark, next to a set of words that read, ‘that all you got?’

Butters let out a grunt of frustration and tried again, hitting just a little over ’70’ this time.

“Dammit!” He swore.

“Alright, come on, Leo, you can do this!” Kenny clapped and cheered next to him. “Last chance, you got this! Woohoo!” Butters cracked his neck and shook off the nerves as Kenny hyped him up. This was the one, the winning hit, he could feel it.

Butters held the mallet up high above his head, thinking strategically and focusing on following through with the motion. He brought the mallet back down, hitting it with all his strength, the wood vibrating painfully in his hands as it connected with the soft padding at the base of the game.

’80’. He hit ’80’. A discouraging whistle noise descended from the speakers, diving in pitch as if to emphasize the epic fail.
“Wha— all that effort for that?!” Butters panted, out of breath, as Kenny cackled next to him.

“Sorry, dude. Wanna try again?” The smiling game host chuckled.

“Yes!” Butters ripped off another ticket and handed it to the guy.

“Butters, I don’t think this game will magically get easier the more you tire yourself out.” Kenny chuckled, barely able to finish his sentence with how hard he was laughing. Butters narrowed his eyes. If there’s one thing Kenny should have learned from sarcastaball, it’s how fucking competitive Butters can get.

“This game… is mocking me, Kenny… I have to win!” Butters explained humorously, well aware of how ridiculous he sounded.

But Kenny was right, the more he tried the more tired Butters got. He only ended up a little above ’60’ on his last try, just inside of the category marked ‘wimp’.

“On my deathbed, I’m going to think about this game, and regret the moment I walked away a ‘wimp’. ” Butters muttered melodramatically as Kenny and the game host chuckled amusedly.

“Why doesn’t he give it a shot?” The host gestured to Kenny. Butters thrust a ticket into his hand and shoved the mallet into Kenny’s hands.

“If you don’t win this, I’ll leave you.” Butters joked dramatically, Kenny threw his head back and laughed until tears came out of his eyes. “Swing it!” Butters demanded.

“Jesus fucking Christ!” Kenny chuckled, swinging the mallet, landing at only a little past ’80’. ‘Almost there!’ The game read, mockingly.

Kenny hit it again, this time only just barely hitting ’80’.

“Wait! Can we both hold the mallet?” Butters asked the ticket taker.

“No man, that’s cheating!” He chuckled, for some reason entertained with Butters’ competitive nature, which was of course annoying.

“Aww, come on, it’s his birthday!” Kenny whined to the guy.

“Yeah, it’s my birthday!” Butters pouted his lips and widened his eyes sadly.

“On 9/11? Jeez kid, what was that like growing up?”

“The bullies always picked on me.” Butters answered very straightly. This guy didn’t need to know that the biggest bully in the school actually once often thought of Butters as his best friend.

“Come on,” Kenny pleaded, grabbing Butters’ cheeks with his hand and turning towards the guy, “look at that face! You’re gonna tell him ‘no’, on his birthday?” Kenny raised his eyebrows at the guy. Butters gave his absolute best puppy dog eyes — they had never failed him before. He looked contemplatively between both boys, and then… he nodded his head.

“Alright. Just don’t tell anyone.” He smiled.

Butters grabbed onto the mallet, placing his hands high up on the neck above Kenny’s.

“Ok.” Butters looked into his eyes seriously as he went over the game plan. “On the count of three, we’ll bring this down with all the muscle that both of us can muster, ready?” Kenny
nodded. “One… two…” they brought the mallet up over their heads and waited, “three!”

The sound of a high pitched bell tolled victoriously as the needle slid easily up to the ‘100’ ‘you win!’ mark.

Butters screamed excitedly, wrapping his arms around Kenny in celebration of their win. Kenny cheered, pumping his fists over his head victoriously. He started twerking excitedly when Butters finally let him go, chanting ‘we did it, we did it!’ As he shook his tiny ass.

The game host was cracking up by the time Kenny had stopped dancing. “Nice job, guys, what prize do you want?”

“Prize? Oh holy shit, I wasn’t even thinking about a prize, I was just so excited about winning!” Butters panted, out of breath from jumping around in celebration. “Do you want anything Kenny?”

“Me? Oh my goodness, my word, a prize for little old me?” Kenny gushed with a mock southern accent, batting his eyelashes as he fanned himself, before turning back to the host. “What can we get?”

“One of the big bears, or three of the little ones.”

“Let’s get the little ones so we can each have one.” Butters suggested.

“Which ones you want?” The guy grabbed a long pole with a hook at the end of it and walked over to the vertical display of bears.

“I want the orange one, obviously.” Kenny announced. The game host reached up with the pole and pulled down a soft, sherbet colored, fuzzy, little bear, with a pale orange-cream colored stomach, and an orange gingham bow tied around its neck.

“Um… ooh! That turquoise one!” Butters exclaimed, happy to catch the eyes of the one bear in his favorite color. It was a deep, gem-colored bluish-green, with a soft, pale, turquoise stomach and a matching bow.

“Alright you got one more.” The guy told them.

“I’m happy with my little guy, you take this one, Kenny.” Leo looked over his adorable little bear as he spoke.

“Hm… hold on!” Kenny turned around and scanned the grounds. He found a happy family of three walking by, two parents holding the hands of their little girl, about 4 or 5 years old, as they strolled through the amusement park, a kid’s-sized, dripping ice cream cone melting in the father’s hands.

“Excuse me!” Kenny called to them from afar, “We just won an extra bear and we don’t want it,” he explained to the parents before addressing the little girl, who was scrunching her eyebrows and pouting her lips in curiosity as she looked up at him, “would you like one?”

“YES!” She cheered, jumping excitedly up and down repeatedly.

“Come pick one out!” Kenny waved the parents over to where Butters and the game host were waiting for them. The parents smiled at him, thanking him gratefully, as they lovingly encouraged their daughter to pick her favorite one.
“PURPLE!” She screamed.

“Look, see, they have a light purple one there, and a dark purple one up there,” Kenny showed the girl, pointing to the row of small bears and speaking to her gently.

“DARK PURPLE!!!” The little girl roared, wiggling excitedly in her mother’s grip.

“Yeah, the dark purple one is the best one! Good choice! High five!” Kenny praised, as the little girl smacked his hand with her hardest high five. “Ow!” Kenny joked, the little girl giggling excitedly as he shook out his hand.

“Another!” She called. Kenny raised his hand again and she smacked it again with all her little might.

“Ok, that one actually kinda hurt.” Kenny chuckled towards the parents.

“Yeah. She’s a wild one. ‘Beating people up’ is her favorite game. She’d do that all day if you let her.” The mother explained.

“Daddy!” The girl cheered, turning around to face her father with her hand raised. The dad wiped his ice cream-covered hand on his jeans and let his daughter beat the ever living shit out of his palm. The game host raised his stick and grabbed the dark purple bear for the little girl.

“Say thank you.” The mother urged.

“THANK YOU!” The little girl yelled, staring at the bear in her hands excitedly.

“Thank you.” Both parents thanked Kenny gratefully.

“No problem!” He dismissed.

“Bye!” The little girl called, waving, but still with eyes only for her new bear.

“Bye!” Kenny called. It was the absolute cutest, most adorable thing Butters had ever seen. It was only when Kenny turned back to Butters, looking at him quizzically, that Butters realized he was staring. “What?” He tilted his head and smiled at him brightly.

Butters shook himself out of his cuteness coma and just kissed Kenny on the cheek.

“Nothing.” He smiled.

They were next in line for the ferris wheel, when all of the lights in the park sparked to life at once.

“Cool!”

“Whoa.” Butters looked around himself in awe at the beauty of it. Kenny smiled at him excitedly. Life was beautiful next to Kenny.

They rode the ferris wheel, around and around, mesmerized by the view of the entire grounds from up above. The wheel squeaked to a stop right as Kenny and Butters reached the top.

“This view is amazing.” Butters whispered in captivation, resting his head against Kenny’s shoulder as he stared out at the sun, setting low behind the apple trees.
“Yeah.” Kenny murmured, head tilted, looking down at his boyfriend in his arms. “Leo…” Kenny began.

“Yeah?”

Butters sat up to face Kenny, a strange look on his grinning face. “Um…” Kenny bit his lip like he was thinking really hard. “Are you having a good birthday?”

“The best!” Butters bounced, gripping his boyfriend’s arm excitedly. “Seriously. This is probably my best birthday ever. Thank you.” Butters reached forward and grabbed Kenny’s face to kiss him, laughing a little bit as the wheel jerked startlingly back to life underneath them.

Kenny pulled away and looked between Butters’ eyes, searching for something. Whatever he found, he kept it to himself. “I’m glad.” He smiled, and pulled Butters close to him again, so he could rest his head back on his shoulder and watch the scenery go by.

“Look! A Photo Booth! Aw, Kenny we HAVE to take a picture! Come on!”

Kenny laughed as Butters dragged him along behind himself. He’d been extra quiet since the ferris wheel ride, but Butters figured he was probably just overwhelmed with the beauty of the park — Butters remembers Kenny getting this quiet in Hawaii too.

Butters threw a dollar in the machine, before Kenny could protest, and pulled him inside.

“Ok,” Butters wrapped his arms around Kenny, “here we go, what should we do first just regular smile? Should we hold up our bears?” Butters giggled, watching the camera countdown the seconds until it takes its first picture.

“Ok.” Kenny beamed at Butters dreamily through the monitor.

Click.

“Ok, now like… laughing or something. Like even happier, if that’s possible.” Butters grinned at Kenny, giving him a quick peck on the lips before facing the camera again and smiling widely.

Click.

“I love you.”

“…What?”

Click.

Kenny was staring at Butters, biting his lip to contain the wild smile stretched across his face. His eyes were alight with giddiness as Butters felt his own eyes widen in shock.

“I love you.”

Kenny repeated again, chuckling nervously as he stared at Butters.

The way he was looking at him… it was like Butters was Kenny’s whole world.

Well, Kenny was Butters’ whole world.
At the very last second, Butters closed his eyes and drew Kenny close to him, lips meeting together at the very last ‘click’.

*Click.*

“I love you, Kenny, I love you so much.” Butters rambled as he looked over his boyfriend’s smiling face with adoration.

“I love you, Leo.” Kenny repeated again, kissing him deeply again and again.

“We should probably get out of here... people are waiting...” Butters murmured quietly, kissing Kenny one last time.

“They can wait.” Kenny whispered, pulling Butters back against him, until they finally did hear knocking on the photo booth wall.

“It’s not a broom closet, kids.” A slightly-annoyed female voice droned in from outside. Butters immediately scrambled out muttering ‘sorry, sorry, sorry!’ as he dragged a hesitant Kenny behind him. They stepped out of the photo booth, blushing, to face a tall woman in her early 30’s, in a black and purple, denim and leather ensemble, covered in tattoos, her hair a choppy swirl of purple and black. With her stood a fairly geeky looking woman of about the same age, covered in piercings, with a flowy, floral sundress, the tips of her hair blending in with her pink sweater, thick glasses, and pink combat boots.

“Cute picture.” The tall woman smirked, nodding her head towards the two sets of film strip sticking out of the printer, only the bottom picture visible.

“Sorry.” Butters apologized, embarrassedly snatching up the pictures and holding them protectively against his chest.

“Don’t apologize kid, we were all sixteen once.” The woman nudged woman next to her (who Butters now realized she was holding hands with), as the nerdy one rolled her eyes, smirking at a memory that would never be shared.


“Be safe, now.” The woman called jokingly, stepping into the photo booth, her pink-clad girlfriend following along with her, both waving politely as they disappeared behind the black cloth.

“You realize, that was literally hipster us, right?” Kenny chuckled, pointing behind himself, as he and Butters made their way to a nearby bench.

Butters snorted and nodded his head, but he was only half listening.

Instead he was staring down at the living memory in his hands; a snapshot in time, the proof that Kenny loved him as much as he did. Kenny sat down next to Butters and rested his head on his shoulder.

“I’m gonna love this picture forever and ever.” The usually-impish blonde whispered softly against Butter’s sweater.

Butters kissed Kenny on the top of his head and handed him one of the copies.
On the ride home, the boys cranked the music and sang at the top of their lungs, sipping milkshakes from the gourmet burger stand that overlooked the orchard. Butters looked over at Kenny, smiling and laughing, singing and dancing behind the wheel like he was in his own private music video.

‘Oh hamburgers, I really love him.’ Butters smiled to himself.

Butters looked down at the precious film strip in his hands.

Four pictures, each worth a million words.

Two boys smiling, with their arms around each other comfortably.

‘Click.’

Butters smiling at the camera obliviously, while Kenny turned to stare at him lovingly, nervously, muscles tensed in preparation for the irreversible string of words about to leave his lips.

‘Click.’

Butters facing Kenny’s warm expression with wide eyes and raised eyebrows.

‘What?’

“Click.”

The two of them, blissful and happy, lips locked, Butters’ hand resting against Kenny’s cheek, Kenny’s fingers wrapped around Butters’ wrist tenderly. Smiles apparent in the corners of their lips.

‘Click.’

Butters’ heart was pounding, remembering this moment again. He smiled down at the film strip, and traced the edges with his fingertip.

As the boys made their way back into South Park, Butters found himself sort of dreading being back. Today was almost magical in it’s marvel, and it was almost hard to leave and return to his normal life. Kenny drove past the main part of South Park, following the GPS on his phone and smirking to himself at whatever surprise he knew he had lined up next.

“What? Where are we going?” Butters wondered. All Kenny told him was to pack an overnight bag and dress warmly. He knew there were two 6-packs of beer in a cooler in the back but that’s about it.

“A party. A small one. A get-together, if you will. You’ll see.” Kenny explained vaguely, a smirk dancing on his lips.

The two pulled up to two wrought-iron gates, decorated with gold-painted detail on the sides.

“Whoa.” Both boys gasped to themselves at the sight.

Kenny pressed the call button, and Butters was surprised to hear Token’s voice on the other end.
“Hello?”

“Hey, it’s me!” Kenny called into the intercom.

“Come on up!”

The gate beeped as it swung open slowly, revealing the long driveway and manicured lawns of Token’s house.

“Wow.” Butters exclaimed as they drove up the short, but winding driveway.

“I know right?” Kenny stared around in wonder as he drove to the house.

“So who’s coming?” Butters asked as they pulled up to the house, much smaller and homely looking than he expected. Maybe there was more to it in the back.

“You, me, Token, Craig, Clyde, and Tweek. Cartman had other plans, luckily, so there won’t be any drama there. I also asked Jimmy, Kyle, and Stan last week but they were all busy — Kyle, Cartman, and Stan want to celebrate tomorrow with you though if you want.”

“Absolutely!” Butters bounced in his seat excitedly. “You have really out-planned yourself, mister. I don’t think I could have done a better job planning my own party.” Butters gushed as Kenny parked the car.

Kenny leaned over the middle divider and kissed Butters slowly and sweetly.

“I go all out for the people I love.” Kenny cooed, smirk on his face. His words sent Butterflies fluttering wildly in Butters’ stomach.

As Kenny opened his car door, a thought crossed through the smaller blond's head. Butters grabbed a hold of Kenny's elbow, suddenly frozen with worry.

"...Can we trust them?" Butters whispered after a moment of silence, fidgeting with Kenny's sleeve in his hands.

"Definitely." Kenny nodded his head confidently. Butters nodded, content in Kenny's confidence. Kenny kissed him on the cheek before running around the car to open the door for Butters.

They exited the car and gathered all of their supplies, knocking on the Black family door excitedly.

“Hey!” Token panted as he stepped side to let the newcomers through the door, drying his short, curly hair with a towel as he spoke. “Welcome to my house! Happy Birthday, Butters! You guys bring bathing suits?”

“No.” Butters answered nervously.

“I just plain don’t have one.” Kenny shrugged.

“Come on, I'll let you borrow some of mine. We’re going night swimming!” Token announced
with a bright smile.

“I don’t mind going nude.” Kenny offered, as they walk up the giant carpeted staircase, his protests pretty much existing just to make everyone uncomfortable.

“No… we’re getting you a suit.” Token stated firmly. Kenny smirked at Butters over his shoulder.

Token opened white, double doors to reveal a large bedroom, with a neatly made bed, nice, dark wood furniture, and posters on the walls featuring college football teams, a collage of pictures of him and his friends, and foreign movie posters from around the world. Token walked past a lightly filled bookshelf and an incredibly messy desk, to his dresser drawers next to his bed.

“Here you go.” Token handed each of them a colorful pair of trunks — Kenny’s a plain bright yellow, Butters’ a purple geometric pair.

“Just come downstairs whenever you’re ready.” Token smiled and left the room, closing the door behind him.

“Is it rude if I blow you in his bathroom?” Kenny wondered absently, not even looking at Butters as he peeled off his shirt — casual, as if he was just talking about the weather and not... oh hamburgers!

“What the— what the fuck, yes, it’s rude!” Butters scolded, embarrassed, face reddening by the second.

“Are you saying no?” Kenny asked, staring Butters down with wide, daring eyes.

Butters blinked at him blankly.

“God dammit.”

A short while later, Butters and Kenny made their way down the giant staircase, in their borrowed bathing suits, Butters feeling only a little bit embarrassed about what they’d just done.

“Imma put the beers in the fridge if Token hasn’t already.” Kenny called lazily as he wandered off to the kitchen.

Butters stepped outside onto the patio, and marveled at the sight: clusters of balloons in whites and blacks, with giant silver '17' birthday balloons on either side of the sliding door. It was a pale concrete stretch of land with a brick stone pathway weaving through a grass and dirt path along the side that lead out to a gated garden out back. On the patio sat a blue stone fire pit, an outdoor, brick BBQ, a simple but classy looking glass dining table and wrought-iron chairs with cream colored cushions and a matching umbrella, a small garden of potted plants in each corner of the seating area, and some simple lounge chairs across the way with a small, solid stone table in between, carved into the shape of an elephant. There was a hot tub off to the side, and right in the middle was a giant, heated pool, where the others were already swimming and having a great time.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY BUTTERS!” Clyde screamed from the pool, arms waving above his head excitedly. After a moment, he turned to scoff at Craig and Tweek behind him with a look of
betrayal. “You guys didn’t cheer with me!”

“I waved.” Deadpanned Craig.

“Hi Butters! Happy Birthday!” Tweek called sweetly as he waved.

“Hi guys!” Butters called waving from where he stood. “Kenny’s here somewhere, I think he’s just getting changed.”

“Woohoo!” A whir of blonde rushed past Butters as Kenny took a running start from inside the house, sprinting, and cannonballed into the deep end of the pool, splashing everyone in the process.

“Fuck. You. McCormick.” Craig flipped him off as Kenny resurfaced, splashing him, though the laugh in his voice betrayed his annoyance.

Kenny dove deep beneath the pool and swam impressively fast over to where Butters was still standing above the shallow end. He watched as Kenny’s muscles stretched and flexed beneath the surface. He reached his hands up out of the water and pushed himself up until he was suspended above the concrete, arm muscles flexed, abdomen dripping with pool water.

“What?” Kenny cooed innocently, flipping his hair, water droplets spraying Butters’ legs from where he stood above Kenny’s suspended push-up. “Quit staring before you pop a boner in front of everyone.” Kenny muttered mischievously, a wicked smirk widening on his adorable face.

Butters rolled his eyes and nudged him back into the pool with his foot, then jumped in after him. When he stood up, he was standing right in front of Kenny.

Kenny brushed Butters’ wet hair out of his eyes affectionately before calling “Race you to the other side!” and pushing Butters underwater so Kenny could get a head start.

Butters sputtered and coughed water out of his lungs when he resurfaced. “NO FAIR!” Butters called after a thoroughly submerged Kenny, though he knew he couldn’t hear with all that splashing. Kenny could swim fast, but damn was his freestyle technique a flailing mess. Butters raced to the other side, where Kenny was already leaning against the ledge, cockily, ready to gloat.

Music broke through the quiet night from surrounding speakers as Token emerged with his cell phone in one hand, a bucket of sodas and beers balanced against his hip.

They swam, they listened to music, they played ridiculous games like pool charades — basically regular charades, but it involved racing the person who guessed your mime correctly.

Butters looked around, grateful for the wonderful friends he had.

It was one or two hours later, when they were all chilling in the jacuzzi, looking up at the stars, that Clyde spoke up.

“I’m hungry.” He whined.

“We had dinner like three hours ago.” Token explained to him, baffled but not completely surprised by his friend’s appetite.

“Exactly!” Clyde agreed, clearly missing the point of Token’s statement.
“I could eat again.” Tweek piped up.

“I will never turn down food.” Kenny agreed.

“I wouldn’t mind a snack.” Butters admitted.

“Ha! Birthday boy says so!” Clyde sing-songed loudly in Token’s face. Token pushed him away calmly.

“Ok, Clyde, buddy, you’re going to have to cool it with the beers or you have to lower your voice, it’s too much; you, Craig, Kenny, and Butters drank all six that I brought out… and Craig and Butters have only had one.”

“Are you calling me a lightweight?” Clyde questioned, a little hurt by the accusation, until a look of enlightenment crossed his face. “PIZZA! Let’s make pizza!”

“Yeah, let’s make you a pizza.” Token soothed before Clyde ran out of the hot tub and into the house. “Towels!” Token called, stomping over to the pile of towels on the table and walking inside, grumbling, to babysit Clyde.

“Call us when it’s ready!” Craig called, clearly with no intention of getting up from where he was seated anytime soon.

“Which planet is that?” Tweek asked quietly, pointing up at the sky.

“Um… Venus, I think. It’s super bright, so I’m pretty sure. And I think that one’s Jupiter.” Craig explained, eyes lighting up as he spoke about the stars — second only to the light in his eyes when he turned to look at Tweek.

Butters looked over at Kenny, and was met with that same look of absolute mush.

“Good birthday so far?” Kenny smiled, resting his head against his folded arms on top of the ledge of the hot tub, melting Butters’ heart with his bright blue eyes.

Butters leant over to kiss Kenny on the lips. “Good is a fucking understatement.” Butters chuckled.

“What else did you guys do today?” Tweek piped up from the other side of the jacuzzi.

“We went to that preserved, farm-slash-county fair amusement park near Lake George.” Butters explained, watching Kenny beam up at him from where he hugged the concrete ledge.

Tweek and Craig looked at each other.

“What?” Butters asked them.

“No, it’s just,” a smile broke out on Craig’s face as he explained, “when we were ten, Tweek was having a particularly rough time, so I brought him there to cheer him up, and it’s where we had our first huge fight, but also… it was…” Craig stopped himself before continuing, “the day I knew I liked him.” Craig finished his story in a rush, as if not sure if he even wanted to admit the ending.

“Ew, you like me?” Tweek teased sarcastically.

“Shut up. Don’t tell me that’s not why we went back three years ago.” Craig accused.
“Yeah.” Tweek admitted. “I was gonna ask you out then but I chickened out.” Butters was confused, weren’t they always dating? He decided not to ask.

“Wait… THREE YEARS ago?” Craig raised his eyebrows in disbelief.

“Yep.” Tweek nodded.

“Sap!” Kenny accused.

“Pizza’s ready!” Token called from inside the house.

Everyone gathered around Token’s blue-speckled, granite countertop, the last of Kevin’s illegal beers chilling in a bucket of ice next to two frozen pizzas, hot and fresh from the oven.

Token snatched the beer out of Clyde’s hand and lectured him about making sure everyone else had a chance to have one first. Tweek declined, saying something about his medication. Kenny handed one to Butters, and kept one for himself. Token passed one to Craig, popping the top off of his own bottle, leaving two unclaimed on the table.

“So everyone’s had one then?” Clyde asked tentatively, like a child forced to apologize when they didn’t want to.

“Hold on.” Craig muttered, taking a sip of his own beer, before grabbing one from the middle of the table and chugging it, impressively, but obviously uncomfortably — defiance and immature comedy fueling him to continue through the tears and gagging.

“Craig!” Clyde whined, watching helplessly as Craig drained the bottle, holding one finger up in a ‘wait’ position. Everyone watched on in a mixture of horror and adoration, as Craig finally slammed the empty bottle down on the counter, and picked up his other one to take a small sip.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Clyde, did you want that one?” Craig innocently batted his eyes, holding in a burp as he struggled to speak. The others exploded into laughter at the exchange.

“Worst sibling.” Clyde accused.

“Only child.” Craig shot back.

“Ok, ok.” Token laughed, stepping in between the two, barely able to talk through his giggles, “since Clyde has already had two, as long as nobody else wants this one, he can have it.”

Clyde looked around the room, eyeing everybody to see who had the guts to take it from him.

“Yoink!” Kenny swiped it from the table. Clyde dropped his jaw, looking at him hurtfully. “I’m kidding.” Kenny smiled, tossing Clyde the beer.

The boys ate their pizza in silence, too engrossed in the delicious cheesiness to say anything to one another, until Token broke the silence.

“If you guys could go anywhere in the world, where would it be?” He asked casually, empty bottle rolling around in his hands.

Butters thought it over.
“I’d wanna go back to Hawaii.” Butters smiled. “Or at the very least, Southern California. I wanna surf, and lay in the sand, and swim in the pacific ocean again. See the sunset… That was fun the first time, huh Kenny?” Kenny smiled at him.

When they were little, Butters’ family was going on a vacation to Hawaii, but he didn’t wanna go. He knew his parents would just fight the whole time and be awful sore and he didn’t wanna hear it. So they bribed him with permission to bring a friend, and he’d brought Kenny. They swam, and made sandcastles… they had a pretty good time until Kenny dove into a shallow stream and almost drowned.

“I’d go back, but I’d definitely be smarter this time.” The reckless blond chuckled, nudging Butters in the ribs. “You know how when you’re a kid you think you’re immortal?” Kenny addressed the table, as he explained his story. “Well, Butters and I had gone off exploring by ourselves and we found this little river bank. Well me, not knowing how shallow it was, dove in. Luckily I mostly bellyflopped so I only hit my head—”

“But you could have broken your neck!” Tweek screeched from across the table.

“Luckily, I didn’t.” Kenny smiled and pointed at him with a wink, like it was no big deal. Tweek looked like he wanted to faint at the horror. “But apparently I was knocked unconscious and I would have drowned if Butters wasn’t there to save me. My hero!” Kenny gushed jokingly.

“It’s not funny! It was really scary.” Butters defended. Kenny kissed him on his forehead. Butters wondered if that was just a coincidence, or if Kenny remembered Butters doing just that as he held the unconscious and bleeding Kenny in his arms. “But anyway,” Butters continued, “yeah. I’d go somewhere like that.”

“I’d want to go some place cold,” Tweek leaned his elbows against the counter, “like Alaska or Iceland. Somewhere where I could curl up with a coffee by the fireplace in a big sweater, with a good book. Plus I’d love to see the northern lights under a clear sky.” Tweek gushed excitedly, taking another bite of pizza.

“Is there a bear skin rug in front of that fireplace?” Craig drawled, leaning against Tweek lazily.

Tweek picked off a piece of pizza crust and threw it at Craig, accusing him of already being drunk. The accusation was, of course, denied. The exchange made Butters giggle.

“I think I’d wanna go someplace cool, like California… or AUSTRALIA! Someplace you see a lot of in movies but have never actually been. I’d go hiking, and spend time outside… and find all the places I’ve only ever heard of before. I wanna go someplace like that.” Clyde rattled off fairly eloquently, before tipping his head back and sticking his tongue out to get the last drop of beer out of his empty bottle, shrugging and settling for another pizza slice when he realized there was nothing left in his glass.

“Well, I agree with Tweek.” Craig stretched his arms above his head before elaborating. “I wanna see the northern lights, and stargaze under completely clear skies. But California is cool too, they’ve got some fun observatories there.”

“Like Joshua Tree?” Butters smiled brightly.

“Yes! Like Joshua Tree! Oh my God, I wanna go to Joshua Tree.” Craig swooned, falling against Tweek dramatically. Tweek pushed him off, only to have Craig do it again just to piss him off. The two of them were very comical if you watched long enough.
“What’s Joshua Tree?” Kenny asked.

“It’s like this indie campsite in the middle of nowhere in California, east of Santa Monica I think. Anyway it’s supposed to be beautiful and you can see the stars, and they have an observatory and stuff. My mom always talked about going…” Butters’ voice trailed off sadly at the thought.

Butters’ mom had barely spoken at all in a year, let alone about her hopes and dreams. He wondered idly if she would ever get the chance. If she’d ever get better. Kenny wrapped his warm arms around Butter’s middle and held him close, as if reading his mind. Kenny always knew how to do that.

“Where else?” Kenny addressed the awkwardly staring crowd, attempting to get back on topic, and distract from the obvious elephant in the room that everybody had secretly poached from their parents or friends in whispered tones and innuendos.

“Anywhere.” Token whispered, a look of longing crossing over his serious face as he spoke passionately. “I wanna see history, and simplicity… I wanna travel around Europe with a backpack and a wallet, and stay in people’s houses, not pay for hotels… and tour landmarks and stand right where the great writers of history stood… I wanna get lost in a town so rich in culture and adventure that I may never care if I ever find my way back.”

Everyone blinked at Token surprisingly.

“Damn. That was beautiful.” Kenny uttered in surprise once Token’s impromptu poetry slam had shut off its spotlight.

“I just… don’t want to live my life on the outside… I want to experience, I want to feel Vienna, not just see it in a movie.” Token

“You will.” Tweek smiled encouragingly. “One day.” Token, however, did not seem to be so convinced.

“Alright, alright, enough chit-chat.” Clyde smiled, effectively changing the subject. “Let’s get this party really started.”

The herd of tipsy boys made their way down the stairs to the basement — fully furnished with soft carpet, and a warm, inviting, pale lilac color on the walls. They made their way down the end of the hall to an offset room, where there was a small bar, fully stocked, a row of seating, and a musical set up complete with a few microphones and amplification equipment. There was a small, boxy TV monitor, hooked up to a tiny computer.

“Ok.” Token looked around the room excitedly, “who’s ready for karaoke?”
Chapter Summary

KARAOKE CHAPTER! YAY!
I highly encourage you to listen to the songs before/after/while reading this to really get a sense of this scene. Rock out, sing, have a party in your room, whatever, no judgment.

As usual with musical chapters, here comes the disclaimer:

**** I DO NOT OWN ANY OF THESE LYRICS, ALL LYRICS BELONG TO WRITERS OF THE BANDS *DEXYS MIDNIGHT RUNNERS*, *WHAM!*,
*SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER*, *TONI BASIL*, *DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE*,
*QUEEN*, *DEEP BLUE SOMETHING*, and *THE DIVINYLS* respectively.


I'll leave a song list at the end in case I wasn't clear about describing one of them. (I should probably also leave a 'soundtrack' list at the end once this story is finished... that'd be really cute).

Enjoy, and sing your hearts out!

Chapter Notes

I’m going to have to take a little break because I’m starting school soon. This seems like a natural place to leave off because Butters’ birthday marks an important milestone for a lot of the relationships, and when we come back we’ll have jumped forward a little to October, then mostly focus on revolving around big holidays or birthdays. Or ~PROM~ or ~GRADUATION!~ (But like, let’s skip Homecoming and Winter formal? What the heck is that about anyway, huh?). I’ve moved a lot of the goth narratives to the sequel instead, so they’ll mostly continue to be lovable chaos in this first part. I’d say we’re eeeeeehhhh about halfway done with this story. I’ve got big plans for it, sad plans, happy plans, what the shit plans.

I’ve written everything down so I wont lose my place, but honestly I probably won’t be able to write more until the next holiday break.

Please excuse my hiatus, and I’ll see you next time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LEO’S BIRTHDAY PARTY, PT. 2: POV - Craig
“Ok. So, I’ve created a sign up list so Clyde doesn’t hog the machine.” Token explained as he untangled wires and plugged everything in. He was practically bouncing with excitement. Token and his family loved their karaoke in their household.

“Hey!” Clyde pouted at the accusation, folding his arms in defiance.

“Don’t worry Clyde, I’m sure Kenny will give you a run for your money.” Craig promised, knowing full well that it was definitely the truth.

“Hey!” Butters tried feebly to attempt to defend Kenny’s honor.

“It’s ok. I will do that.” Kenny reasoned.

“Ok!” Token announced, flicking the light switch, colorful disco lights swirling around the darkened room. All eyes watched him as he slammed his finger on the play button. “Let’s get it started.”

Violins sang through the night, accompanied by the excited groans of acknowledgment from the peanut gallery. The words ‘Come On Eileen’ flashed across the screen as Token swiveled the tv stand to show everyone.

Once the beat kicked in, Token danced and bobbed his head, spinning around in circles as his feet flexed and shuffled underneath him. The other boys cheered, but none so loudly as Clyde and Kenny. He looked like a cool dude in a music video, and Craig almost forgot that this was the same kid who once peed his way down the slide when they were eight. Ha!

“‘Come on Eileen!’” Token, along with everybody else, cheered while the intro played out.

Token Black looked straight out of that Jon Cryer scene in ‘Pretty In Pink’ as he danced around and ‘flipped’ his short hair.

“‘Poor, old Johnny Ray!’” Token’s rich, pouty voice sang out as he danced along wildly. Tweek jokingly shimmied his shoulders like Emma Watson in that ‘Perks of Being a Wallflower’ scene and Craig snorted a laugh. Craig wondered if Clyde still remembered that routine that he made everyone learn with him… Craig looked over and saw him subconsciously moving his hands in exactly the right moves so yeah, Clyde remembered.

“‘You’re grown.”” Token crooned with his widely oscillating vibrato.

“‘So grown up!’” Clye screamed off-key, jumping out of his seat excitedly.

“‘So gro-own.”

“‘So grown up!’” Kenny joined in with Clyde.

“‘Nooooow I must say more then eva!”’ Token belted out in a British accent.

“‘Too rah too rah too rah LOO RAH EYYY!”’ Everyone (even Craig) sang out at the top of their lungs.

Token tipped the mic to his audience to sing the backup parts of the chorus.

“‘Come on Eileen!”

“‘Oh I swear!”

“‘What he means.”
Craig looked over and saw Tweek laughing, singing, eyes lighting up like this was the best night of his life. Tweek turned those sparkling green eyes on Craig as he began singing to him instead of Token. The wandering disco lights illuminated the sparks behind Tweek’s baby green’s, in a way that took Craig’s breath away. Damn, he was beautiful.

Craig snapped out of his trance and resumed singing like a normal person, rather than staring at Tweek like he was the holy work of art that he is.

The piano glissando-ed, and Token danced around in perfect 80’s style.

“The people ‘round here!” He sang as he shuffled his feet and bobbed his head.

The kids watched on as their friend performed in his own private music video; Clyde dancing and singing excitedly from the audience, Kenny and him appearing to bond over their shared show-off-ish-ness.

“Ah, Come on, Eileen, pleeese!” Token tossed a spare microphone to Clyde in time with the music, further proving that Token was just the coolest fucking person on the planet, and it was no fair.

“Come on, Eileen Ta Loo Rah Eh, Come on, Eileen Ta Loo Rah Eh.” Clyde sang, and it was pitchy. He tilted the mic towards the center of the group, where Kenny and Butters sang along enthusiastically. Tweek sang quietly next to Craig, not caring if he got a piece of the mic.

The music picked up, getting faster and faster as the seconds ticked on. Craig slung his arm around his boyfriend and swayed them side to side while Tweek rolled his eyes, before smiling up at Craig with that damn hypnotizing smile.

A snare drum fill broke Craig out of his trance and he turned to face the front of the room, pulling Tweek closer to his side as they sang and swayed with everybody.

As the song concluded, everybody clapped and Token gave a bow.

“Ok, who’s next?” Token held the mic out to whoever was next.

“ME!” Clyde screamed, running up and typing in his song as he bounced excitedly.

“Do you know what you’re gonna sing?” Craig squeezed Tweek’s shoulder.

“I don’t know. Maybe nothing.” The blond shrugged.

“Nothing! Really?” Craig wondered.

“I don’t know, maybe.” He shrugged again.

Craig kissed Tweek on top of his head as Wham!’s ‘Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go’ (Clyde’s go-to song) played over the speakers.

Clyde was doing ok, until for some reason he thought there was more instrumental and he came in a bar late singing “‘But something’s buggin’ me, somethin’ ain’t right, my best friend told me what you did last night!’” under all the wrong chords.

Tweek and Craig cackled to themselves, trying their best not to make their friend feel bad. But he was. He was so, so bad.
“I shoulda been with you instead! Wake—wake me up! Before you go-go.” Tweek sighed comically as Clyde found his way back on the correct beat.

Clyde finished his song confidently, completely unaware of his many, many flat notes, but dammit he had the fucking time of his life, and that’s really all that matters.

“Good job, buddy.” Token praised as he sat back down.

“Leo’s turn!” Kenny called shoving Butters up on stage.

“I’m going Kenny, jeez, relax.” Butters muttered as he stepped on stage, biting his lip thoughtfully as he searched for a song.

Reverb-y guitar strummed away as Craig instantly recognized the song from one of his sister’s 90’s music phases.

Butters grasped the mic with both hands, elbows folded in at his sides as he tapped his foot tentatively, waiting for the lyrics to start.

“Kiss me. Out of the bearded barley, nightly. Beside the green, green grass. Swing, swing, swing the spinning step. You’ll wear those shoes and I will wear that dress, oh! Kiss me.” Butters’ shy, quiet voice lilted along as he tapped his food determinedly.

“Woohoo!” Kenny cheered him on. Butters smiled at him timidly, blushing as he continued to sing lightly.

“So kiss me.” Butters sang, eyes locked only on Kenny. Craig looked over at Kenny and saw him practically on the floor, leaning forward on his elbows, watching Butters intently, a wide smile on his face.

There was a small instrumental moment after the second chorus, which Butters awkwardly didn’t know what to do with.

“Loo, loo, loo…” He mumbled tentatively with the melody of the guitar.

Kenny’s high pitched laughter floated above the music like its own melody.

“Woohoo!” He cheered again. “Fuck, I love him so much.” Kenny gushed quietly to Craig, eyes still locked on his singing boyfriend at the front of the room.

Craig turned his head to look at Tweek. He was sitting right next to him, a small, encouraging smile on his face as he watched Butters sing. As he caught Craig’s eyes, his smile widened, and Craig’s heart skipped a beat. He could feel his face reddening with the sudden realization — fuck.

Butters finished his song and he jogged over to the couch, where Kenny stood up and caught his lips in a kiss in front of everybody. Clyde and Token ‘ooh’ed mockingly. Butters lightly slapped Kenny on the arm as he pulled away, the slightly taller blond purring ‘as you wish’, and wiggling his eyebrows suggestively. Craig could feel Tweek giggle next to him.

“It’s my turn anyway.” Kenny walked past his boyfriend and strutted up to the machine. A cheesy, clapping beat played through the monitors. “This one goes out to the birthday boy!” Kenny slurried into the microphone, everybody cheering as he did.

“‘Oh Butters, you’re so fine, you’re so fine you blow my mind, hey Butters! Hey Butters! Oh
Butters, you're so fine, you're so fine you blow my mind, hey Butters! Hey Butters!"

Kenny chuckled into the mic as he continued to sing, as Butters sunk low in his seat embarrassedly, face red and laughing hysterically.

"Oh Butters, you're so fine, you're so fine you blow my mind, hey Butters! Oh Butters, you're so fine, you're so fine you blow my mind, hey Butters!"

"I'm sorry, I had to." Kenny cackled into the mic, collecting himself by the end enough to sing the verse, staring down his lashes at Butters in mock seduction as he sang.

"Hey Butters! You've been around all niiiiihgt, and that's a little long. You think you've got the right, but I think you've got it wrong! But can't you say goodnight, so you can take me home, Butters!" Kenny cheered, flipping up into falsetto expertly, just like Toni Basil. He flipped his hair in three consecutive circles before continuing, running his hands down his face and body, amusedly watching Butters squirm embarrassedly at the public attention. Kenny continued, shaking his shoulders suggestively as he belted it out.

"Oh Butters, what pity, you don't understand!" *shake shake* "You take me by the heart when you take me by the hand." *shake shake* "Oh Butters you're so pretty, can't you understand, it's guys like you Butters!" Kenny fell to his knees dramatically. "Oh what you do, Butters, do, Butters, don't break my heart, Butters! H-hey Butters!" Kenny chuckled as he continued singing, well aware how ridiculous this display of affection had become.

By the end he was crawling on the floor and attempting cheerleader moves.

It was a cringe-y, hillarious, gift-to-mankind, hot mess. Everyone was practically on the floor laughing by the time the song finished. Kenny took a bow and was met with thunderous applause.

"Well… that was great… whatever the fuck that was…” Token joked as he took over the mic to sing ‘The Impression That I Get’ by The Mighty Mighty Bosstones.

"Are you gonna sing, Craig?” Tweek chirped quietly over the start of the song.

“I don’t know, maybe.” Craig smirked, parroting Tweek’s earlier statement.

Kenny was in the middle of singing ‘I Believe in a Thing Called Love’, in his easy falsetto, when Craig decided to get up and play bartender, pouring everyone another round of shots. Kenny was dancing around more and more seductively the drunker he got, yet still managing to hit every high note with ease, as he swayed his shoulders and wiggled his hips like a rockstar. Butters, now drunk as well and no longer shy, was now cheering him on with all the encouragements and enthusiasm of the most dedicated groupie.

Craig gestured to Token to ask if it was ok to open the Fireball, which he nodded ‘sure’.

As Kenny’s song ended and he took a bow, Butters ran up and kissed him passionately on the lips, in a much more PG-13 version of what had happened when Butters sang earlier in the night.

“Ok, ok, break it up!” Clyde called from his seat. Craig chuckled and shook his head, walking around the bar to figure out some way to carry five shots in his two hands.

As his back was turned, Craig heard the familiar strum of one of his favorite Death Cab For Cutie
songs, ‘I Will Follow You Into The Dark’. Tweek had introduced this song to him, actually.

It wasn’t until he heard the small, raspy, familiar voice, that Craig spun around, eyes wide.

“‘Love of mine someday you will die, but I’ll be close behind. I’ll follow you into the dark.’”

Craig sunk into a nearby barstool and watched on in a baffled trance, jaw hitting the floor as Tweek sung softly

“‘No blinding lights, or tunnels to gates of white, just our hands clasped so tight. Waiting for the hint of a spark. If Heaven and Hell decide that they both are satisfied, illuminate the ‘No’s on their vacancy signs. If there’s no one beside you when your soul embarks, then I’ll follow you into the dark.’”

God. Dammit. Craig was hit like a freight train by a feeling he’d only ever read about before.

‘Fuck me, I love him’.

Craig downed two of the shots, before pouring two more and bringing them all to the little table in front of the couch. He stared up at Tweek, mesmerized, as the small blond continued to sing.

“‘You and me have seen everything to see, from Bangkok to Calgary. And the soles of your shoes are all worn own. The time for sleep is now. It’s nothing to cry about, ‘cause we'll hold each other soon in the blackest of roooms.’” Craig’s heart lurched as Tweek’s beautifully scratchy voice floated that last note, taking the breath away from Craig’s lungs. Was Craig crying? He may have started crying…

“‘If Heaven and Hell decide that they both are satisfied, illuminate the ‘No’s on their vacancy signs. If there’s no one beside you when your soul embarks, then I’ll follow you into the dark.’” Tweek smirked at the look on Craig’s face. “I’ll follow you into the dark”. Craig sat stunned and frozen, as the final chord rang out over the speakers.

“It’s Craig’s turn!” Clyde called, waving around the sign up sheet.

Craig downed one last shot and stood up shakily, his giant body finally not able to keep up with the amount of alcohol he’d ingested.

“That was amazing.” He slurred as Tweek handed over the mic.

“Thanks!” He chirped adorably, bouncing over to the couch to sit down again. Craig snapped himself out of staring, and typed in his song, mentally shaking off the performance jitters that always seemed to grab a hold of Craig when he got up to sing in front of people. Thank you fireball...

A piano gave Craig his starting notes. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and began.

“‘Caaan anybody find me somebody to love?’” Tweek chuckled as Craig hit the lowest note at the end.

Not many people know this about Craig, but he’s actually a pretty good singer. As a kid he was tone-deaf, but his mom had dragged him to singing lessons along with Kenny and his mom when they were growing up and he had learned to harness his voice and stop being so lazy with it.

Craig continued serenading his audience, mainly Tweek.

“‘Ooooh, oooh. Each morning I get up I die a little, can barely stand on my feet! Take a looooook
in the mirror and cry. ‘Lord watcha doing to me?’ I spent all my years believing you, but I just can’t get no relief Lord! Somebody, ooh somebody, can anybody find me somebody to love.’”

Now it was Tweek’s turn to pick his jaw up off the floor. “‘Yeah.’” Craig sang with a smirk. He began swaying to the music, hoping and pleading in his head that he looked as cool as Token or Kenny when they did it.

When the guitar solo came around Craig awkwardly mimed a dramatic performance, Pete Townshend windmill and all.

“‘Oooh somebody… Ooh… can anybody find me soooomebody to looooove?’” Craig belted impressively, trying, but not sure if he was failing, to look as cool as possible while doing so.

Craig humorously pointed at Clyde for he next set of lyrics.

“‘Got no feeeel, I got no rhythm, I just keep loosing my beat’”

“Hey!” Clyde called through everybody’s laughter.

“I’m ok, I’m alright. I ain’t gonna faaaaace no defeat! I just gotta get out of this prison cell. One day I’m gonna be free, looooooood!” Craig pulled the mic slowly away from his face as his note rang out with beautiful vibrato.

“‘Find me somebody to love, find me somebody to love.’” Craig gestured for everybody to sing along, as he once again picked the lowest bass note to latch onto in the harmonies.

“‘Oh, oh-oh-oh ooooh!’” Craig crooned over a chorus of drunk, teenage boys chanting “‘Find me somebody to love!’” He caught Tweek’s eyes as they sang, smile breaking out over his moving lips.

“‘Can anybody find me….. somebody toooooo…’” Craig rasped out his high note as best as he could to the whoops and cheers of the crowd. “‘Lo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-ove.’”

“‘Find me somebody to-o-o-o love.’” The background of the track sang on as Craig stared at Tweek breathlessly.

“‘Oooooh!’” Craig trilled as the song played on. “‘Fiiiiiiind me somebody, somebody, somebody…. somebody to love. Find me, find me, find me, find me, fiiiiiiind… ooooh someone to loooove!’”

Craig stepped off the stage as he sang to Tweek, walking over to him slowly, smiling dopily.

“‘Ooh-ooh-ooh ooooooooh! Find me, find me, find me somebody to love.’”

Craig was now standing in front of Tweek, watching him slowly stand up from his seat, staring at Craig carefully. Craig felt his eyes soften as he looked down at the enchanting blond in front of him.

“‘Anybody, anywhere, anybody find me somebody to lo-o-o-o-ooove, find me, find me, find…’”

Craig crooned, voice fading to a whisper, as he lowered the mic and Tweek reached up to wrap his arms around Craig’s neck, kissing him feverishly. Cheers and hollers could be heard from the onlooking teens, but they sounded so distant in his swimming head. The only thing that mattered to Craig at this moment was his coffee scented boyfriend, and the way his arms felt around him. The piano played its last notes and Craig pulled away from Tweek, running his fingers through his hair and staring down at him lovingly.
“Love you.” Craig mouthed embarrassedly.

“Already?” Tweek mouthed back, jokingly.

Clyde had already stepped up and started playing some Carrie Underwood song when Craig rolled his eyes and pulled Tweek away behind the bar to talk.

“So you love me?” Tweek smirked, thrown off guard when Craig kissed him unexpectedly again.

He pulled away and looked Tweek deep in his eyes, trying to ignore Clyde’s off-key rendition of ‘Jesus Take the Wheel’ in the background.

“I guess.” Craig shrugged.

Tweek laughed musically. Craig’s favorite sound.

"'You'll say... we got nothing in common...’” Clyde’s voice was mumbling over the speakers hours later.

Kenny and Butters were passed out on the couch. Craig’s head lay in Tweek’s lap where the sleepy blond was sprawled out on the floor, propped up against the wall, lazily. Token was busy at the bar cleaning up and washing glasses.

“‘And I said, what about... breakfast at Tiffany’s...’” Clyde slurred exhaustedly into the microphone from where he was slumped against the mic stand, eyes drifting closed as he moaned out the words, almost passing out before he’d finished the second verse.

“Alright, that’s it, I’m calling it, we’re done here.” Token announced, flicking on the light and waking everybody up.

“What time is it?” Butters stretched, rubbing his eyes as Kenny flipped over on the couch and buried his face in the cushions.

“3 o’clock in the morning.” Token yawned. “Let’s go to sleep.”

“Some of us already were.” Kenny grumbled, voice muffled by the couch cushions.

The boys set up sleeping bags and pillows in the living room, everybody too exhausted to even bother with getting ready for bed.

Kenny lay his sleeping bag right next to Butters, placing his head on the pillow as he yawned. “Did you have a good birthday?” He whispered, wiggling closer to Buters as he settled in. Craig rolled his eyes, mostly out of annoyance for his fatigue, and set up camp next to Tweek and Clyde.

“The best. Seriously.” Butters whispered sleepily. “Hey, do you remember the last time we had a giant sleepover like this? It was the night before the battle at Kupa Keep.” Craig heard Buters giggle. He looked over at Tweek, who just shrugged and closed his eyes.

“I promise this is not just a vision this time, Paladin.” Kenny chuckled.

“I don’t know what you guys are talking about over there but please shut the fuck up. Sorry,
Happy Birthday Butters, but shut the fuck up.” Craig grumbled from where he lay on the floor next to Tweek. Craig heard mumbled ‘sorry’s as he buried his nose in Tweek’s shoulder and fell asleep, feeling a very tired hand wrap around his shoulders and pat his back absently as Tweek drifted off to sleep.

Craig was the last to wake up, as usual, waking up in an empty graveyard of sleeping bags and blankets. He could hear noise and laughter drifting in from the kitchen, the smell of cinnamon scones and eggs wafting into the quiet living room.

Craig checked his watch: it was about 1 pm. But hey, breakfast was always justified as the first meal of the day no matter what time you woke up. Those. are. facts.

Craig yawned and stretched, and grabbed his chullo from where it lay discarded against his pillow. He pulled it over his head and stumbled into the bright kitchen. Too bright.

“Ow.” He mumbled shielding himself from the sun’s nurturing rays. “Can we close the blinds?”

“There aren’t blinds. My mom thought it looked too cluttered.” Token called over his shoulder, stirring more than a dozen scrambled eggs over the stove.

“Well, where is the Tylenol?” Craig winced with only one eye open.

“It’s dye-free Acetaminophen but it’s the same ingredients.” Tweek explained, rolling his eyes a little bit, making Craig chuckle despite his headache.

“Where’s Clyde?” Craig asked as he popped the pills into his mouth and placed the bottle back on the counter where he found it. Tweek gestured with his head and Craig followed his gaze to where Clyde was lying on the cold tile floor, mouth hanging open, eyes wide, arms limp above his head as he lay there, blinking.

“Hey, buddy, you feeling ok?” Craig called, trying his best to surpress his laughter.

“Nuh-uh.” Clyde grunted shaking his head slightly.

“He’ll feel better once he has some food in him.” Token chuckled.

“And why are you so chipper this morning?” Craig accused.

“Because I only had one beer and a few shots. I drank responsibly. And now I feel fine.” Token gloated with his stupid, smiling face and his stupid, clear eyes without bags underneath them…

Craig flipped him off for no reason and sat on a stool at the counter.

“How long does the coffee take?” Tweek asked Token, eyeing the bubbling machine with his big eyes like Gollum eyes the One Ring.

“It’s almost done, probably another 10 minutes.” Token promised.

“I’m getting tea.” Tweek grumbled with a shrill, rushed tone, if that paradox even makes sense, God, Craig was so tired.

“You have a literal caffeine problem.” Craig announced with slight judgment in his voice.

“And you have a literal attitude problem.” Tweek shot back defensively, as he made himself his
temporary caffeine fix.

“Good morning.” Butters called sleepily from the hallway as he walked in from the bathroom, toothbrush in hand.

“Morning!” Token chirped.

“Mhm.” Tweek nodded.

“Ugh.” Craig grunted.

Clyde just made some sort of whimpering sound, but Craig was sure it was meant to be cheerful.

“Where’s Kenny?” Butters asked innocently.

Speak of the devil…

Just then, pounding drums and electric guitar beat through the tiny speakers of a cell phone, as Kenny slid in on his socks, using his phone as a microphone, being loud and annoying as fuck.

He spun around dramatically and began singing along with the track.

“‘I love myself I want you to love me. When I feel down I want you above me.’” Kenny danced around the kitchen, sauntering about like a lunatic as this disgusting song played on. “‘I search myself, I want you to find me. I forget myself, I want you to remind me.’”

Everyone looked around the room at each other like ‘what the fuck is going on.’ At least Clyde looked amused, tapping his foot despite his nausea. Butters looked red-faced and mortified as Kenny danced up to him, shaking his hair and shimmying his shoulders.

“‘I don’t want, anybody else! When I think about you—’”

Butters lunged at him. “KENNY PLEASE STOP SINGING!”

Kenny smirked from behind Butters’ hand, which was now covering his mouth in a desperate plea to make the embarrassing serenading stop.

Kenny chuckled and shrugged, mumbling something muffled that just came out like ‘mmfmm mmfmm mmfmm.’ He turned the song off on his phone and looked mischievously down at Butters as he leaned against the wall behind him lazily.

“Mmfmm m mmfmm.” Kenny rambled, whatever he was saying Craig couldn’t understand it, though Butters seemed horrified by whatever it was.


“When I think about you, I…” Tweek hummed to himself quietly as he sweetened his tea, before realizing, based on the fact that everyone was staring at him now, that it was in fact out loud. “What? It’s catchy!” He defended himself embarrassedly.

“Well… ignoring that… breakfast is ready.” Token announced, scooping scrambled eggs into a big bowl. Craig helped by pulling the scones out of the oven and placing them all on a giant, floral, porcelain plate. Kenny buttered stacks of excess toast and set it down in the center of the table. Tweek tended to the giant pot of coffee that had just finished brewing and Clyde continued
Butters attempted to help to, but was bombarded with commands to stay seated, because it was still technically his birthday celebration.

The boys all ate in front of the giant windows, with a stunning view of Mrs. Black’s multi-colored rose garden. The fresh air from the open windows actually helped to ease Craig of his headache, and the still silence at the breakfast table helped to soothe his mood.

Once breakfast was over, Clyde — now full of food and feeling better than ever — helped clear the dishes with everybody else, though he continued to insist that Butters stay seated, grabbing his plate for him as well.

By 2:00, everybody was tired again and ready for another nap.

“Anybody wanna watch a movie in the theater?” Token suggested. Craig sighed in relief just thinking about the plushy, leather, reclining seats and the dark room.

“Yes.” Clyde cheered enthusiastically, albeit much quieter than he would on any other given day.

“I’d love to, but Kenny and I have got to get going.” Butters called from where he was packing his bag in the corner.

“What are you guys doing?” Clyde wondered with a yawn.

“We’re gonna go play video games at Stan’s house since they all couldn’t come yesterday.” Kenny explained, chivalrously taking Butters’ bag from his hands so the smaller blond didn’t have to carry anything, despite his tiny protests.

“Alright well have fun. We should all hang out again sometime!” Token smiled.

Everybody bid goodbye to Kenny and Butters, Clyde with the biggest hugs, and promises that he and Kenny will hang out more often.

By 3:00, everybody was asleep in the theater, dozing off to Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World in their reclining seats, warm blankets draped over their laps.

Tweek’s head lay nestled on Craig’s chest, where the taller boy clung onto him like a koala in the seat they were sharing together.

'Yeah', Craig thought to himself with a yawn as he closed his eyes, 'I... love him... or whatever'.

Chapter End Notes

Song List:
1. "Come on Eileen" - Dexys Midnight Runners
2. "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" - Wham!
3. "Kiss Me" - Sixpence None the Richer
4. "Hey Mickey!" - Toni Basil
5. "The Impression That I Get" - The Mighty Mighty Bosstones
6. "I Believe In A Thing Called Love" - The Darkness
7. "I'll Follow You Into The Dark" - Death Cab for Cutie
8. "Somebody to Love" - Queen
9. "Jesus Take The Wheel" - Carrie Underwood
10. "Breakfast at Tiffany's" - Deep Blue Something
11. "I Touch Myself" - The Divinyls
Firkle's Song

Chapter Summary

Merry Christmas! (At least I think 2 hours past midnight on the 26th still counts as Christmas...)

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season, whatever you may or may not celebrate

And if you didn't, that's ok too

Anyway, here's a sweet little Firkle & The Goths chapter to tide you over until I can finish editing the rest of this chunk of chapters. I just really wanted to make sure I had a little something as a present for the holidays.

Cheers!

POV - FIRKLE

“Any more takers before we rehearse?” Henrietta held up her small, glass hookah — an admittedly beautiful periwinkle/purple color, though Firkle would never confess how much he adored the shade.

“Me.” He grunted roughly in his small voice. He held out his hand to accept the sweet bowl of tobacco, packed with half Strawberry Shisha, and half with South Park Dispensary’s finest weed.

Michael has a condition of some kind or something, though he changed the disease and the severity of the illness every time he talked about it, so Firkle and Pete never really knew the truth. Firkle sometimes wondered if there even really was anything wrong with Michael. Though the specifics of that information is irrelevant, anyway. The point is: Michael has a medical card, and he was always willing to share.

Firkle closed his eyes and sucked in the sweet and bitter taste of tobacco, marijuana, and artificial strawberry. He held it in his lungs until it burned, and blew it out slowly.

…Sometimes Firkle’s brain overthought. In fact it was doing it right now. Firkle cleared his throat a little in order to fill the room with at least some noise to distract himself.

“‘K.” He concluded simply, setting the hookah down on a nearby table and picking up his guitar.

“Right. Let’s get going.” Michael announced half-heartedly, mid light, a fresh cigarette between his teeth as he mumbled before the open flame of his engraved zippo lighter.

Firkle took the silence as an opportunity to bring up something he’d been thinking about a lot lately.

“Hey…” he fidgeted with the guitar pick in his hands, “so… you know how, at lunch in the
beginning of the semester, you said that Karen and those guys should come see a rehearsal sometime… I’m thinking of inviting them… to one… a rehearsal… yeah.” Firkle either felt the need to say too much, repeat himself, or say too little. He hated himself for any one of those options.

“I think that’s a great idea.” Henrietta chimed in. “Plus, you need to get more friends your own age so you’re not all alone next year when we’re all going to community college in Denver.”

Ouch. The thought made Firkle dizzy…

“If I go.” Pete muttered under his breath in response.

“You’re going.” Henrietta snapped at him.

“Birth mother, is that you?” Pete quipped back at her with sarcastically dark humor.

Michael snort-laughed around his cigarette.

Henrietta flipped them both off before sighing, and lazily explaining herself, and her bossy attitude.

“Listen, It’s your life or whatever, but I don’t want my baby boys to grow up without futures. And as much as diplomas and degrees and shit are all just conformist bullshit that the world is conditioned to value over character — the more pieces of paper you collect the more little pieces of paper you get in the mail so you can pass it off to the next corporate greed machine… it matters. Your life will be easier if you have one, and I, like, kinda tolerate you bastards, so I won’t let you sabotage yourselves.”

Case closed. End of story.

It was Henrietta’s way of saying how much she loved the guys, and how she wanted to push them towards success — even more than they’d push themselves. Hell, she’d most likely be the only one keeping Firkle in school next year once they all moved on without him. As much as he refused to even breathe a word of this truth: he’d miss them terribly. He was already having stressful, anxious nights where he just sat up crying and worrying, until the early hours of the morning, agonizing over fake scenarios where they’d move on to make much cooler, more edgy and sophisticated friends — Denver friends — and he’d lose them forever. He’d even made himself sick over it a few times. It was not a topic he preferred to be thinking about…

So he changed the subject.

“So yeah. Anyway, I’ll tell them. I guess. Whatever. I’ve got a new song today, let’s work on that.” Firkle ordered in a rush, words speeding up the more he heard his own voice out loud. He hated it…

Firkle flipped his hair and pulled his bangs down in front of his face.

“Hey Pete,” Henrietta called from where she lounged on her drum throne — slouched back against the wall behind her with one heel perched up on the side of her seat, elbow resting on her black denim knee, stick twirling in her hand — “Why don’t you invite that friend from work…”

“Oh, I don’t have a work friend?” Pete condescended with attitude, flipping his red hair that was now the same color as his face.
Ok, cool, guess we’re all just ignoring Firkle now, whatever…

“Yes you do, boo.” Henrietta smirked, “that cute one, right?”

Pete sputtered and choked on his gatorade, rushing to screw the lid back on as he coughed and gasped for air. Henrietta smirked amusedly before blowing Pete a kiss and winking at him, wittily. Michael handed Pete his lit cigarette, and Pete took long, slow drags off of it as he slowly caught his breath again, treating nicotine like an inhaler.

“No way!” Pete coughed once more before taking one more drag. “Besides”, he spoke, holding his breath. Pete blew smoke out in long, slow streams from his nostrils as he passed the cigarette back to Michael. “I don’t ever really talk to him… her… them.”

Henrietta just shrugged, a know-it-all smirk painted plainly on her face. Pete made a disgusted clicking noise with his tongue.

“Ugh. Let’s get back to rehearsal?” He ordered warily, looking to Henrietta for permission. She nodded. Michael gestured towards Pete in a sort of ‘cheers’ motion with his cigarette before taking three unnecessarily short drags in a row and producing three perfect rings upon exhale. Pete took another swig of his blue gatorade, and Firkle passed out the charts for the newest song he wrote.

Michael guffawed, raising his eyebrows in disbelief. “Is this really what the song is called?”

“Yes.” Firkle hissed, snatching the chart from Michael’s hands, “We can change it later but for now just fucking sing it.” Michael cocked his eyebrows in that arrogant way of his, before holding out his hand to wordlessly ask for the chart back.

Firkle threw it back at him, regretting the choice of not changing the name before giving it to the guys.

“Alright, Georgie.” Henrietta sneered. Firkle winced at his ugly name. “Lead the way.”

Firkle sighed, already exhausted. “Ok. Everybody listen up, please, because I don’t like repeating myself…”

Of course, the guys wasted the next five minutes of rehearsal pretending they hadn’t heard each time Firkle laid out tempo, time changes, and where he wanted the rhythmic hits.

“So… just to be clear… hits on 1 and 4?” Michael deadpanned, eyeing Henrietta out of the corner of his eye so he could watch her as she laughed heartily.

“IS THIS A FUCKING TAYLOR SWIFT SONG? NO, IT’S TWO AND THE AND OF FOUR, and then THREE and FIVE IN THE FIVE-FOUR OUTRO, DOES ANYBODY EVER FUCKING LISTEN TO ME?”

Michael snickered at his own joke, and Firkle flipped him off emotionlessly. At least he hoped it came across that way.

“I don’t know man, this lovey-dovey title sure sounds pretty Swift-y to me.” Pete chimed in, slumped, disengaged against his amp. Michael blew a cloud of smoke through his smirk as he eyed Firkle like he knew something Firkle didn’t know he knew. It was the kind of look that made Firkle’s head hurt. He pulled down his bangs again.

Henrietta’s condescending laughter and Pete’s occasional chuckle only served to make Firkle more
and more irritated. It wasn’t a good look on him and it messed with his usual nihilistic and laisze-
faire attitude. Firkle just sat back and folded his arms, eyeing his friends with judgment until they
silenced.

After the laughter died down, Firkle took a calming breath, flipped his hair and ran a hand down
the side of his face, tugging at his bangs along the way.

“Just play the fucking song.”

Firkle slung his guitar over his shoulders and took his place behind his microphone.

“Alright.” Michel placed his lit cigarette in the attached cigarette holder he had constructed and
screwed crudely into the side of his mic stand.

“We’re just teasing you Firkle, baby, we’ll be serious now.” Henrietta announced in a very mom-
like voice, “no more picking on Firkle, he’s band leader right now!”

“I don’t need you to protect me from my friends…” Firkle mumbled, though Henrietta just
shrugged and clicked the record button on her computer. Michael smoothed his hair on the sides of
his head and Pete adjusted his seating position. Everybody was settled, and Henrietta counted off.

“She’s a Gem’… Rehearsal, Take One… ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR!”
21: A Real McCormick Man

Chapter Summary

It's Kevin's 21st birthday motherfuckers

Chapter Notes

WE'RE BACK

it has been a moment

Sorry it took me a LONG ASS time to figure out the order of the next important plot points, and literally 2 months to create this next round of updates amongst the other real life things I had to do once life got in the way again.

Anyway, after many weeks of reacquainting myself with the plot and timeline, we are back, and it's not even October 3rd. 😊

(P.S. As I've said before, there will be large time jumps once we pass certain milestones like birthdays and Halloween, but 35 chapters in and I'd say we're a little more than halfway, but that's whatcha get for wanting each chapter to be its own POV.

BUT

I'm not too stressed about it because I actually really like reading monster fics so why not continue to churn out the content I enjoy, no matter how long it takes, but the point is this is all going somewhere, I swear, lol).

ANYWAY, WELCOME BACK, and I hope you all enjoy further continuation of When Do I Get Out Of Here

<3

POV - Kevin

"Ey, my boooooy!"

Kevin was woken up by the sounds of his father’s bellowing voice, followed by a small clatter as he stumbled his way to the side of Kevin’s bed to grip him with a heavy, enthusiastic smacking on his shoulder.

“Ow,” Kevin grumbled, eyes adjusting to the light that had just been flicked on in his room.

“Happy Birthday, Kev!” Stuart leaned down to kiss his son on the top of his head, before shaking his shoulder again and patting it aggressively, beaming proudly. “My boy is 21! A man! A real McCormick man! Another year older, you know what that means?”
Kevin grumbled squinting his eyes against the aggressively bright lamp next to his bed.

“A year closer to death?” Kevin felt a hard slap against his face.

“Don’t you dare say those things.” Stuart hissed, his eyes pained, hand shaking, a slight panic in his rumbling voice. Kevin blinked up at him unmovingly. Stuart’s expression melted and a proud smile returned to his face. “21! My boy!” Kevin remained motionless as his dad scooped him up into a half-hug, giggling with manic enthusiasm as he rocked his son back and forth. He already smelled like cheap ass beer and bourbon. Stuart kissed his son on the cheek sloppily and pulled back to look at him with tears in his eyes. “I can’t believe my boy is a man… a 21 year old man!” Kevin jolted as another supportive smack jostled him in the center of his back, rattling his spine. “We’re going out to the bars, come on!” Stuart jumped up and danced his way toward the door, snapping his fingers off-beat, no doubt waking up the whole house with his singing and hollering.

Kevin looked at the clock, “At fucking midnight?” He rubbed his face as he swung his legs over the edge of his bed.

“Yeah!” Stuart beamed sticking his head back in the doorway, “the guys’re already waitin’ for us down at the pub to celebrate us legally drinkin’ together as father and son! All grown, ‘Cat’s In The Cradle’, n shit. Come on,” Stuart clapped his hands and rubbed them together, “I’ll be waitin’ in the truck! 21, yahoo!” Stewart cheered all the way down the hall and out the front door. He’s probably blasting his truck radio right now, waking up all of their neighbors.

Kevin wondered if his dad was even in the condition to drive — probably pregamed with his work buddies, no doubt. Although, Kevin didn’t blame him. It was a really special birthday according to his dad, because it meant they could hang out together like ‘men’. Not that 21 would really mean anything different to Kevin aside from finally cutting up his fake ID and christening the real one for the first time out in public. Big fucking deal.

Kevin stood up and cracked his back, his head pounding from the few hours of sleep he’d gotten today… yesterday… when he’d passed out in his bed at 6:00pm on a Thursday.

He didn’t even have to get dressed, six hours ago he’d just crashed without changing his clothes and was still wearing his outfit from last night… two nights ago… whatever. It served its purpose just fine.

As predicted, Stuart was already slumped back in the passenger seat of Kevin’s car, windows rolled all the way down, singing at the top of his lungs to Journey playing in the radio.

“Lower that shit.” Kevin muttered as he climbed into the driver’s seat, cranking the volume knob to the left and rolling up the windows despite his father’s arm half-hanging out of it. They couldn’t afford another noise complaint. Barbrady promised the next one would result in a fine.

Stuart protested under his breath, muttering something about ‘classic Journey, man’. Kevin ignored him, and drove the familiar route to a familiar bar.

“Hey, Kevin’s here!” A chorus of men roared their greetings as Kevin and his dad wandered into the bar. Kevin heard individual ‘happy birthday’s’ from at least seven of his dad’s friends, each
one clapping him on the back in an aggressive show of affection that seemed to be the only way that grown men knew how to communicate towards one another.

Stuart pulled his son straight to the bar, where Skeeter himself was waiting to serve Kevin a celebratory drink.

“Kevin, what’ll ya have?”

Technically, Skeeter and all his other employees had been serving Kevin for years. Stuart hadn’t allowed it in high school, but once he had dropped out, it hadn’t really mattered anymore, and Stuart preferred his son get his drinks in a safe environment, rather than from some strung out drifter selling beers to underage kids in they alley outside the 7/11. (His name was Steve, he was nice, but he was shady). Skeeter made Stewart sign something stupid, for legal reasons, if the law were to ever get involved. But Stuart was a regular, and a valued friend of the owner, so it was all smooth sailing from the word ‘ok’.

“You know what I’ll have.” Kevin nodded towards the bar with a smirk.

“The usual!” Skeeter cheered, and a chorus of echos from drunk hillbillies followed. Skeeter reached down behind the bar and brought up a pint glass and a shot glass for Kevin’s usual: a pint of Guinness and a shot of whiskey. If he was feeling differently he would order a Jack and Coke, but Guinness with a side of Jack was his favorite, because it got him way more fucked up.

“All right, pipe down, pipe down.” Skeeter ordered, and the bar noise fell to a quiet hum of distant conversations. Everybody around the bar watched on with excitement and anticipation as Skeeter held Kevin’s order up in front of him. “A pint of Guinness,” dark beer splattered onto the carved up, wooden counter as Skeeter slammed it down in front of Kevin, “and a shot’a Tennessee Whiskey.” Skeeter passed the shot glass to Kevin as a low rumble of ‘oohs’ and ‘ohs’ rustled through the onlooking ground. Skeeter held up another small shot glass to Stuart, and a third one up for himself. “Kevin…” Skeeter looked excitedly between Kevin and his dad, “Happy Birthday.”

“To Kevin!” Stewart bellowed.

“To Kevin!” Stuart’s friends bellowed back, yelling unintelligible words and pounding drumrolls on the unsteady bar, rattling glass and raising a racket as the three men slung back their shots of Jack. It burned, numbing on the way down until Kevin could feel warmth settle in his empty stomach.

“Well… let’s party!” Stuart proclaimed to the bar. The music turned back on, patrons cheered, and conversations resumed as normal. It was almost surreal, like a scene in a movie. Flogging Molly blared on in the background and the sounds of pool balls knocking together melted into the portrait of noise as Jimbo ordered another round of shots for everyone in the general vicinity.

It was now 1 am and Kevin was beginning to feel drunk. Or was it more like drunk-ish? No… no he was definitely fucking obliterated by this point. Either way, he was still fully aware of his surroundings by the time Stuart stood up out of his bar stool at the center of a small group of his friends to make a second toast to his boy.

“Excuse me!” He announced grandly to the five people in their corner of the bar, “But I just have to make a second toast to the Birthday Boy.” He raised his glass and his friends did the same.
Stuart turned to Kevin and smiled. “We haven’t always had the easiest relationship. Yes, we’ve had our differences, our fights and our disagreements,” Stuart smirked at his friends like it was some kind of an inside joke, which was massively irritating, “but I have never forgotten how I felt the day you were born, because… whoo!” Stuart blew air through his mouth and shook his head, looking as though he might cry, before continuing with his unnecessarily dramatic speech, “Because your family and your blood is all you got in this world.” Kevin was getting jostled by all of his Dad’s friends, patting him on the back and slurring their similitudes. Stuart tapped on his glass lightly with his stubby fingernails to get the attention back on him. Kevin took a small sip before his dad continued.

“Exactly 21 years ago today, at 1:07 in the mornin’, my firstborn,” Stuart gripped his son’s shoulder tightly, “came into this world. And I swore I would protect him until the day I died.” Kevin gave his dad an awkward, tight-lipped, half smile as his dad’s work friends/drinking buddies cheered with a chorus of ‘here, here!’s. Stuart’s eyes were twinkling like the stars in the sky. It made something deep in Kevin’s chest feel tight and hollow.

“Now… I know at times I may not have been providing the best example,” Stuart played to the small crowd around him, his buddies chuckling in response like a bunch of frat boys reveling in their fucked up pasts, “but I hope I’ve made you proud as your dad, and as a man. Because,” Stuart wiped at his wet eyes before the tears could even fall, “you’ve made me proud to be your dad. Happy Birthday, son.”

“It is now… 1:07, on the dot! Drink t’Kevin!” Stuart cheered as all his friends chugged their beers in seconds flat, with Kevin not far behind.

“Thanks, Dad.” He smiled more genuinely now that he could feel the Guinness ease his senses and lessen his irritation. He hoped it resembled something like appreciation for his father’s millionth embarrassing speech that night.

Skeeter came back with another tray of twelve whiskey doubles, and each of them wolfed down two each before he could even set the tray down at their table. Kevin put down his beer, deciding he should probably take a break, as his vision was beginning to swim.

“You know,” Kevin coughed as four shots of alcohol burned his throat and went straight to his head, making him sway dizzily on his feet. “I always thought I was adopted? Since nobody in our family really looks like me. But we’re too poor for that...” The crowd went silent for a second before busting up with an inappropriate amount of strained laughter. If there was a joke here, Kevin didn’t get it.

“Oh this is fun, apparently, Kevin has struck a nerve.
He found it humorous.

Kevin threw his head back and laughed again. “I’m just joking, Dad…” Kevin was about to take another swig of beer before he remembered that it was empty (when had he finished it?), “But I mean, look at this.” Kevin grabbed his dad’s arm and held it up next to his (gesturing between their similar but slightly different shades) before Stuart’s drunken reflexes could yank his limp arm away. “Pale with freckles, tan with moles.” Kevin failed to notice the shifty-eyed look that was being passed around the room as he continued drunkenly confessing a long-time theory he’d been pondering since childhood. “I mean it looks like we’re not even related.” Kevin looked at his dad pointedly. “Isn’t that funny?”

Stuart was fuming now.

He slammed his fist on the bar counter with a booming thump and stepped forward to point a shaky finger in Kevin’s face. “You shut up, you little shit, you are the spittin’ image of me.”

“No, Kenny’s the spittin’ image of you.” Kevin quipped with a drunken sloppy smirk, despite quiet warnings from Stuart’s friends telling him to just be quiet.

“You’re just different colorin’ but that’s my face I’m lookin’ at right now!” Stuart half-yelled through his attempt to try and keep his voice down.

“Kevin. Just drop it.” Randy Marsh begged him quietly.

“Oh come on.” Kevin chuckled darkly, hiccupsing on inhalation. “My skin is more tan than yours, my hair is darker than yours…”

“Watch it—” Kevin’s dad warned him lowly.

“…If Mom didn’t have brown eyes that would be proof that I’m adopted, at least... or maybe i’m just hers or something.” Kevin joked, though even he wasn’t really sure where the humor was supposed to be.

Stuart shook off Jimbo’s tentative hand as he attempted to comfort his fuming friend.

“Hey, dumbass,” Stuart condescended with a holler towards his slightly startled son, “you’re descended from your grandpa too, and he’s got your colorin’. Now that settles it, and I won’t hear any more of it. Now shut your mouth, you little shit, you’re disrespecting me, and your mother, and I won’t have any of it.” Stuart snarled in an ugly growl.

Kevin wasn’t impressed. “Face it, I look like a bastard.”

Stuart breathed in and out of his nose heavily. “You look like my family!”

Kevin chuckled and addressed Randy and Jimbo to his left as they shook their heads warningly. “Hey, I wonder what my real dad is. Maybe I’m Greek or somethin’. Italian. Something from somewhere where all the women are hotter than all of Ireland’s babes combined.” Kevin threw his head back in drunken laughter.

It’s because of this that he hadn’t seen him coming.

Stuart grabbed Kevin out of his barstool, and rushed him across to a nearby wall, practically throwing him into it, grabbing him painfully by his cheeks with one vice-grip of a hand.
“Do you hear what you are accusing your mother of?” Stuart hissed, foul breath mere inches from Kevin’s face. He kept squeezing tighter and tighter and his hands shook from the effort. “Answer me!”

“Dad, chill out, it was a joke!” Kevin scratched at his father’s hand gripped tightly around his cheeks. “I was just being funny!” Kevin mumbled as best as he could, his voice cracking embarrassingly high at the end.

Stuart stepped in closer, other hand pointing in his son’s red face. “You have McCormick blood running through your veins, boy, and I won’t hear anything on the contrary. Now, I may look like my mom, but you look like just like my dad and the rest of my kin. Hey, I can prove it!” He snarled in sarcastic anger. “You have his forehead,” Stuart pointed his bony finger into Kevin’s skin painfully hard, “and his cheekbones.” Stewart shook his son’s face from where he was still grabbing him my the mouth.

“Ok, Dad, I was kidding! I know you’re my dad, stupid!” Kevin felt a hard slap to his face, nothing like the warning tap he had received for joking about dying. The room fell silent at the unmistakable sound of skin hitting skin. Stuart took a step back with tears starting to form in his wild eyes. Nearby, a small group of people were starting to flee from the bar, not wanting to be here to see the shit show come to a conclusion. A banging noise directed the attention back to Skeeter.

“GET OUTTA MY BAR, NOW, TAKE IT OUTSIDE!” Skeeter roared, pointing to the side door. Kevin stomped toward it and threw it open, feeling like a small child being sent to his room. His father was not far behind, followed closely by his loyal troupe of friends. He stalked up to Kevin, steaming and whistling like a teapot ready to boil.

“Now I may be no angel,” he hissed, spitting with his words as he stared at Kevin carefully, “but your mother is a saint. Do you hear me? The shit that you have put that woman through… that you put us through…” Stuart moaned self-pityingly.

“Oh, fuck you.” Kevin dismissed with a wave of his hand.

“FUCK YOU!” Stuart screamed, whole body shaking as some of his friends attempted to calm him down. “And she always forgave you, your mother, forgiving woman that she is… whereas I just forget.” Stuart spat towards Kevin’s feet. It took his drunk brain a second to process what his father had just said.

“You’re not seriously blaming your shitty life on me?” Kevin shouted incredulously.

Stuart threw his hands up in the air in question, pacing around the parking lot like a caged animal. “I’m just saying my life has always been hard. Then I had you too young, and wasn't ready... then you and your attitude growing up didn’t always help.” Stuart shrugged callously.

Kevin could feel his blood boiling.

“You’re life was hard?” Kevin scoffed, advancing on his father as quickly as he could without falling over. “Try growing up with parents who never gave a shit—”

Stuart exploded, “You don’t even KNOW WHAT IT’S LIKE to grow up with parents who don’t give a shit!”

“—who never matured past high school—”
“You don’t know WHAT I do for this family!”

“—and treat sobriety like a phase!”

“And what are you then, hm?” Stuart growled dangerously, “Didn’t even graduate, and oh, no job to show for it. Not since he got fired for showing up drunk—”

“That’s still a better record than you’ve got!!!”

“—Just lays around the house all day when he’s not out getting stoned or drunk, again.”

“At least when I fuck up it doesn’t tear our whole fucking house down!”

“It’s pretty damn close!”

“—Bringing strangers into our garage like you don’t live with three kids…”

“My kids are 14!”

“Karen is 14!”

Kevin and Stuart were practically chasing each other around the alley now, airing out all of their dirty laundry with an almost unrealistic lack of regard for the world around them. He would almost not believe this story tomorrow when someone tells him about it. Kevin could feel all of his father’s friends glaring daggers at him, but it only served to fuel the fire more.

Stuart spun around on his heels before continuing.

“I raised you kids fine, you’re alive ain’tcha?”

“No, I raised us kids.” Kevin clarified, he could feel the fire blazing behind his eyes and burning his throat as he screamed.

“Jesus Christ, cry me a river.” Stuart rolled his eyes and leaned back on his heels.

“I raised my siblings.” Kevin insisted, face growing hot.

“Well, don’t take all the credit, Kev.” Stuart sneered in cruel, sarcastic invalidation.

“I kept them safe—”

“Please, you were never home.” Stuart dismissed.

“—While you and Mom were off getting high in the garage.”

Stuart’s eye twitched in that way that only happened when Kevin hit a nerve.

Got him.

Stuart doubled over and let out a primal, guttural scream.

“Leave your mother out of this!” Stuart wailed pitifully, pulling at his hair in frustration.

Kevin pushed his father back into his clump of eavesdropping friends.

“You’re a drunk piece of shit.” He snarled, spitting a fat glob of spit at his dirty work boots.
“WHAT?” Stuart barked, eyes blinking wildly like a madman.

Skeeter stepped between them carefully, like a trained lion tamer stepping straight into a wild lion’s den. “You’re both drunk, let’s chill out before I have to ban you both from my bar!” He warned. Stuart and Kevin eyed each other coldly before Stuart finally made a disgusted sucking noise with his teeth, waving his hand downwards dismissively. He turned around and began walking back into the bar, opening the door to the musty enclosure with a bang.

“And just so we’re clear,” Kevin continued, strutting up to snarl at his father’s back despite protests from everyone around him. “Mom’s no saint.”

An unmistakable popping sound filled the air, just barely covered by the loud screams of everybody watching.

Kevin staggered back, holding his jaw in disbelief; he’d hit him… his father was an abusive piece of shit, sure, but he had never actually hit him before, not technically... and now he’d actually done it. Kevin’s vision went blurry from shock and alcohol, but he could still see his father’s blue eyes grow soft and desperate as he reached out to his son. His friends must have thought he was trying to get to Kevin to keep beating the shit out of him because they held onto him tightly as he squirmed.

“Kevin, get out of here!” Skeeter yelled, holding his dad back as he sobbed and wailed apologies to Kevin.

“Should I call the police?” The young, new hire called from inside the bar as Skeeter tried his best to pull the door shut with six grown men wedged in the doorway.

“Christ, no!” Skeeter yelled back at him, “Stuart’s family, and we handle family matters here on our own.” Skeeter turned towards Kevin. “You still on probation, boy?”

“Just got done.” Kevin answered dazedly, scanning the scene for a sense of clarity, finding only shocked and disappointed, pitiful faces.

“You’d best get out of here before you find yourself in front of another judge, son.” Skeeter warned darkly. “Now!” He barked.

Kevin could hear his father’s unashamed, sobbing cries dissipating behind him as he flew down the street, away from Skeeter’s bar.

Kevin was twitching with rage. He could feel his pulse in his eyeballs as he stumbled down the street, too drunk to continue running anymore. At one point he just slammed his fist against a nearby brick wall, and great, now his knuckles were bleeding too.

It was at this point that he remembered it was his birthday.

Without warning, Kevin turned right on his heels, and vomited violently into some nearby bushes. He stood there, holding his knees, panting heavily and trying his best to ignore the smell. He took
a few good breaths through his nose and stood, running a hand through his hair.

Kevin found himself doubled over again, hands on his knees, just breathing heavily as he fought the urge to scream. Tremors wracked his jaw the more he held onto his composure.

“fff-fuck.” He managed to whimper. His fists shook as he stood, and marched his way home.

Kevin slammed the front door shut with little regard for what time it was. He turned to look at himself in the mirror by the front door. His cheek was a little red, but he looked otherwise ok. For some reason it made him more mad, than if a big, ugly purple bruise had been staring him in the face instead of a wimpy pinkish one.

Kevin stomped his way to the kitchen and threw open the fridge door with a clatter.

Kenny peeked his head out from his door just as Kevin was finishing a glass of water in the kitchen.

“Dude, we’re all sleeping.” He pointed out annoyedly, a yawn obstructing the annunciation of his voice. Kenny straightened his posture protectively as Kevin strutted down the hall like a forceful wind.

“Go to Hell, Kenny.” Kevin shoved his brother haphazardly into the hallway wall as he passed him to get to his bedroom. He heard his brother's bony shoulders smack into the hollow walls.

“What the fuck!” Kenny yelled in a whisper, chasing after him as Kevin sauntered down the hallway with his water.

Kevin barged into his bedroom and flipped on all the lights, grabbing his headphones from his nightstand. He plugged them into the phone and shoved the earbuds into his hears while he scrolled through his playlists.

Kenny flew right in behind the closing door and was standing at the edge of Kevin’s bed, arms crossed scoldingly across his chest in that sort of superior way that really got underneath Kevin’s skin. Kenny was half whispering something, but it was completely muffled by the rubber earbuds in Kevin’s ear.

He stopped scrolling and froze, not even giving Kenny an excuse anymore as to why Kevin was treating him like a ghost. Kenny waved his hands in front of him, but Kevin kept on ignoring Kenny, staring blankly at the wall ahead as if it was the one being an idiot until, out of the corner of his eye, he finally saw his little brother throw his hands up in the air in frustration, mutter something unintelligible to himself, and close Kevin’s door behind him, gently.

It wasn’t much later that Kevin’s scrolling was interrupted by a text.

From Kenny: I said “fuck you”, if you didn’t hear me before *middle finger emoji*

Kevin gripped his phone and resisted the urge to chuck it across the room and watch it shatter and dent the wall. He settled for his wallet instead. It had nowhere near the same effect as the soft
leather landed against his carpet with a muted thud, one loose condom spilling out onto the floor, pitifully.

“Pathetic.” Kevin slurred to himself as he slinked off his bed and staggered across the carpet.

Kevin bent down to scoop his belongings off the floor and stumbled, landing flat on his fucking face. He cursed under his breath and slammed his fist hard against the ground a few times. He crawled on his knees to scoop up his wallet and slumped against the wall, looking up at his ceiling fan spinning around and around, dizzyingly, circulating the stale air that felt even duller without smoke.

Kevin’s phone buzzed again in his lap.

**From Kenny:** And Happy Birthday

**From Kenny:** Dick

Kevin scoffed under his breath, tossing his car keys across the room with all the pissed-off, drunken force he could muster. It was only slightly more satisfying than the wallet.

He closed Kenny’s messages and his eye was drawn to another text thread. Kevin chuckled under his breath and stood slowly, before grabbing his jacket, his cigarettes, a stick of gum, and his wallet. Kevin pressed shuffle on his ‘70s punk playlist and blasted the volume, deafening his eardrums with Richard Hell & the Voidoid’s ‘Blank Generation’ as he plodded across the carpet, throwing some more shit around his room before he left, just for good measure.

The outside air whipped against his face and stung his tender cheek. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it, letting the flame linger dangerously close to his face for just a little bit too long, feeling the warmth against his skin until it burned.

He winced as the lighter fell out of his hands and clattered to the pavement. He shook out his scorched thumb and stuck it in his mouth before carefully bending down to snatch up the lighter by the hot metal end. He shoved the cooled down lighter back in the pocket of his leather jacket and looked down the street, towards the not-so-shitty part of town.

Kevin pulled out his phone and sent out one simple, two-worded text message before he began stumbling down the street.

**To Shelly:** Coming over.
I Don't Fit Into The Costume Anymore...

Chapter Summary

Kenny is sick and fucking tired of always cleaning up everybody's messes... but if he won't, who will?

POV - Kenny

Kenny woke up again, at 3:30 am, to his phone ringing alarmingly loudly. He jerked awake in bed, disoriented, until he located the source of the ringing and killed the volume. It wasn’t a number he recognized so Kenny ignored the call and threw himself back against his pillow. He tried to fall back asleep, but a bright blue light glowed behind his eyelids as his now silent phone lit up the ceiling one more time.

“F*cking kidding me…” Kenny cursed as he sat up in bed to answer. “Hello?” He slouched forward from the weight of his drowsiness.

“Kenny. Yeah, it’s Skeeter.” Kenny’s blood ran cold. Kenny bolted upright and flung himself out of bed. “…you better get down here and come get your dad…”

“I’m on my way.” Kenny had been handling calls like this since he was fourteen years old, even Kevin had had to respond to his fair share of late night rescue calls in his time, back when he was still around to answer them.

Kenny tossed on some jeans and threw on his parka, fuming mad that he had to play the fucking superhero yet again.

Kenny sulked his way into his brother’s room to look for his car keys.

He opened the door quietly and knocked on the frame softly.

“Kev?” He called into the silent room. He must be sleeping by now. If it wasn't his fucking birthday Kenny would have flipped on the lights and made Kevin deal with this. But he was feeling generous, so he decided to let it slide, this one time. Kenny quietly closed the door behind him and waited for his eyes to adjust to the dark.

After (quietly) slamming some drawers and worsening the mess, Kenny finally found them under a pile of dirty clothes.

Kenny snuck back out of Kevin’s room and stormed his way into his mother’s bedroom.

“I have to go pickup your husband.” He bitterly called to her in the darkness.

“What?” Carol shifted in bed.

“YOUR HUSBAND.” He repeated. “Skeeter called me.” Kenny explained through gritted teeth.
“Oh, thanks baby. Drive safely.”

That was it. Carol rolled onto her side again and fell back asleep.

Kenny resisted the urge to call his mother names under his breath as he shut her door.

“What’s happening?” Karen rubbed her eyes, leaning against her doorframe.

“Go to sleep.” Kenny waved her off coldly as he passed by.

“But—”

“Go back to sleep!” He yelled from the front door before slamming it closed louder than he maybe needed to. A little over dramatic but whatever, Kenny never did well when someone messed with his sleep.

Kenny walked outside to see that, oh great, not only was his dad’s car gone but Kevin’s was too.

‘This fucking family…’

Kenny squeezed the keys into the palm of his hand, resisting the urge to throw them over the roof in frustration. Instead, he shoved the useless keys deep into his pocket and walked the short mile to Skeeter’s. After trudging in the cold for about 30 minutes, uphill, Kenny finally made it. He walked past the parking lot — well, there were Kevin’s and Stewart’s trucks — and burst through the doors.

He was tired and he just wanted to go back home and be back in his bed.

Kenny had never been inside of Skeeters while it was open. He was sure it looked much better when it was filled with happy patrons laughing, drinking, having fun and playing bar games. At closing time, it was quiet and hostile — just an empty shell of its former life, much like many of the patrons inside.

Kenny squinted into the bright industrial lights of the interior.

“Kevin upset him.” Jimbo informed, walking with Kenny to the bar, where Stuart was slumped over on the wood, slurring and drooling, incoherent.

Of course…

“Let’s go, Dad.” Kenny ordered with a growl.

“My beautiful boy.” Stuart flung himself on Kenny, drooling a little bit on his shoulder. “My good, wonderful son.”

Randy Marsh weakly attempted to pry Stuart off of his son, trying to be helpful despite being equally as fucked up as his dad.

“Let’s go.” Kenny spoke firmly.

“Aaaah, I’m not ready yet.” Stuart shrugged.
“Let’s. Go.” Kenny ordered, eyeing his suspiciously inebriated father carefully.

“Don’t worry, we watched him.” Jimbo assured Kenny from over his shoulder. “He only had drinks.”

“Must’ve been a fuck ton of drinks then.” Kenny snarled under his breath, slightly blaming these guys for continuing to serve his dad.

“Iiiiii’m not ready to leave.” His dad bellowed. “These are my friends. They’ve always been here for me.” Stuart threw his arms around a nervous looking Randy Marsh and Jimbo. Stephen Stotch was standing off to the side watching Kenny with high surveillance. ‘The feeling’s mutual, dude,’ Kenny thought to himself as he glared at the entertained onlookers. “Through it all. Even tonight. Hey Skeet! ONE more round for all my friends, here!” Stuart cheered, giggling to himself as he stumbled, dancing around on his feet.

“Bar’s closed.” Skeeter declared matter-of-factly.

“We’re leaving anyway.” Kenny ducked up underneath one of Stuart’s arms, and half-dragged him outside to the cars with Jimbo shouldering the other arm. Randy and Skeeter followed them out as everyone waved goodbye to the family they all knew too well. It would be fucking embarrassing if he wasn’t so used to it…

Jimbo helped guide Stuart into the passenger seat while Kenny ran around to the other side.

“Hey.” Skeeter called through the open passenger door as Jimbo struggled to buckle Stuart’s seatbelt for him. “Talk to your Dad, ok? He’s uh… he’s had a rough night.”

“Um… ok?”

Stuart always had rough nights, Kenny didn’t really care what made this one any different.

Stuart gasped like he had just remembered something really important that he had almost forgotten about. “Where’s Kevin!” He gasped, checking around the back seat of the car like he would find him there if he just looked hard enough.

“Kevin’s at home in his room.” Kenny yawned. “He’s fine. Let’s just go home.”

“Drive safe.” Jimbo called and shut the passenger door.

“Text me or Stan when you get home, okay?” Randy asked, yawning a little bit himself as he stumbled away from the car.

Kenny nodded.

South Park may be a small town where everybody knew everybody’s business, but it was also a family.

The five minute ride home was quiet, and they only had to stop once so that Stuart could throw up on the side of the road.

“We’re home.” Kenny announced flatly once they’d pulled into the driveway.
“Did you hear what Kevin accused me of tonight? Accused your mother of?” Stuart drawled drunkenly.

Kenny’s expression froze in apathy as his hand hovered over the car keys. He was dead tired, he just wanted to go back inside and go to bed.

“It was unspeakable.” Stuart whispered grimly.

Kenny sighed in acceptance of the impending long-ass conversation and slumped back in his seat. “What was it?” He engaged, remembering Skeeter’s strange request, ‘talk to your dad, ok?’

“I can’t speak of it.” Stuart twirled his hand with a flourish and leaned against his elbow to look out his window melodramatically.

Kenny frowned and stared up at the ceiling, debating whether or not to just let this go. But curiosity got the better of him.

“Dammit,” he muttered under his breath, “ok, tell me what happened.” he insisted, maybe a little more lazily and detached than was believable. It worked on his father, nonetheless.

Stuart stared down at his fidgeting fingers and scraped at a thumbnail obsessively.

“He said he doesn’t believe he’s a part of this family.” Stuart chuckled, “or he just thinks I’m not his flesh and blood…the little shit actually said that.” Stewart’s words were harsh but his voice was defeated. “Thinks he’s not mine cuz we don’t look enough alike, the stupid shit…”

“Well… and that’s not true…” Kenny tread carefully on the subject.

“Well no!” Stewart shouted in agreement.

Kevin had actually expressed this concern to Kenny when they were kids, when Kenny was about ten and Kevin was starting to grow into his brunette hair and dark eyes, already towering above his siblings at an alarming height. Kenny had to admit he’d considered the possibility before too, he was just not willing to deal with bringing it up.

Stuart grew quiet and introverted as his mouth struggled to produce words that Kenny cared very little about at this point.

Finally, he just sighed and spit it out, "I hit him. I hit my son," Stuart confessed, folding in on himself pitifully, "From a young age I always said I’d never do that, and I never thought I would..."

Kenny blinked at him confusedly. He could definitely recall vivid memories of Stuart open-palm smacking his wife and kids around whenever they messed up, or he got mad, or the wind fucking changed direction.

Apparently, Stuart could not recall, and apparently he hated himself for it.

He looked so small, slumped against the seat, visibly beating himself up for something Kenny was pretty sure was not actually new.

"Um, dad, I’m pretty sure you’ve hit Kevin before," he spoke gently, trying to help absolve his
father of some of his guilt, no matter how much he may have deserved to finally fucking drown in it.

"Nah, not like this, this was… like my dad.” Stuart's wide eyes darkened for a split second as he got lost in his own head.

Stuart went back to picking at his nails, before turning in his seat to lean against the headrest lazily. “There’s some family secrets… that should only be secrets if the whole family knows about ’em.”

“…ok…” Kenny encouraged skeptically.

What the fuck was that supposed to mean?

“There’s something I never told you kids. Something I never talk about. Something that… you deserve to know about.”

…

Kenny waited patiently.

…

“Dad?”

Stuart had started to snore.

He had fucking fallen asleep. Fucking great.

Kenny sighed exasperately, debating whether or not to just go inside…

…But he can’t just leave his dad here in the car, he might freeze to death.

“God. Dammit…”

Kenny left the car running while he popped into the house to set up the couch for his dad to crash onto, rather than walking him all the way into his bedroom. He brought his dad’s pillow, and a TV blanket from the closet, plus the trashcan from the bathroom — just in case.

“Ok. Dad.” Kenny tried his best to gently coax his father awake, tapping against his cheeks with the back of his hand before finally smacking him in the face unnecessarily hard with all the stress and anger of this exhausting night. Stuart just grumbled and scrunched his eyebrows together as he attempted to fall back asleep. It was worse than trying to wake a teenager. “Dad, get up, you have to go inside.”

“No.” Stuart grumbled as he sunk deeper into his seat.

Kenny stepped back, flipped him off and cursed violently at him without making any sound.

He was gonna need some help.

Kenny trudged his way back inside the house and stormed straight to Kevin’s room.

“Kevin? I need your help cleaning up your mess—”
Kenny’s sentence stopped short as he flipped on the light and was met with an empty room.

“Kevin?”
Chapter Summary

Shelly lets Kevin into her room late at night.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

POV - SHELLY

Kevin showed up at Shelly’s window, just as he’d promised.

Forearm leaning against the outer edge of the window, he stared down at her from behind the glass like a caged animal that had been trapped inside for years.

His breath fogged on the window and his fingerprints lay sweaty on the glass.

She looked at him from behind the delicate barrier curiously.

He started to shiver.

Shelly began walking towards him, feet giving in before she’d even decided to walk, herself.

His hands dropped to his pockets as she lifted the window and carefully pulled off the screen.

She indicated for him to be quiet as she invited him in.

Kevin was already climbing his way inside and wrapping his arms around her before the screen even hit the floor.

Shelly stumbled under the weight of Kevin’s heavy limbs. She dropped the screen she was holding and ran her hands up his back and across his leather-clad shoulders with weighted palms. Kevin relaxed under her hold and stepped closer to pull her closer to his body.

“You ok?” She whispered.

Kevin sighed, burying his face in her neck, in response.

"McCormick?"

Kevin (with his head still resting heavily against her shoulder) shook his jacket off and let it fall to the floor with a thud of heavy-fabric. He wrapped his arms around her again, holding her tightly, so desperately that he was beginning to scare her.

"Hey..." Shelly whispered gently, sensing that something was definitely horribly wrong.

Still holding onto her, Kevin pulled back, and tucked her hair behind her ear as he stared at her strangely. His expression was flat, unreadable. It was only then that Shelly noticed a light pink
bruise on his cheek. Her hand flew up worriedly to brush it with her fingertips, but Kevin flinched backwards and rolled his eyes. She pulled away from him, apologetically at first, and then sadly, offended that he wouldn't let her touch him. His jaw clenched as he swallowed nervously.

She was just about to open her mouth to ask about it, when Kevin leaned forward and kissed her, very gently. He walked her to the bed, laying her down carefully, lips never parting from hers. He kept contact with her, even as he pulled off his shirt and crawled on top of her — which Shelly was expecting.

What she didn’t expect was Kevin McCormick cuddling up next to her, nuzzling into the crook of her neck, and holding onto her tightly, trembling just slightly as he drifted off to sleep.

The next morning when Shelly’s alarm clock woke her up for school, she threw it across the room, as is her usual morning custom.

It was only when she heard the toilet flush that she remembered: Kevin’s here!

Holy crap!

Shelly quickly brushed down her hair with her fingers and wiped at her smudged makeup, using her phone as a black mirror. She pretended to fall back asleep just as the bathroom door opened again.

Shelly heard Kevin’s shuffling feet walk over to the side of her bed. He paused. What was he doing?

Shelly cracked open an eye and saw him staring at the photo wall right next to her bed.

How fucking embarrassing…

“Most people can’t pull off bangs the way you do.” Kevin uttered dryly, not taking his eyes off the wall. Ok, so he knew she was faking being asleep. Shelly tossed her hair over her shoulder and propped herself up on her elbow. “Shit, Marsh, if you can pull off headgear…” he smirked, looking at her out of the corner of his eye.

“Shut up.” Shelly snarled lightly. Kevin attempted to hide his smile as he hurdled over her and landed heavily on the other side of her bed. He stared straight up at the ceiling in silent thought.

Shelly still had no clue why he felt the need to come over so late last night, nor why he seemed to be so upset. Kevin was a man of very few words, and even fewer emotions… but Shelly was the same. They understood each other.

She could sense him growing tenser and tenser under her analytic gaze.

His head lolled towards his shoulder lazily as she twisted onto her side to face him.

Kevin didn't say anything, just raised his eyebrows up at her expectantly while she searched for something to say.

She was just about to open her mouth, when there was a timid knock at the door.

Shelly shot out of bed and stood there, looking around her room helplessly for answers.
“Shelly?” Stan’s voice called from the other side. Shelly froze, and said nothing.

’Say something to the turd!’ Shelly thought to herself.

“…Can I come in?” Stan asked, hesitantly.

“Do I hide?” Kevin mouthed to her, amusedly.

“I don’t know!” Shelly mouthed back, beginning to panic.

“…Are you even in there? Hello?” Stan questioned.

Shelly looked around her room in vain for a solution. “….U-um…”

Upon hearing no answer not to come in, Stan opened the door only to make direct eye contact with his friend’s shirtless brother laying down in his sister’s bed, smirking and waving hello like this fiasco was the funniest thing he had ever seen.

“WHAT, STAN?!” Shelly screamed at him, grabbing a nearby pair of jeans to hold in front of her bare legs for modesty.

“Um.” Stan looked down at the floor and shielded his eyes like he didn’t know what to do. “I needed to know if you still had my science book in here.”

“I PUT IT BACK ON YOUR DESK!” Shelly snapped.

“O-ok.” Stan turned around and left without looking at them. “Bye Kevin.”

“Get out, turd!” Shelly roared as she threw a nearby stuffed animal at the closing door, her screams just barely drowned out the sound of Kevin’s thunderous laughter.

Chapter End Notes

We love a big man who’s also a little spoon.

<3
Chapter Summary

Cartman's at stupid therapy instead of stupid school today, and then he's all alone. But he'll find ways of entertaining himself.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is hella long, because I wanted to set up a lot of Cartman's issues with his mother in this one chapter, so that we don't really have to see him at the therapists' office again.

But it's all important tho (especially the different events before and after the actual visit), even if it doesn't seem like it yet, it will be.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

POV - Cartman/Eric

Eric watched as trees flew past the passenger window. The thick glass chilled his temple as he leaned against it.

“This blows.” He grumbled.

“Now, Eric,” his mother crooned sweetly, “you promised.”

He snapped at her, “All I said was, ‘whatever’, and I only said it so you would stop freaking out, Jesus Christ…”

Mrs. Cartman’s hands squeezed the wheel tightly.

They were both silent for a long while.

“Do you still have that breakfast bar, poopykins?”

“This one?” Eric held up a disgusting banana-chocolate monstrosity that seemed way more like a nasty dessert than it did breakfast.

“Eat it.” Mrs. Cartman’s eyes widened. “Now, please.”

“But, Moooooom, I practically just woke up, it’ll make me nauseous—”

“Eric?!” His mother half demanded, half asked nicely.

Jesus Christ, he could practically hear her blood pressure rising. When he was little he used to
walk all over her and all he’d ever hear was a wimpy ‘please’.

He decided not to argue with her today.

Eric Cartman plugged his nose and took a bite of the horrible, oat-y, fake-banana-flavored, unsweetened breakfast bar.

“It’s gross.” He complained.

“Eric…”

“I’ll finish it, don’t worry, you can keep your fucking shirt on…” He mumbled under his breath.

“You remember that article I sent you?” Liane recited with a space-y voice and blank expression, “your brain can’t function without food.”

“Yeah, I know Mom, that’s been, like, common knowledge for a thousand decades.” Eric sassed through a mouthful of disgusting breakfast bar.

“Hm.” Was all she replied.

“Besides,” Eric swallowed, “I already told you I’ve been good, and I would appreciate it if you actually believed me once in a while.” He took another four bites in quick succession, before his own defiant disobedience could prevent him from finishing it. Liane sighed in relief.

Every quick comment, every sideways stare or wimpy lecture from his mom made him somehow feel guilty, incapacitated, and stupid all at once. He needed her to stop. He needed her to trust him now, or he was gonna have a serious problem.

“Why do I have to be pulled out of school for this anyway?” He whined, “It’s a Friday!”

“Yes, and being that you were put in the hospital just last week—"

"Two weeks ago," he corrected, flatly.

His mother shot him a scolding glare as she continued. "—I thought it best that you not go to school today."

“I would have been fine,” he groaned and rolled his eyes, “Craig's already over it, he's just a fighter it's not personal, plus he and Tweek got suspended an extra week since they were actually able to walk away, (less than they deserve in my opinion, but still). They're both not even there today. We could have done this after school… or not at all.” He tossed the breakfast wrapper into the back seat and wiped his hands on his sweatpants. “I just don’t see why I have to have an extra day this week. I went on Monday like I’m supposed to, and I’ll go next Monday when I’m supposed to, too. Just because—"

“Eric? That’s enough.” His mother suggested, weakly.

“I was talking,” he cut her off crudely. “Just because you’re concerned doesn’t mean it’s not all in your delusional head.” She frowned at the windshield. “And — ugh! — I don’t waaaaanna go to the doctor today,” he whined childishly, “I had physical therapy on Tuesday, I’ve been in and out of doctor's offices all week!”

“Enough.” She blurted out flatly.

“You’re so dramatic…”
“Don’t be difficult, Eric!” She cut him off, a rare edge in her voice.

He shut the fuck up.

They pulled into the parking lot. Liane helped her son out of the car as he looked around the empty lot to see if anybody he knew was around to spot him. Coast clear. He leaned on her shoulder for balance as she dug his crutches out of the back seat. Once his supports were safely under his arms, Liane took a long look at her son. She cupped his cheek with her small hand, craning her neck to look up at him. He sure as shit didn’t get his height from her, whoever his dad was he must’ve been huge.

Cartman could feel her brown eyes examining him: the cuts, the bruises. It felt uncomfortable and invasive. He could feel his guard going up.

“Ok, Mom, let’s go already.” He grumbled, cringing away from her comforting touch. It made him feel safe, and that made him feel angry.

They walked up to the familiar ugly, gray corporate building once more.

“I’m going to make myself some tea in the lobby, do you want anything, snickerdoodle?”

“No thank you, Mommy.” He droned flatly.

He felt a little bad for snapping at her earlier, but he felt worse for the relief he felt as he watched her finally leave the room. His shoulders gradually lowered with every step that she took farther and farther away from him.

Eric closed his eyes and breathed deeply, counting up to eight like he had been taught to do. He’d learned it in this very office. He was taking one more breath so he could prepare for the unknown in peace, when the sound of a text tone startled him.

He cracked one eye open and scanned the room.

Directly to his right, about two or three chairs over from him, there was a kid. A fucked up, nervous looking kid, and he was looking right at Cartman. Looking at him like he knew him.

They stared at each other for a second, the same curious expression on both of their faces.

“What?!” Cartman shot at him. The younger boy turned his face away and stared at the closed door rigidly. Wait a second, Cartman did know this kid.

He recognized him as that fat goth girl’s brother, the one who was about his age. Wonder why he didn’t go to school with them anymore, or for that matter, why he wasn’t at his fancy prep school right now…

Cartman looked him up and down in his tailored school uniform. He noticed the kid’s eyes shift towards Cartman again, watching him like camouflage prey watches an approaching predator.

Just for fun, Cartman lunged towards him, making the smaller boy jump back in fear, falling into the other row of chairs to his right. Cartman cackled to himself as the blonde boy with the bowl haircut straightened his tie and suit jacket to try and compose himself.
"Bradly Biggle?" A male voice offered from the now open doorway next to Dr. Mendoza’s office. “Hi, nice to meet you, I’m Dr. Doverman. Come right this way and we can get started.” Ah, a newbie.

Bradly Biggle rose from his chair slowly, glancing curiously at Eric on his way through the doorway. The bully was still sneering and snickering to himself over the little spaz’s knee-jerk reaction. It was funny. Kid needs to get a thicker skin.

Bradley tilted his head in curiosity, as if finally recognizing where he knew Eric Cartman from.

“The Coon.” He whispered. A small, brave smile spread across his chubby little face as the door closed in front of him, leaving Eric alone in the lobby with a stupid smile and the memories of a childhood game. Wow, he had almost forgotten about that…

Cartman tipped his head back towards the ceiling and chuckled to himself, “Stupid game…” remembering the good old days when all the neighborhood kids would get together to play superheroes, or medieval magic kingdoms. Nobody cared about anything serious, and everybody listened to him. Those were the good old days…

“Eric.” Dr. Mendoza’s smile looked even more smug than it had sounded in her honey voice. “you seem like you’re in a good mood.”

“Just thinking about you, Dr. Mendoza.” He schmoozed lazily, winking at her as he leaned shakily against his crutches to stand up.

“I’m ignoring that, it’s inappropriate.” She quipped dryly. “So how have things been going?” She reached out an arm to help. Cartman shook his head, declining the doctor’s offer to use her elbow to help him stand. “Long time no see.” She joked sarcastically.

“Yeah, you’re tellin’ me… I don’t know why I had to come in today again, but here we are…”

“Well, your mother felt it was important.” The doctor turned quickly on her heels, long brown ponytail whipping around her shoulders as she led the way into her office. She held the door as Cartman waddled his way in on his crutches. It was only mildly uncomfortable and embarrassing.

Cartman declined her help again and Dr. Mendoza took her usual seat. He winced slightly from the pain of plopping into the low-seated chair across from her, but thankfully, she ignored it.

Dr. Mendoza picked up her notebook and crossed her legs. “So.” She held a black pen loosely between her manicured fingers. “Tell me why you’re here today.” ‘Click’

“Oh… Yeah.” Eric slumped back in his armchair, draping his arms over the sides, “I guess it’s because my mom had a panic attack, and instead of taking a goddamn chill pill like she should’ve she woke me up while I was sleeping last night to tell me I had an appointment this morning.” He shrugged innocently. "That’s it.”

“She’s a good woman, your mother. She tries really hard.” Dr. Mendoza shot her patient a prompting look.

Eric frowned at the doctor. “I guess.”

The sound of pen against notebook scraped against his nerves like nails on a chalkboard.

"What are you writing?” He asked through grit teeth.
"Just your name and the date, I like my notes to be organized." Dr. Mendoza's voice sang gently. This didn't seem to ease Cartman's sense of irritation and paranoia.

"...You know she’s the one who should really be in here", he spoke over the pen noises, if only to cover the sound, "My mom. She’s always freaking out," Dr. Mendoza raised her eyebrows as she continued writing, "And she’s got, like, a boner for pity. She's always causing drama—"

"Eric, if you want to talk about your mother that's fine, but please don't lose sight of the fact that we're here to talk about you." Dr. Mendoza pointed out dryly.

A small, entertained smile flickered across Cartman's face.

Dr. Mendoza's expression remained unamused. She stared at him over top of her long lashes, sternly.

His smile faltered.

"May we continue talking about why you're here today?" She raised her eyebrows, setting down her pen and paper.

Cartman folded his arms across his chest and jutted out his chin, "I guess."

“You said you were sleeping when your mother called me.” It was not a question.

“...I gueesss…” He repeated slowly, condescendingly.

“What time was that?”

Cartman shifted his eyes to the ceiling and blew air out of his mouth as he tried to remember.

“Dunno… ‘bout six.”

"And you don't see why your mother could find that concerning?"

Cartman narrowed his eyes, but didn't say a word. Dr. Mendoza waited patiently for his answer. She could out-silence him any day. It was usually how she got him to talk.

He waited for so long that he’d forgotten the question.

“Huh?”

“Do you think it’s concerning that you're falling asleep after school.” The doctor clarified, without missing a beat.

Cartman scoffed defensively, “I don’t do it every day, I was tired.”

“Well, your mother seemed concerned.” Dr. Mendoza shrugged as she scratched notes into the thin paper.

Eric rolled his eyes, “I’m just tired. I’m a teen, and I’m tired.”

"Yes, but your mother says you slept through your entire week of suspension, the week before, as well...” She pointed the pen at him accusingly and frowned. 'Dammit, Mom, dirty rat...' Cartman grit his teeth.

“What else was I supposed to do all day?” He questioned innocently.
“You don’t think your mother could view that as alarming?” She responded flatly.

“The body needs to heal, right?” Cartman gestured towards his fucked up leg.

“You always have an answer for everything, don’t you?”

“Well, you always have a question, so…”

The doctor pursed her lips and sat silently for a moment. Watching.

Dr. Mendoza surveyed Eric with steady calculation before shifting her weight to the other armrest and holding the pen over the yellow pad of paper, expectantly.

"Would you say you've been feeling depressed?"

Cartman immediately recoiled at her question, visibly and audibly.

Dr. Mendoza picked up on his abhorrence, "I only ask so that we can talk about it, if you feel you need to," Cartman groaned exasperatedly as she spoke, "there's nothing wrong with feeling emotions, we just need to make sure they're not serious ones," the doctor explained hurriedly.

"Ew, fat goth girls get depressed." Cartman spat disgustedly.

"Anybody can feel depressed—"

"Well, I'm not depressed." He scowled flatly.

"It's not always a state of permanence, and it's nothing to be ashamed of." Dr. Mendoza insisted quickly and firmly, "People may even feel situational depression after a specific change or major life event—"

"You're asking because I'm broken right?" Cartman joked with a chuckle in his voice and venom in his stare. "I'm weak, therefore I'm sad?"

Dr. Mendoza looked taken aback.

"I'm just checking in with you.." she explained sadly, defensively, "but yes, sometimes after such an event... but I can only help you if you're honest with me—"

"I'm 'honestly' fucking peachy." He shot back coldly.

Dr. Mendoza nodded. There was nothing else she could do, really. It was rare moments like these that really reminded Cartman that Dr. Mendoza — young, though experienced as she was — was human, too. It also reminded him that he was a real piece of shit.

“I'm sorry if I offended you,” she spoke softly, "I was only doing my job."

Cartman rubbed his palm against the armrest, distractedly. "I know." He snapped, although his voice had softened considerably, and it really came out more like an apology.

Dr. Mendoza pursed her lips, "Eric, something is obviously going on and it is my job to help you." Cartman felt slightly guilty at the gentle tone in her voice. She just wanted to help...

"...Ok, sorry..." He whined in a pathetic mumble, too much of a coward to even look her in the eyes.
"Thank you for apologizing." Dr. Mendoza praised flatly, attempting to meet his gaze as Eric fiddled absently with the armrests.

'Obviously', Cartman thought to himself, shaking his head in defensive rudeness.

"Why don't you share your perspective." She tried again, and Cartman groaned audibly at the tiring redundancy. "Tell me why your mother insisted you come in today, from your point of view. No assumptions on my part, clean slate. Just explain your side of things, as if I had no idea.” Dr. Mendoza leaned against the arm of her chair.

“But you do know, though.” The teenager pointed out. The doctor said nothing. Eventually, he fell victim to the deafening silence, and gave in.

“So I was sleeping, and my mom wakes me up to ask me if I feel sick. I tell her no, and to get out of my room, so she turns on my light and sits on my bed. She tells me to turn off my alarm, that I’m not going to school tomorrow, and that I had an appointment. Then she made me get out of bed to go eat dinner with her. That’s it. After dinner she tucked me back into bed and told me she’d wake me up at 9 this morning for our appointment. The end.”

He could practically feel his mother’s fingers combing gently through his hair as he remembered. It made him irrationally irritated. Cartman scratched his fingers against his scalp to stop the itch.

Dr. Mendoza nodded slowly. “What do you think of that?”

Eric squinted his eyes at her. “I don’t know… annoying?”

“See, Eric, either you’re not being honest with me, or yourself, or you need a serious re-shifting of perspective.” The doctor announced plainly.

“…Excuse me?” Cartman stiffened, guarded.

“Can't you see how much your mother cares?” Dr. Mendoza waved her arm towards the direction of the waiting room, exhaustedly. Cartman stayed silent. "Some mothers wouldn’t give a shit. You wanna go to bed before dinner? Fine, starve. You wanna sleep all day and make yourself feel worse? Have at it. Do you see how rare it is, for a mother to still tuck in her teenage son? It’s a little coddling — and I’ll have a small talk with her about that later — but it’s love and it’s care, and you don’t seem to appreciate or even take notice of that.”

“I can acknowledge all that and still find it annoying, can’t I?” He snapped at her.

Dr. Mendoza stared at him patiently. “I suppose you’re right about that.” Cartman snorted through his nose and looked off to the side. Of course he’s right, he was always fucking right...

He refused to look at her. “Eric…” he glanced at her immediately, “With all you've been through these last two weeks, it's no wonder you've been feeling off ever since.”

"'Off' is an understatement." He mumbled with flat humor.

The doctor checked her watch before tapping the pen against the paper methodically.

"Eric, we've touched on the subject briefly," tap, tap, tap, "but if you’re ready, could we finally talk more deeply about what else happened two weeks ago… on Thursday night? Do you know what I'm referring to?" Eric felt the wind knock out of him like reliving the memory, "I imagine that must have been very traumatic for you..." She probed, gently.
He clenched and unclenched his fists against the fabric of his sweatpants and struggled to gulp shallow breaths through his tense chest. “No shit.” He hissed. “Don’t ask stupid questions Dr. Mendoza, you’re smarter than that.”

She ignored his attempt to get a rise out of her.

“So then, I’m wondering,” tap, tap, tap, "if you don’t blame your mother a little bit, because this bubbling hatred for her is not like you. Something else is fueling this fire.” Eric almost wished the pen noises were louder now, like jackhammers — at least they would drown out this miserable conversation that he did not want to be having... Mothers were supposed to protect their sons. Why didn't she?... Every click was an irritation, but every word was a wound. He closed his eyes as his brow tensed until Eric just had to scream.

"JESUS CHRIST, can you STOP with the FUCKING TAPPING?!!" He howled with misdirected rage.

Dr. Mendoza froze with wide eyes.

"And... and... if not her, then... then who the FUCK else should I blame?!!" Eric whimpered with a childlike crack in his voice.

Fuck.

Again. Once again, he was crying in Dr. Mendoza’s office.

Fuck!

Eric felt tears welling in his eyes deep beneath his stony features.

Dr. Mendoza nodded her head curtly and set down the pad and paper. Now the only sounds in the room were the ticking of her desk clock, and the echos of an outburst unprompted.

She folded her hands in her lap and waited patiently for him to speak.

Eric shook his head and glared out the window.

“Well… if you know the situation… then you tell me,” he could barely talk with how tightly clenched his jaw was, “what would you say to that? If you were me.” He challenged her, eyes widening like a child's as he felt tears cascade down his hot cheeks.

“That seems like a loaded question, Eric.” She shut him down. Something in her sharp eyes softened, and she sighed. “But… I would imagine, if you will permit my assumptions, that you are most likely feeling a strong sense of betrayal right now. Would you say that’s accurate?” Eric guffawed, but said nothing. The doctor waited patiently for him to speak.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.” He flapped his hands in a blabbing motion as he pictured what she would say about verbal affirmation if he waited any longer to respond. He wiped a tear from under his eye. She waited for him to continue. “Yeah, I’m fucking pissed.” He growled with hostile tension. “I feel ‘betrayed’, as you put it, and I’m fucking mad as hell right now.”

Dr. Mendoza scratched some notes on her notepad as Eric continued to seethe in front of her.

He wanted to scream. Wanted to shout about how Mommy's psycho-of-an-ex-boyfriend practically tried to kill him. ‘But did she tell you why, Dr. Mendoza?’ He would snarl, ‘Hm? It was because she was breaking up with Tony-the-Walking-Steroid, for a man she’d met in a coffee
shop! Worse yet, it was the dad of a boy he'd once considered a friend.

It wasn't enough that he still had nightmares about Tony showing up to kill them, but then he also had to FAINT, BACKWARDS down the FUCKING STAIRS! HE COULD HAVE DIED, were it not for his shoulder hitting the curved railing and twisting his body so that he landed on his side instead of his head, undeservedly eluding death for the second time that week. He should have died.

'I SHOULD BE DEAD!' he wanted to scream at her, shake her, something!

Instead he swallowed the tension that was creeping up his neck like a choke hold, and grit his teeth endlessly in an effort to break tradition and not hyperventilate in this chair every fucking visit.

When he'd finally settled down again, he spoke.

"Do you know that she left me alone in the house that night?" He whispered, choking back a sob. Dr. Mendoza stopped writing and her eyes were drawn to Eric's, empathetically. The teen took a shaky breath and continued, quietly, "He tried to kill me, and she left me...

"Eric, I'm so sorry that happened to you. To be honest, I would be struggling too if I were you."

"I'm not struggling, I'm angry." Eric growled, voice rising with every sharp breath that stung his chest. "SHE has put me through shitty guy, after shitty fucking guy, my ENTIRE LIFE! She doesn't even have a GUESS as to who my dad might be, and she has not stopped jumping from one asshole to the next SINCE!" He snapped, ignoring a few hot tears that plummeted from his eyes like falling rocks. "You know, Tony's not even the first one to put his fucking hands on me, nooooo, that was Matthew Myers at age 14, herbal supplement peddler and 'militant disciplinarian'." Cartman mimicked an authoritarian voice and brought one hand down across the other, as if to mimic the motions of a guillotine. "Thought a good swift punch to the jaw would set my lazy ass straight, and boy he tried and tried!" Eric felt his fingernails digging into his palms sharply. He opened his mouth to speak again, but what only came out were stutters and stammers. Cartman stopped, and took a deep breath. "And then she did it again," he growled simply, unsticking dull fingernails from the moon-shaped indents that had been molded into clammy flesh just for them. "I have a hard time trusting her, I can't fucking tell her, I fucking hate her sometimes — no I don't want a tissue!" He batted away the tissue box that the doctor was offering him and watched it tumble to the ground, helplessly. He stared after it, as it lay there motionlessly, in a hauntingly familiar state. It reminded him of curved hallway stairs and jostled bones. His eyes gravitated down towards his leg.

"I know I shouldn't have taken it out on Clyde the next day, but I didn't know what else to do." He whispered, trailing off inaudibly at the end of his pitiful explanation that he knew did not excuse his behavior.

Dr. Mendoza eyed him carefully as she scooped the tissue box up off of the floor and cradled it in her hands.

"Now I'm broken." He grumbled as calmly as he could manage, "And the only reason I'm able to get help is because my mother's shitty government job gives her great health insurance." Dr. Mendoza attempted to speak, but Cartman cut her off with a humorless laugh before continuing, "You know, I actually asked her to sue the school — sue Craig and Tweek's poor families for everything they don't have, something! But apparently, we can't afford the lawyer, even if we win." He chuckled darkly, "And all this because she's afraid to be alone." Eric scoffed and rolled his eyes, ignoring the tears that burned his hot cheeks. "Yes, I feel betrayed." He hissed, more angry than he'd ever felt in this office before. He wiped at his face but he had no tears left to cry.
Now he was bitter.

“Well… some of that was new information for me, thank you for sharing that with me.” Dr. Mendoza concluded the conversation gingerly. Cartman rolled his eyes. “I would say,” she continued carefully, "your feelings are incredibly valid. And you don’t need to forget, but it would help you heal to forgive... however hard that may be...” Yeah right...

“Whatever.”

“Let’s change the subject.” She offered.

Eric sat as forward in his chair as his cast would allow, and swept his hand across the room dramatically.

“Be my guest.” He snarled with dramatic condescension.

“How are you doing in school? Grades, social life?”

“Good.” He barked.

Dr. Mendoza raised her eyebrows. He didn’t care. He stared her down.

“Well, then.” She sighed. Tossing her long ponytail over her shoulder as she shifted her weight. “I guess that’s what happens when you don’t ask open ended questions.”

“I guess.” Eric parroted, annoyed. The doctor twirled the pen around in her hand. It was almost more distracting than that giant pendant necklace that sat low on her chest and drew his attention to her tits. Almost.

Dr. Mendoza reached forward to hand him the box of tissues, smiling at him not like she pitied him, but like she understood him. Cartman grabbed one (as much as he wondered if he didn't deserve to take one after his outburst) and dabbed at his wet face, a small shadow of a grateful smile behind his eyes for this doctor who really did understand him.

“Let’s end this session positively.” Her stern voice had a steely clip to it that for some reason always tended to work on Eric, when she so chose to use it. “What’s the most positive social interaction you can recall, say, within the last few weeks.” She smiled warmly.

God damn, how can a woman with steel-armored shoulders and a sharp tongue wield such a comforting smile?

"Best interaction," he pondered out loud, unable to stop himself from complying. The prim face of a ballsy brunette flashed behind his eyes — her expression stern, and her hands perched high on her hips as she chirped on in a bickering tone in a way that was equally as annoying as it was kind of adorable. He chuckled to himself, before meeting Dr. Mendoza's intrigued expression and freezing. “Well,” Eric began, deciding to pick a different memory on the spot, “it was a friend’s birthday last weekend… I didn’t go to the party, because I figured it was best to distance myself from seeing Clyde, Tweek, and Craig again. But we did hang out the next day, played video games, ordered pizzas, watched movies. It was chill.”

“It sounds like it.” Dr. Mendoza smiled. “How have you been adjusting to seeing these… acquaintances… of yours at school or in town?”

"Who, like Craig?"

"Yes, any of these classmates you've mentioned having issues with in the past," the doctor explained.
“Jeez, Ariel. Can I call you Ariel?” Cartman smirked. All the bubbliness disappeared from her expression.

“No, Dr. Mendoza is fine, thank you.” Ariel stated firmly. Ariel was so funny.

“Anyway, Doc, to answer your lengthy and probing questions,” Cartman couldn’t help but smile at the humorous look on his doctor’s face, “School is school. And South Park is South Park. When I see these kids that used to be my friends, I don’t know if we’re friends anymore. The setting doesn’t matter, that would be awkward as shit even at the North Pole.” Eric chuckled, but Dr. Mendoza simply nodded.

“I suppose that makes sense.” She checked her watch.

Eric watched closely at the way Dr. Mendoza tucked her sleeve back over her watch face, refolding the cuff of her sweater as was her tradition every single time she messed up her hemline to check the time. Well, suppose psych-docs must be a little crazy too, to do what they do for a living. "You're still getting along with your four closest friends? Communicating effectively with them? Let me see... Kenny, Kyle, and... Stan?" Cartman's smirk softened as the doctor rattled off his friend's names as best as she could remember.

“No complaints.” He announced, arms raised in the air.

“That’s good to hear.” She smiled, "I’m glad you have quite a strong support system of friends.”

Eric smiled despite himself. “Yeah.”

Dr. Mendoza smiled back at him, tapping her pen absently, like clockwork.

“Well, is there anything else you’d like to chat about in the last five minutes we have here?”

“I think…” His voice trailed off into silence.

“Come on Eric, you can talk to me.” Dr. Mendoza encouraged.

“I mean... this is gonna sound stupid, and it probably is, but... I don’t know how to help myself in this... department... so...”

Dr. Mendoza nodded and waited for Eric to continue. He rolled his eyes at himself, but also at the genius doctor who couldn’t put together what he was inferring about, forcing him to spell it out, embarrassingly.

“So, I like girls, I mean obviously,” he chuckled self-consciously before clearing his throat. "So I see my friends with their girlfriends and I think, ‘why not me?’, you know? That… sounds stupid…”

“It doesn’t, I think it sounds perfectly normal.”

“Ha. Yeah. But like, I mean, not to bring this up again, but I feel like even though the issues I have had… with my body I mean… have been mild and lame and stuff—”

“—Don’t undermine your struggle, everybody deals with these things differently, and that doesn't lessen the validity of your trauma—”

“— I still feel like, even though I’m determined, now, to get better in that um… area… um, I’m still terrified what people will think of me… if and when anybody… looks at me? You know?”
“Eric, what your describing is perfectly normal.” Dr. Mendoza insisted. "In fact I felt much the same way throughout most of my 20’s.”

“Damn, you? That’s sad.” Eric blurted out. And he meant it too, and not even in a comically creepy way either. Dr. Mendoza was a good person, and he didn’t feel like she deserved to feel the same pain as he did. Plus her body was bangin'.

The doctor nodded. “It was, but I learned from it and I grew.” She gestured with her hands as she spoke. “And you will too. In time.” Eric looked down at the carpet and fidgeted with his hands. “The most important thing to remember,” Dr. Mendoza leaned forward in her chair enthusiastically, “is that you cannot hold yourself back for other people’s sake. Let others make decisions for themselves, don’t cut someone off to spare their feelings, because honestly if someone loves you for you, they don’t see what you don’t like about yourself, I can promise you that... Or if you prefer a more gruff approach, ‘who are you to decide that other people don’t want you?’ That seems pretty arrogant to me, don’t you think?”

Huh.

Eric felt a grin spread across his face as he watched her bask in her own self-satisfaction.

“Well, our time is up. I hope you think a lot about what we’ve said today, and don’t let you hold yourself back”.

“Sure, whatever,” he dismissed, turning back to smile at the doctor gratefully before she could call him out on it.

When he stepped back into the lobby, his mother was already waiting there, sipping on her cup of tea.

“Ready to go?” She sang cheerfully as she rose from her seat.

Cartman took one quick glance at Dr. Doverman's still-closed office door, and nodded.

When Eric finally made it back to the car he felt exhausted and drained. He slid into the passenger seat as smoothly as he could and leaned his head against the headrest with his eyes closed.

“Well, I got the whole day off work, and it’s only lunchtime now.” Liane buckled her seatbelt as she chirped happily. “Do you wanna go to the diner? As a special treat?”

“Special treat for what?” Cartman grumbled, eyes still closed. He was 100% positive that nothing he had done in the past 24 hours warranted a celebratory treat.

“For just getting through a rough week,” Liane uttered, embarrassed at her own suggestion.

Cartman sat up straighter and opened his eyes. “Thank you, Mommy. Sounds good.” He smiled at her in what he hoped was a convincing manner. Liane smiled back broadly, proud of her success.

They drove to the diner in silence and talked about school and work while they ate.

When they got home, they both aimlessly drifted over to the couch to watch something together,
though neither of them really cared what it was.

They settled on some sitcom they’d seen a thousand times and watched for a couple hours. At one point Liane checked the time and declared that she had to start getting ready for her date in a few hours. It was with Roger Donovan again, though Cartman was too exhausted to have any strong feelings about it at the moment. He’d ended up falling asleep on the couch and waking up alone about an hour later.

“Shit, dude, so he just dropped a mystery bombshell like that and never told you what it was?”

“Mm-hm.” Kenny mumbled, most likely with a mouthful of something. Of course Kenny would have no shame eating while on the phone.

“What a dick.” Cartman sympathized.

“Yeah.” Kenny gulped. “I kinda feel like he’s bluffing.” Cartman could hear the crinkle of some kind of pastry bag. He was probably at Tweak bros. “I bet there is no family secret,” Kenny continued, “I’m not gonna ask unless he brings it up again… but I haven’t seen him at all today, so.”

“Mnhm.” Cartman grunted, trying not to get distracted by the thought of fresh croissants and brownies. “What happened with Kevin?” He asked.

“He still hasn’t come home. But Stan told me he walked in on exactly where he’s been hiding, if you know what I mean.”

Cartman laughed freely. “Damn, you miss one day of school and you have to find out about all the entertaining shit over the phone.”

“Glad you think this shit show is entertaining.” Kenny muttered darkly.

“You know what I mean.” Cartman dismissed.

“I gotta go.” Kenny spoke over a loud crinkling on the other line. “Karen has her first real date today so, I wanna make sure she’s not nervous or anything, while simultaneously trying to stop myself from telling her she’s too young for this shit.”

“She’s practically twelve.” Cartman chuckled. He heard someone else speaking softly on the other side of the phone.

“She’s not too young,” Cartman continued. “She left me alone.” Kenny sassed. “Butters says hi.”

“Hi, Butters.” Cartman replied awkwardly.

“He says hi.” Kenny spoke, the phone pulled away from him slightly. “So yeah. I’ll talk to you later, Cartman. See ya.”

“Bye.” Cartman mumbled, hearing the click before he’d even got the chance to reply. He looked at his black phone screen and tried not to feel a pang of jealousy at being left out of Kenny and Butters’ hang out. They hadn’t even asked…

Cartman opened up instagram and scrolled through his feed.

He got a text message soon after, again from Kenny.
From Kenny: Btw, Clyde was asking about you today. I think he still feels like he caused the fight between you and Tweek… and Craig.

Maybe text him?

Typical Kenny, always forcing himself into the mediator role when it wasn’t even his place to settle anything.

Cartman didn’t feel like texting Clyde.

He tossed his phone onto his bed before picking it back up again out of sheer boredom.

“Alright, snookums, I’m heading out,” Liane chimed from the hallway, leaning against her son’s bedroom door as she fastened her earrings, “There’s healthy pizza bagels in the freezer.”

“Great.” He muttered, not looking up from his phone. He was scrolling so fast he couldn’t even see what he was looking at.

“You’ll be ok by yourself, won’t you sweetie?” Liane took one more step into her son’s room, leaning against his open door, rather than loitering uncomfortably in the doorway.

“Yep.” He promised. It didn’t sound convincing.

Liane walked over and kissed her son on the top of his head before wrapping her arms around his shoulders and rocking him softly. Cartman placed a hand over her forearm and tried to hold back the painful sting of nostalgia that threatened to strangled his throat as she held him.

“Mommy loves you.” She promised in her sing-song-y voice.

“Ok!” He shot back in a high pitched hiss.

It made him feel uncomfortable, having her cradle him, and tiptoe around his feelings like this. She usually just left the house without even a goodbye, but not since he started becoming ‘problematic’. It made him feel like an invalid.

“I’ll be back late.” She promised as she began to walk away.

“But you’ll be back before the sun rises.” His eyes burned through her with accusatory glare.

Liane scoffed, avoiding answering the question until Cartman raised his eyebrows promptly.

“Yes.” She hissed, offended, straightening her jacket in a fidgety motion.

They stared at each other silently, each thinking things they dare not say to the other.

“Well,” Liane sighed and smiled her ditsy smile, “have fun tonight.”

“You too.” Eric forced a smile of his own.

“Why don’t you invite some friends over?” Liane checked her hair’s volume in the mirror near the doorway.
“Yeah, maybe.” Cartman agreed emptily.

She blew a kiss his way. “Bye schnookums.”

“Bye Mommy.”

And just like that Eric was alone again.

A few hours had passed, and Eric had no appetite for frozen pizza bagels with gluten free bread and dairy free cheese. He was hungry though, there was no denying that. After days of being practically force fed hospital food, and then a slew of healthy foods by his mother, he’d been surprised to feel how his body had changed, almost forgetting what it felt like to teeter a constant balance beam of starvation and eating just enough to survive. It wasn’t the same pangs of headache and dizziness that were so familiar they’d became comfortable. It was uncomfortable now.

He remembered the way Wendy had sat with him, with her feet up on the side of his bed casually, reading on her phone as she kept him silent company while he wolfed down disgusting meatloaf or chicken parm. He thought of the way she’d sit up too straightly anytime they heard any footsteps near the door, knowing full well it was not a professional look to treat your assigned patients like footstools, volunteer worker or not. He never minded Wendy’s clunky Doc Martens nudging his mattress as she tapped her toes absently, no matter how ugly those hideous boots were.

Before he could even think of what he was doing, Eric had gathered his coat and shoes, and wobbled his way to the front door to hobble down the sidewalk on one crutch.

Straight to Hells Pass Hospital.

He found what he was looking for almost immediately.

“Wends!” Eric called at her, trying his best to keep up with the rigid brunette who was fast-walking down the hallway at the end of her shift.

“Ew, don’t call me ‘Wends’, Cartman, we’re not on that level yet,” Cartman tried his best to ignore Wedy’s subtle blush, and the way she’d said ‘yet’.

“Ki-tchen Wench.” Cartman corrected in a robotic monotone, a devious smile spreading across his face when Wendy whipped around to glare daggers at him.

“I don’t have time for this.” Wendy muttered to herself. Speeding away again. Cartman was practically running between his good leg and his crutch to keep up with her as she cruelly left him in the dust.

“What’s wrong, Wench?” Cartman called to her, pushing her buttons to get a reaction. She had already reached the front doors by the time he was already halfway down the halls. Not surprising that she left him behind. He was surprised to see Wendy holding the door open with her foot, arms folded and staring off into the distance in front of her as she waited for him to catch up.

As soon as Eric passed her, she let the door slam closed (as quickly as automated doors can slam) and turned away without looking at him. She continued walking, and Cartman was beginning to feel rejected, which to Cartman felt like being cornered. It wasn’t a good look for him.

“Wendy—” He reached for her, crutch clattering to the ground when he missed.
Wendy sighed and walked back over to where Cartman was balancing on his good leg with no crutch to support his weight, wobbling with his arms outstretched. She picked his crutch off the floor and handed it to him, eyes on his cast. She waited for him to readjust himself, folding her arms stand-offishly as she waited.

“I just gotta ask… what the fuck?” He joked breathlessly.

“I just got fired.” She mumbled to the concrete.

“What?” Cartman half-laughed. “From a volunteer job?”

“Yeah, well, I’m not proud of it.” Wendy glared at him hatefully.

Cartman looked around the hospital courtyard as if he’d find some comforting words for her in the trees or the decorative fountain near the entrance. He chuckled uncomfortably.

“…what’d you do, I mean, it’s only been two weeks—”

“I know how long it’s been.” Wendy answered in a defeated whisper.

“What… happened?” Cartman wobbled on his foot as he spoke.

“I don’t wanna talk about it.” Wendy looked around the courtyard herself. “Wait… what are you doing here, Cartman?” She shot at him with an irritated look on her face.

“I had a doctor’s appointment.” He lied.

“They do follow ups in doctor’s offices, not the hospital rooms.” Wendy narrowed her eyes an an accusatory fashion. Cartman just shrugged without answering her. Wendy rolled her eyes. “Well, then I guess I’ll just go home.”

“Do you wanna eat?” Cartman blurted out, far less gracefully than he’d meant to, physically retracting his outstretched hand like he wished he could take it back and try again. He continued to ramble on, instead. “Like, just, it’s because, I hadn’t eaten yet, and I figured you wouldn’t have either, since your shift ends after dinnertime, and I didn’t have anyone else to eat with, I’m super bored, that’s all…” He let his voice trail off, trying not to read too much into the disbelieving smirk spreading steadily across Wendy’s face.

“Wow, Eric, are you sure I’m not beneath you?” Wendy looked at him like she was awaiting an apology that he was being forced to give.

He narrowed his eyes. “What are you—?”

“Say I’m not a Kitchen Wench.”

Eric guffawed in response. “Excuse me, what?”

“Do it. Say I’m not a Kitchen Wench, and I’ll consider hanging out with you. Getting dinner.”

“…Are you seriously—?”

“I’m waiting.” Wendy tapped her foot and raised her eyebrow amusedly.

Wow, she actually was seriously.

She was really gonna stand there, with her hands on her hips, staring him down and forcing words
out of his mouth like a misbehaved child getting scolded. It was almost hot — and it would have been too, you know, if it hadn’t’ve been Wendy.

Eric sighed dramatically and stared down at her with his best and most innocent puppy dog eyes.

“Wendy, you are not a Kitchen Wench.” Her shoulders un-tensed. “…At least not now that you’ve been fired.”

Eric flinched a little when Wendy slapped his arm, the look on her face only slightly amused. She looked between his eyes like she was searching for something.

“This is not a date.” She clarified sternly.

“Wow, Wendy.” Cartman scoffed at her accusation and Wendy lowered her eyes self-consciously. “You would just assume that that’s what I meant? Why? Just because you could maybe be considered moderately hot by someone’s low, low standards…?” Eric’s weird complimentary insult (or insulting compliment, more like) trailed off pathetically into short bursts of defensive laughter as he ran out of words to say.

Wendy looked thoroughly confused before shaking her head and ignoring it. “No, I just meant... I broke up with Stan for good and I’m single now, so... yeah... that’s not what this is.” She lectured him condescendingly.

Cartman laughed out loud, maybe a little cruelly, and hobbled off towards the parking lot where Wendy’s car would be. “Oh, Wendy. Wendy, Wendy Wendy…”

She breezed past him, but he caught up to her right as she was unlocking her car's passenger door.

He leaned in closely and sneered at her, watching her body stiffen tensely as he muttered low under his breath.

“Get over yourself, babe.”

Chapter End Notes

Ok, I'm thinking that'll be it for the updates tonight, this seems like a good middle point to pause in the update, and I didn't wanna unload the full ten new chapters all at once.

When Do I Get Out of Here chapter dump will resume tomorrow, and get ready because things are about to I M P L O D E.

Stick around.
Chapter Summary

This is my favorite thing ever.
Ike and Karen go on their first real date.
They also run into a familiarly rude employee at the theater.

POV - Karen

“Wow, a date on a school night, how did Ike swing that past Sheila?” Ruby drawled from the speakerphone.

“I don’t think you understand the definition of ‘school night’.” Karen replied, undoing the braids she’d just spend the last fifteen minutes twisting into her short hair.

“What, there’s school on Fridays?” Ruby justified.

“But not on Saturday, ergo, not a school night.” Karen frantically brushed out her now frizzy hair.

Ruby gasped sarcastically. “Ooh, we speak Latin now?”

“Shut up.” Karen reached for her straightener again and tried to work fast. “I’m already stressed.”

“Chill out, you know who’s probably more stressed than you?” Ruby questioned through the phone.

Karen put down her straightened and smiled as she pictured Ike Broflovski fussing over himself in his mirror at home, sweating even more than she was now.

“Ike?”

“Sheila.” Ruby corrected. Karen actually laughed out loud when Ruby impersonated the east-coast woman in all her frazzled glory, “Wha-wha-wha-WHAT?! My baby boy on his first date?!”

“Ruby!” Karen scolded, laughing so hard she could barely even speak.

“I bet he had to beg.” Ruby’s grin could be heard through the phone. The thought made them both laugh.

Karen could just picture Mrs. Broflovski’s look of evident disapproval and skepticism as her sweet boy begged her to let him take Karen McCormick out on a date. Karen liked to think that the hesitation stemmed from concern for his studies, and less about who he would be hanging out with…

That was most likely true. Karen was very familiar with the Broflovski household, and before Ike had boarded for middle school, she and Rubes were there all the time as kids — not to mention the
few times Kevin had walked her and Kenny over to Kyle and Ike’s to sleep there for the night. As a kid, Karen thought it was just a fun sleepover, as Kenny had made it seem, but as she got older she realized her big brothers were just protecting her from the truth.

Karen liked to think Mrs. Broflovski had no problem with the small McCormick girl, who had proven herself to be nothing but a polite and respectful friend of the family. But the gnawing of self-doubt in the back of Karen’s brain was what kept her warm most nights while others were sleeping comfortably in their beds.

When Karen had expressed this anxiety to Ruby, she’d called her stupid — in the most loving way, of course.

“Get out of your head,” Ruby’s flat command crackled through the speakerphone after picking up on the worried silence on Karen’s end, “Just have a good time. Watch a fun movie, kiss a cute boy, and get on with your life.” Ruby suggested nonchalantly. Karen could picture her shrugging with ease.

“Did you just call Ike cute?” Karen guffawed into the phone.

“Well, what, he is?” Ruby responded, unfazed. “Neither you nor I can deny he’s a good looking dude… objectively, or otherwise…”

Karen covered her face to hide the blush that nobody could see.

“I’m gonna hang up, now.” Karen groaned into her hands.

“Ok, but don’t forget to call me with all the juicy details the MINUTE you get back home!”

“Yes, mother.” Karen mocked flatly.

“And clean your room.” Ruby ordered humorously, before hanging up on Karen and leaving her to stew in silent anxiety until her date arrived. Luckily, Karen soon identified the timid knocks of a nervous-sounding visitor tapping on her front door.

“He’s early!” Karen expressed with panic, to nobody in particular, taking a second to spin around her room in search of a jacket amongst the piles of dirty and clean laundry that never seemed to get put away. She tossed an armful of clothes frustratedly back onto the floor and ran out into the hallway. “I got it!” She yelled through the house before anybody else could answer the door and embarrass her. She ran back in her room and snatched a black sweater from her desk. “NOBODY GET IT!” She shot out of her room, before turning back around and grabbing her purse from the door handle. She kept counting the seconds that she was keeping Ike waiting as she flew past Kenny and Butters playing a card game in Kenny’s room. They eyed her curiously as she sprinted past the open door, straight to where she could just barely see dark hair peeking in from the window in the door.

Karen opened the door and tried not to look as flustered as she felt.

“You look nice…” she smiled warmly, “I like your new haircut.”

Ike beamed brightly. “Thanks! I got it done yesterday,” he chuckled, running his fingers self-consciously along the short fringe that stuck out stubbornly from the top of his head. “Are you ok? You seem out of breath—”
“Shall we get going?” Karen suggested, wanting to rip out her lungs so they’d stop being embarrassingly greedy.

Ike smiled and gestured towards his brother, Kyle, the apparent chauffeur for the day, idling in the driveway.

“Y-you look really nice too.” Ike stammered as the two walked down the small stretch of driveway.

Karen paused and looked down at her mother’s black and white, polka dotted blouse with the ruffles in the front (one that Karen felt was ‘too flashy’, but Carol insisted made her look ‘so grown up’). She scuffed the heel of her brother’s hand-me-down keds against the concrete.

“Thanks!” Karen chirped, swiping her hair behind her ears as she grinned up at Ike. He beamed back, but said nothing.

Ike jogged up ahead of Karen a few steps to make sure to open he door for her. It almost caught Karen off guard.

“Oh! Thank you!” She grinned as she climbed into the back seat. Ike ran around and scrambled to the other side. He was about to sit down, but then he stepped back away from the car, reached forward and pulled something out from underneath his seat.

“Oh, um, these are for you… but you can just leave them in the car if it’s easier… you can just take them later…” Ike awkwardly handed Karen a small bunch of flowers as the two young teens piled into the back seat.

Kyle pulled out of the driveway and they were on their way.

Ike sat looking out the window, and tapping his foot like a jackhammer, before looking himself over and smoothing down his adorably formal, teal, collared button-up that he apparently planned on wearing to the movies.

Karen watched him subtly. The way his golden-hazel eyes darted towards her, the way he smiled so politely through pursed lips, the way his cheeks tinged when she warmly smiled back.

They drove along, none of the teens speaking to each other over the rumble of the engine and the faint sounds of angsty 80’s music playing over Spotify, until Kyle’s phone started ringing.

“Hello?” He answered over the bluetooth.

“Hey.”

Karen immediately recognized Kenny’s voice.

“Stop spying on me, Kenny, he hasn’t even dropped us off yet!” Karen yelled at the speaker.

“…..Gotta go.” Kenny hung up.

Kyle chuckled amusedly.

“Jesus Christ…” Karen muttered to herself, crossing her arms at the thought of her very first date.
not even being something she could keep to herself. Ike stiffened uncomfortably, probably because the date hadn’t even started yet and protective big brother was already waiting to see if Karen’s date would mess up.

“You know I drove this car once!” Ike piped up, apparently trying to impress Karen, but by the look on his face he regretted spewing out such an off-topic piece of information.

Karen tried to picture Ike Broflovski behind the wheel. “You did?”

“Yeah... s’no big deal.” Ike shrugged it off, trying to impress her in a way that was so freakin cute it was actually working.

“That’s pretty cool...” She flirted back, “When did you do that?”

“Two weeks ago.” Ike smirked coolly, like he just knew was making Karen’s stomach do flips; boys with cars... Karen had been warned about their charms many times from the older McCormicks in her family.

“...Were you practicing for your permit test?” They were all at least a year away from that, but Karen had run out of follow up-questions and she felt like if she didn’t say something the conversation would die down awkwardly.

“No,” Ike glanced at his brother’s green glare through the rearview mirror, “Stan was plastered so Kyle drove his car home and I drove my mom’s car back to our house.”

“Oh... he seems to do that a lot...” Karen muttered, all-too familiar with the pattern that Stan had begun displaying ever since his first long break-up with Wendy about a year ago.

“Yeah, he does.” Kyle answered from the front seat, switching to steer with his right hand, so his left elbow could lean against the window. He ran his fingers up the side of his head, tiredly.

Kyle dropped them off at the theater, and drove away, but not before first giving each of them a lecture about not sneaking off, and not going anywhere else without calling first.

Ike jokingly flipped him off as he drove away, but not until Kyle had already almost turned the corner, and had absolutely no chance of actually seeing it. Karen chuckled at him and grabbed Ike by the elbow to lead him inside.

As soon as they stepped into the lobby, Karen caught sight of a familiar ruby neckpiece, jet black hair with a shocking stripe of cherry red, and an apathetic glare, all wrapped up in a South Park Cinemas uniform behind the counter.

“Aw, shit.” She heard Pete drone loudly from across the lobby.

“Peter, you’d better pipe down, mate, before the manager hears you swearing in the lobby.”

“AW, SHIT!” Pete repeated, cupping his hands around his mouth to amplify the sound, and calling out even louder over to where Karen was now giggling musically, and Ike was chuckling nervously, still very much intimidated by the older boy he’d only ever had blunt or hostile interactions with. The pretty blonde next to Pete whipped their head around towards the manager’s door, eyes burning into the painted green wood fearfully, while Pete — not even remotely apologetic — never even turned around.
He tipped his eyes up to the ceiling and sighed dramatically.

“Ugh. Welcome to South Park Cinemas — wipe that fucking look off your face McCormick — where every day is *cinemaatic.*” Pete gestured languidly at the not-so-creative slogan — quoted and displayed proudly in colorful letters at the top of the register — as he continued to drone disinterestedly at the chuckling customers in front of him. “What can I *slave* over for you today?”

Karen bit her lip to stifle the laughter that bubbled up from her chest.

She cleared her throat. “Sorry, you work here?”

Pete narrowed his eyes. Karen tried not to chuckle at the tamed state of the jaded goth kid in front of her.

“Yes.” He hissed nastily. “What can I get you?” He growled through clenched teeth.

“Small popcorn, please. With butter.” Karen giggled quietly while Ike stood frozen next to her, unsure how to approach the scary teen who was more bark than bite.

Pete got to work, making a disgusted face as some of the butter got on his hand while he poured.

Karen tried her best to continue the conversation. “The uniform looks good on you, it’s black, so…”

“I’ll spit in your popcorn.” Pete warned threateningly.

Kernels erupted from the bag as he slammed Karen’s order onto the table. “And for you, preppy?” Pete narrowed his eyes at the cowering freshman, looking him up and down with a snarl as Ike stammered in front of him.

“I — I’m good.”

“$5.78.”

Karen felt Ike’s hand on her shoulder before she could even reach for her bag.

“I got it, Kare.”

“Wow, Kare, real catch.” Pete mocked.

Karen glared at him as Ike dug in his wallet for some cash. Upon finding none, he just handed Pete a credit card instead, which was taken with a raised eyebrow and a snicker. “Of course,” the goth kid mumbled as he swiped Gerald’s credit card. Ike cleared his throat self-consciously and glanced at Karen, sideways. Pete could be such a jerk sometimes.

“Don’t be such a dick.” Karen hissed. The older boy was only momentarily stunned that little Karen McCormick would dare speak to him like that. He, of course, did not apologize, but he handed Ike his dad’s credit card back without comment.

“Receipt?” Pete asked flatly.

“Yes, please.” Ike waited patiently, as the ancient printers behind the counter slowly printed his receipt… and then jammed halfway through.
“Fuuuck, PIIIIIIIP!” Pete called to the heavens in frustration, probably much louder than he actually needed to.

“I’m right here, you don’t have to shout for me.”

Pip had on a South Park Cinema’s uniform, just like Pete’s, only, with skinny maroon jeans on underneath instead of black, and an aquamarine belt slung low below the belt loops. Pip had beautifully thick, long, honey-blonde hair almost down to their elbows, tied back in a fluffy, low ponytail, with short layers beside side-swept bangs sticking out just below their chin. Underneath very light eyebrows, sat jet black eyelashes, curled to perfection and rimmed with brown eyeliner. A rosy pink blush adorned the apples of round cheeks.

The curls at the end of Pip’s ponytail brushed against Pete’s arm delicately as Pip bent down to inspect the machine. Karen took note of how miserably Pete was failing to hide the blush on his face with each gentle touch. “Come on… bloody work…” Pip muttered, smacking the machine in irritation.

“Are you from England?” Ike asked interestedly.

“Why, yes!” Pip piped up loudly, purposely drowning out Pete’s dull response of ‘Duh’. “I lived there until I was seven…” Pip was now struggling to open the machine and yank the paper jam out. “I followed my parents all over Europe when I was eight… and finally… moved to South Park when I was nine… oh, finally!” The receipt machine popped open with a loud crack. After inspecting to make sure it hadn’t been broken, Pip pulled out the used paper with a flourish and closed it back up. Pete slammed his finger on the print button, jumping just slightly as Pip put a hand on Pete's lower back to reach around him and toss the balled up paper into the trash can to Pete’s right.

“Here.” Pete thrust the small paper into Ike’s hands rudely, face red as a tomato.

Karen smirked at him, “Good thing we have strong hands here to open the machine, huh, Pete?” She popped a piece of popcorn in her mouth, thoroughly enjoying the intense level of uncomfortable that Pete seemed to be operating at in this moment. Serves him right for picking on Ike.

Pip smiled with humble gratitude, their bright grin reaching everybody with individual attention. Pete’s attention remained forward as he snarled and glared at Karen, though she could see him tense up when Pip finally turned a proud smile his way. The tall blonde bounced on their heels and happily walked away to help another customer.

Karen raised her eyebrows at Pete suspiciously.

His scowl only deepened as he grumbled, “Don’t talk to me”, and stormed his way into the back room.

The two kids showed their tickets to the usher and walked into the theater.

As soon as they sat down, Karen felt the bag on her shoulder buzz. She pulled out her phone and let out an irritated gasp.
From Henrietta: Heard your on a date with Broflovkaskjdfhaksjd

From Henrietta: It was bound to happen sometime, the way he was drooling all over you *
eyeroll emoji*

From Henrietta: Be safe, and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do… and DEFINITELY don’t do anything I would do *

“God! Is everybody spying on me today?” Karen muttered frustratedly under her breath, shoving her phone deep down in her purse, and pouting.

Ike looked over at her concernedly, before turning to scan the room over in search of the supposed spies.

“No, it’s just Henrietta texting me,” Karen explained, resting her hand on Ike’s elbow reassuringly. She rolled her eyes and threw up air quotes with all-McCormick attitude as she continued, “Pete told her we were here and she was just nagging me about ‘not doing anything she wouldn’t do’”. Karen explained. Ike’s muscles un-tensed as his shoulders visibly lowered.

Ike sighed, “Oh, I thought maybe Kyle and Kenny were here… or even Stan.” Ike turned around wide-eyed to look over his shoulder in paranoia one last time.

“We’re fine!” Karen waved off nonchalantly, although she was feeling a bit chaperoned. “Let’s just… not worry about anybody else.” She announced, grabbing a handful of popcorn.

“Oh.” Ike chuckled nervously.

The movie hadn’t started yet, in fact they were even a little early for the previews. Karen had insisted Ike pick her up at exactly 6:00, knowing full well his tendency to run late to everything he attends. He must’ve been so nervous to be late that he’d actually shown up at 5:50, and now here they were, sitting side by side in a quiet and sparsely filled theater, watching those lame trivia questions flash across the screen. Occasionally, they’d make awkward small talk about it, but they were otherwise pretty quiet.

“So did you see the first one?” Karen piped up, reaching into the halfway-empty popcorn bag.

“Ike!” Karen rolled her eyes. “Ike!” Karen shoved him with her elbow, “why did you tell me? I would have picked another movie!”

“I know that!” He sassed, picking popcorn off of his shirt and tossing it back to her. “It’s just…
no, it’s stupid…” His voice trailed off.

“What?” She wondered, picking a popcorn piece that was stuck to Ike’s button-up and popping it back into her mouth with a humored smile, “what, were ya nervous or somethin’?” She teased the beet red boy in the seat next to her.

Ike scoffed, not fully looking her in the eyes, “Psh, yeah, Karen, like I was nervous to go on a date with the girl who’s been my best friend since diapers.”

“Do you really wanna mention diapers on our date?” Karen scrunched up her nose.

Ike scoffed again, multiple times, this time with no words. It was practically an admission of nervousness. An awkward silence fell between them.

“I was nervous.” Karen admitted.

“Really?” Ike gawked at her.

“Yeah, of course!” She shrugged casually, before swiping hair behind her ears like she always did when she didn’t know what else to do.

“Oh thank God,” Ike laughed, “I was so fucking nervous, man, I was worried you were like so cool about this and I was being so weird…”

“Ike,” Karen placed a comforting hand on his bicep, “I’m always the weird one, relax.” She joked. His eyes drifted from her casual stare to her lingering fingers.

“It’s just,” Ike lowered his voice as some more movie-goers entered the theater, “I really like you, way more than just a friend, but I know that’s how we started so… I was just… yeah, nervous.”

Karen was starting to think Ike’s face would never go back to its old color again. Karen realized embarrassedly that she still had her hand on his arm. She pulled her hand away slowly, feeling herself blush.

“Ike, if I didn’t want to go out with you, I wouldn’t have said yes.” Karen pointed out, and he nodded in agreement. “I like you too.” She admitted sheepishly.

“Good.” He beamed. She smiled back.

“If you want, we can still sneak out of here and watch something else?” Karen suggested, “I know they’re showing old, gory Halloween movies September through November in one of the theaters in this place…. I think The Exorcist starts in 20 minutes, if you’re interested.”

Ike just blinked at her, eyes wide.

“No thank you.” He rushed with a shy smile. Damn that smile. She realized she was staring.

“Ok.” Karen chuckled, dropping her gaze and tucking her hair behind her ear shyly.

Ike checked his phone for the millionth time, although Karen noticed there were no notifications on the screen. It was cute, it kind of calmed her nerves seeing how much more collected she was than Ike.
He looked like he was about to lean in and say something when the speakers blasted with sound and the screen filled with the theater’s bright logo.

The theater darkened just slightly and more moviegoers continued filing in to take their seats as the previews began.

Ike shifted in his seat. He stretched his arm out in front of him before bending it the opposite way across his body. Ike stretched his arm high above his head before carefully draping in around Karen’s shoulders tentatively.

“Nice yawn-and-stretch… I thought you were warming up for volleyball.” She joked with an awkward snort.

“Is that ok?” Ike whispered, leaning in so she could hear him over the sounds of explosions on the screen. His face was so close to her she could see the warm light reflecting off his golden eyes.

Karen tensed up, grabbed a handful of popcorn, and shoved it in her mouth, turning to face the screen as she mumbled through a mouthful of kernels, “Uh-huh.”

Coward.

Slowly, Ike relaxed and Karen could feel the weight of his arm actually resting on her, rather than hovering slightly above her. It wasn’t so scary… She offered him some popcorn as a casual segue into her next move.

“No, I’m good.” He assured her.

“Ok.” She shrugged, using that subtle movement to slink down in her seat and rest her head on his shoulder.

Both teens stiffened in their seats. Karen was so hyper-focused on her sweaty palms and pounding heart that she hardly registered that the movie had started. The Disney logo flashed across the screen in its creative re-design, tailored to the theme of the “Wreck It Ralph” sequel they were seeing.

Somewhere towards the middle of the movie, Karen felt Ike’s head move as he tilted his head to look down at her. She froze. Despite her brain yelling at her to look back at him, she did not move.

“Hey, Kare,” he whispered, lips inches away from her scalp. It made her shiver. She sat up a bit to turn and face him.

Ike gulped. “I just wanted to let you know I’m having a really good time with you here, and thanks for coming out with me and stuff,” he whispered in a rush.

“Oh, of course! I’m having a great time too.” Karen beamed, leaning back against her headrest as she looked at him.

Ike sunk back against his headrest too, never taking his eyes off her smiling face.

“Um…” he mumbled.

“You can kiss me.”
Karen followed Ike’s lead as the two sat up straighter in their chairs and turned to face each other, leaning in slowly.

Finally, they connected, and Ike’s lips were exactly as soft as Karen had imagined them to be.

He snaked a hand under her hair to caress the nape of her neck before bringing it around to fondly rest against her cheek. His fingertips left sparks behind against her skin.

So this is what making out is like…

Karen suddenly became very aware of the other people in the theater, but she really didn’t care when Ike pulled back and smiled at her with that adorable smile. In their corner seat in the back row who could even see them anyway?

They really did not see much of the rest of the movie after that.

The lights turned on as the credits rolled, and Karen opened her eyes for the first time in a while, remembering where she was now that she was no longer under Ike’s enchanting spell.

She looked at Ike — his cheeks and lips flushed with color — and bit her lip. “Just two more minutes,” she chuckled, going in for another kiss from him. He kissed her back, before pushing back against her shoulders tentatively.

“People will see us.” He rationalized.

“Bunch of perverts,” Karen joked, smiling, but obeying Ike’s wishes. Karen pulled back and smoothed down her hair. Ike stared around in paranoia, doing the same and smoothing out the wrinkles in his dress shirt.

Karen checked her phone.

It is only 4:30…

“Wanna sneak into that scary movie now?” Ike suggested in a rush.

Karen scoffed confusedly, “it’ll be almost over by now.”

“Well, we’re not going in there to watch it...”

Karen matched Ike’s raised eyebrows with a smirk. “Wow, this new Ike is a rebel.” She marveled, impressed.

“Whaddaya say?” Ike held out his hand.

Karen slapped her hand into his sweaty palm, and they ran.
Ike and Karen laughed and giggled as they sprinted down the hallway to the movie in theater 8. Karen was fairly sure Pete saw them, but didn’t move in favor of loving the irony of watching someone steal from any ‘fascist corporation’.

They chuckled, shushing each other, as Father Merrin and Father Karras whispered in hushed tones on the big screen.

“Oh my God, I can’t believe we did that, I hope we don’t get in trouble for that…” Ike laughed in a whisper— this time never once looking over his shoulder, bright golden eyes fixed only on Karen McCormick.

Karen shrugged, “Ruby, my brothers, and I have snuck into double features many times before, and the staff really doesn’t care.”

Ike grabbed Karen’s face and kissed her with swift passion, crashing their noses together, painfully.

“Ow.”

“Sorry.” Ike chuckled embarrassedly as Karen scrunched up her face and rubbed at her bumped nose.

“Come on,” Karen led the way to a pair of seats in the back row. She couldn’t help noticing how packed the theater was.

As soon as they sat down, it was as if the date had been reset to the beginning, an awkward tension clouding over them like a heavy mist. They sat facing the big screen, hands in their laps, and shoulders facing forward, well within the confines of their individual armrests.

“YOUR MOTHER SUCKS COCKS IN HELL, KARRAS!”

“This was a really bad idea,” Ike muttered as Regan writhed and contorted and spewed profanities on the big screen.

Karen agreed, cringing at their choice of make-out movie, over the screaming and pained moaning through the speakers. It was a very unromantic setting. Ike tried not to look like he was uncomfortable, but his head was tilted slightly to the side, and he jumped and covered his eyes as Regan’s eyes bulged out, green vomit spilling from the side of her mouth, onto her bed and restraints.

“That is disgusting.” He whispered, voice cracking, eyes closed behind his barricade of fingers.

“My bad.” Karen muttered, grabbing Ike his hand and dragging him out of the theater. He followed eagerly. “Well, that was way less neutral of a background movie than I thought it was gonna be…” Karen mumbled to herself, embarrassed.

“…I’m sure it’s a really good movie if you didn’t just walk in and see only the part we saw…” Ike rationalized.

Karen shrugged.

Ike nodded, scuffling his shoes.
“What do you wanna do now?”

The kids decided to get ice cream and eat it in the park. As they walked down the sidewalk towards the park entrance, Ike slipped his fingers between Karen’s and held her hand. She smiled up at him and held on tightly.

“So you don’t like scary movies?” She observed, taking a lick of her ice cream cone.

“Oh I do, but I’m more into slasher movies; Texas Chainsaw, Nightmare on Elm Street, Friday the 13th. Bloody shit like that. I’m even down for a haunting movie here or there but exorcisms freak me the HELL out, *pun intended*. Miss me with that inhuman shit.” Ike shivered visibly.

“I thought Jewish people didn’t believe in Hell?” Karen giggled.

“It still skeeves me out. And plus I was only baptized into Judaism, somehow that feels different.”

"Hm." Karen squeezed his hand. “Well, maybe we can watch a classic slasher next time.”

“Yeah,” Ike took a bite of his own cone, “somehow Kevin Bacon being stabbed through his sternum backwards is less of a mood killer than Linda Blair screaming about dicks and spitting up sludge.”

“Cocks.”

“What?” Ike nearly choked on his ice cream, the look on his face priceless.

“The line is ‘your mother sucks *cocks in hell*,’ not ‘dicks.’” Karen clarified, amused at the look on Ike’s face.

Ike chuckled uncomfortably. “Either way, I never wanna hear it again. Just because it’s dirty language doesn’t mean its not a permanent boner killer.” Ike looked up from his ice cream with immediate horror and embarrassment. “Oh my God I just said 'boner' out loud.”

Karen snorted. Like Karen hadn't literally said the word 'cock' less than a minute ago...

Ike groaned and covered his beet-red face with both hands as they both continued to chuckle over Ike's embarrassment. "...Um… sorry… I forget that I’m not just hanging out with you, as one-of-the-guys, anymore… like the old days… that was inappropriate…” He smiled apologetically. That smile... Karen had always found it charming before, but now... She realized she was staring. Again.

Karen tore her gaze away and just shrugged. She'd heard worse.

The kids ate their ice cream on the swings, holding hands as they swung gently back and forth and talked about school. Ike offered to throw away Karen’s paper wrapper when they’d both finished eating. She boldly followed him to the trashcans.

As soon as Ike turned around, Karen grabbed him by the face and kissed him, standing up on her
tiptoes to reach him. She could practically feel Ike’s heart beating out of his chest as she stepped in closer to him.

“I don’t want this date to end.” He confessed rapidly when she pulled away.

“What, am I just *that* enchanting?” Karen flipped her hair dramatically, completely sarcastic in her joke.

“Yes.” Ike answered seriously through a breathless sigh.

Karen’s expression softened as he stared down at her adoringly.

The honk of a car horn drew their attention to where Kyle sat idly in his mom’s car, pretending to be preoccupied with his phone.

The drive back was silent like last time, the only difference being the flutter in Karen’s heart and the song on the radio.

At one point, while Karen was looking out the window, she felt Ike’s hand slip into hers, timidly.

She smiled at him gently before turning back to watch the houses slip past her window.

When they finally made it back to Karen’s house, she made sure to thank Kyle for driving them today.

“It’s no problem.” He assured.

“I’m gonna walk her to the door.” Ike announced, bolting out of his car door in an attempt to open Karen’s door for her, but he was only able to get there in time to kind of hold it open as she stepped out.

He walked about two steps towards the door with her, before sprinting frantically back to the car for something. He returned with her flowers, handing them over with his shy kind of smile that had *always* made Karen’s heart soar.

“Here. Don’t forget these.” He chuckled as she took them from his hand.

“Thank you. You’re sweet.”

“I had a great time.” Ike smiled at her.

“Me too.” Karen rocked back and forth on the balls of her feet.

“So… there's gonna be a 'next time'?” Ike chuckled and shoved his hands in his pockets nervously.

Karen brought the flowers up to her nose to hide her smile. “Sure.” She chirped softly.

“Ok.” Ike sighed in relief. He placed one sweaty hand on her shoulder and kissed her gently on the cheek before booking it back to the car. “Text me, ok?” He called over his shoulder.

“Ok.” Karen answered softly, smiling like a dork. Subconsciously, her hand drifted up to her
cheek as she watched him walk away.

Karen crossed the threshold and leaned against the front door as the latch shut behind her with a click.

She heard a loud bang come from the kitchen.

“Ow! Dude, you have to stop doing that…”

“I’m sorry!”

Karen followed the noise to see Kenny and Butters in the kitchen, standing across from each other awkwardly; Kenny was leaning against the fridge rubbing the back of his head for some reason, and Butters was backed against the opposite counter, clutching the fake granite tightly on either side of him.

“Hey, how’d the date go?” Kenny asked, folding his arms casually. Karen eyed both boys suspiciously. She was about to ask if they were up to something, when Kenny pointed down at her hands. “Did Ike give you those?”

Karen glanced down at her flowers and couldn’t help but smile. “Maybe.” She blushed.

“Ooooooh!” Kenny teased, plucking a glass cup out of the cupboard and filling it with water.

“That’s sweet.” Butters smiled angelically.

“Yeah, you think so?” Kenny murmured softly, glancing at Butters smiling face briefly before handing the cup of water to Karen. “How was it?” He asked again, leaning against the counter.

Karen tried to act cool, but she couldn’t help it; she was smiling like a dork. “Really good.” She laughed giddily.

“Really? That’s good. Was he nice?”

Karen rolled her eyes at her brother. “It was Ike, of course he was nice.”

“Just checking!” Kenny threw his hands up defensively.

“I’m gonna go call Ruby.” Karen announced, taking her flowers and practically running to her room.

“We’re ordering pizza! There’s a two for one special so there’s gonna be a fuck ton!” Kenny called down the hallway.

“Sounds good!” Karen answered before slamming her door and flopping down on her bed, a little bit of water spilling out of the makeshift vase, phone already ringing.

“Hey! How was it?” Ruby’s voice inquired from the other end of the call.

“It was….” Karen placed the flowers on her nightstand as she tried to think of a word for such a perfect night — remembering the way he laughed, the way he held her hand, and the way he touched her delicately, like she was a precious flower…

“…Awesome.”
Eric shows up at Wendy's house, unannounced

POV - Wendy.

“What the…?”

Wendy sprung out of bed on a Saturday morning to look out the window and see who the fuck had just rung her doorbell for the second time before 9am.

Oh… You’ve got to be kidding….

Wendy adjusted her sweater tightly around her like a suit of armor and turned the handle.

“Hey, Kitchen Wench!”

He greeted her cheerfully, a wide smile stretched across his face.

“Why.” She questioned flatly. Eric Cartman tilted his head in confusion and furrowed his eyebrows. Wendy elaborated before he could ask the dumb question poised at his lips. “Why do you insist on calling me that name I hate.”

“Oh.” Cartman chuckled.

“It’s degrading!” Wendy folded her arms across her chest

“Bu-Gu-Ugh! But Kitchen Wiiiinch!” He whined in that annoying baby voice that really got under Wendy’s skin.

“I will slam this door, what do you want Cartman?”

His face fell for a second, but only for a second. As quickly as he let his guard down he regained his composure, cockier than ever.

“I wanted to see what you were doing today, since you seemed to enjoy my company last night.” He sneered at her jokingly.

Memories of venting to Eric Cartman (of all people!) flashed in Wendy’s head: sitting across from him while they ate veggie burgers and fought over a plate of onion rings; sulking and listening to him tell horrible dad joke after horrible dad joke, over and over again until she actually ended up laughing and momentarily forgetting why she was sad; the amused smirk that lit up his eyes and softened his demeanor when she smiled at him; the musical chuckle that caught her off guard right before he told her she laughed like a chipmunk; the way his stare bore into her from across the table like it could burn through her… Just like he was looking at her right now.
“I have to study.” Wendy lied, crossing her arms.

“For what?” He challenged her with a wily smirk on his face.

“Physics.” She barked.

“Oh, really?” He chuckled disbelievingly.

“What do you want?” She shook her head.

“Didn’t you already ask me that?” He sneered, entertained.

“I’m gonna slam this door!”

“If that were true you would have already done it—”

The cocky smirk melted off of Cartman’s face as Wendy began actually closing her door.

“Wait!” He shouted desperately, recoiling slightly at the sound of his own desperation.

Eric popped his crutch in the doorway so the door wouldn’t shut. He was wobbling on his good leg. It was almost sad. Too bad it wasn’t.

“Stop blocking my doorway!” Wendy insisted with a defensive snarl.

Cartman begrudgingly removed his crutch and adjusted it back underneath him.

Wendy closed the door. No, she pretty much slammed it. She didn’t hear anything on the other side for quite a while.

Out of curiosity, she peeked through the tiny peephole at the top of the door.

She had never seen that arrogant face look so genuinely sad in her life. After waiting patiently for a few more seconds, Cartman and his crutches did a three point turn and began walking back to the sidewalk, defeated.

Good…

After watching him struggle for a few more seconds, Wendy felt bad — she’d turned him away for essentially no reason, and it must’ve taken a lot of effort for him to walk over here...

…Dammit, dammit, Wendy!

She threw open the door.

“Give me five minutes!” She called after him, ignoring the soft smile that spread across Cartman’s face.

Wendy ran to her room and got dressed before she could change her mind.

When she came back out, Cartman was waiting for her on the sidewalk, half turned around, neck craning to watch her bound down the front steps with an increasingly entertained look on his face.

“To be clear,” she looked up at his smirking face sternly, “I’ll only come with you if you promise to order your own plate of onion rings this time.”
Wendy smiled in spite of herself at the genuine laughter that erupted from Eric Cartman.

“Whatever.” He chuckled, leading the way as fast as his busted leg would take him.

“Sorry we don’t have a car, both of my parents went into work today, and my mom's car is having issues so she had to take mine.” Wendy apologized, rambling, watching Eric struggle to walk down the sidewalk on one good leg and one crutch.

“S’ok. Could probably use the exercise anyway, right?” He chuckled breathlessly.

“You’re too hard on yourself.” Wendy responded, quickly, like a reflex. She believed it though — the more she got to know him, the more Wendy found that lately Eric put himself down unnecessarily far more often than she'd remembered him doing in their childhood.

Cartman looked at her out of the corner of his eye, a gentle smile curling at the corners of his lips.

“Where are we going, anyway?” Wendy wondered, already whipping out her phone to call them a Lyft.

“It’s Saturday.” He beamed waiting for her to get the memo. When he realized she couldn’t read his mind, he clarified. “We’re gonna visit Nana!”

“Oh, Eric… I don’t know if I wanna go back to the hospital, I don’t wanna be seen there—”

“Please?”

Wendy looked at him. His smile was starting to fade into a clean slate of blankness — not the usual manipulative puppy dog face that used to get him his way. He closed his mouth and looked off to the side, before adjusting his crutch underneath him.

“Please.” He tried again. His voice sounded hollow. Wendy was silent, thrown off by the naked vulnerability on the face of this kid who so often had his guard up. Cartman’s face fell as his eyes drifted to the ground, expecting rejection.


“Totally fine.” He grinned.

“And do I have to pretend to be your girlfriend again?” Wendy asked annoyedly.

“Well, call lunch a date and you won’t be pretending—”

“It’s not a date—!”

“Lyft’s here!” Eric announced cheerily, hobbling off past Wendy and sneering at her as he passed her shoulder.

Wendy whipped around to see a car pulling up to the sidewalk. She checked the app on her phone, then looked back at the car.

“Well, come on!” Cartman called amusedly, before visibly struggling to get his door open.

Wendy reluctantly marched over to the car. When she opened the back door, Cartman was already
sitting in the middle seat.

“Leg.” He gestured innocently to his outstretched leg in the footpace of the other seat. Wendy rolled her eyes and sat down next to him, knowing damn well that he was only sitting there to push her buttons.

She half expected him to make some kind of joke out of it — purposefully take up all the leg room on her side until she complained about it or something like that — but as soon as Wendy stepped in the car and leaned towards the window as much as she could, he responded by tucking his elbows tightly against his body and keeping his face forward. He continued to make jokes at Wendy’s expense in conversation with the driver (things like “my fiancé and I are on our way to Vegas to elope” including a detailed story about how Wendy proposed, because he didn’t have the balls ever since she’d castrated him, etc.). Even as he continued to push her buttons and try and get her attention, Cartman continued to face forward, and spent the entire ride to the diner taking up as little space as possible.

“Hey, kids, what’ll it be?”

“Turkey sandwich, please.” Wendy smiled at the friendly waitress and handed her back her menu.

“And for you?”

Cartman bit his lip as his eyes skimmed across the menu so fast that Wendy wasn’t even sure he was reading it. Eventually he just sorta, handed back the menu. When the waitress asked what he was having, again, he blurted, “I’ll have a side salad.”

The waitress wrote down their orders and promised they’d be out soon. Wendy waited until she’d walked away to lean in and question Cartman.

“That’s all you gonna have?”

“I wanna look skinny on our date.” He declared boisterously, resting his arm against the back of the booth and looking around the restaurant amusedly.

Wendy rolled her eyes and glanced quickly at surrounding diners to see who had heard him declare this lunch a ‘date’. “I’m starting to think you don’t consider that a joke anymore...”

“Why were you even volunteering at the hospital anyway?” He changed the subject swiftly.

Wendy straightened the napkin against her lap and felt her posture stiffen.

“I thought volunteer hours would look good on an application.” She explained stiffly.

“An application for what?” Cartman asked absently, squeezing lemon into his water.

“College. Obviously.” Wendy folded her hands on top of the table and waited for his response.

“Oh yeah, what’s your major gonna be?” He asked, before taking a sip of his water.

Wendy stared back at him and prepared for inevitable combat, a small smirk already creeping across Cartman’s face in response to her body language. She answered swiftly, “Communications.”
“JEEeeez.” Eric scoffed amusedly, rolling his eyes and leaning back against the padded booth.

“What.” Wendy snapped, fists balling on the table, “what is wrong now, Eric Cartman?”

“Wiiihndy, communications is a housewife’s degree.” He whined melodiously, a little smile polluting the mock concern on his dumb, arrogant… dumb face!

Wendy sputtered and stammered furiously, before blowing all her air out of her nose and trying again.

“Why do you even speak, if you have no idea what you’re talking about?!!” She hissed venomously.

Eric took a sip of his water and shrugged, before elaborating.

“It’s not necessarily the choice of the major, exactly, it's the cop-out nature of choosing such a popular degree last minute. It just seems like you’re aiming a little… vague,” He explained plainly, much to Wendy's obvious offense, “like you’re doing what you think people want you to do, and not one of the many, annoyingly organized things you’ve actually had planned since you were... I don't know, spearheading girls-only town meetings in the third grade.”

Wendy was surprised he had remembered that.

It only flustered her for a moment.

The shock wore off, and reminiscing fondly about childhood endeavors didn't diminish her irritation.

“And what the fuck would you know about it? Huh?” Wendy snapped.

Eric Cartman guffawed, apparently entertained by Wendy’s use of profanity in an argument (which she always said showed weakness, not credibility). When he saw that she wasn’t as amused as he was, Cartman cleared his throat and straightened out his expression.

“You know, I have just literally never, ever heard you mention comm in your life.” He shrugged.

“Oh, and you know so much? About 'comm’?” Wendy grumbled quietly, mostly to herself, straightening her posture and picking her elbows off the table. (She could hear her mother’s voice in her ear dictating how it wasn’t polite to keep elbows on the table).

“I know that the Wendy Testaburger I know would never settle for the first degree her guidance counselor suggested, just to get the fuck out of High School.” Wendy’s eyes flicked back up to him with a wide-eyed expression, as he leaned in and spoke softly. “I know you’ve got bigger dreams than that, I know you, Wendy Testaburger—”

“You don’t know me.” She scoffed quietly rolling her eyes. Cartman just shrugged, taking another sip of his water casually. It infuriated her. “And,” Wendy leaned forward and pointed a perfectly manicured finger at him disciplinarily, “there are tons of high-paying jobs that you can get with a communications degree — there’s PR, there’s event planning, social media, human resources—”

“Right, so which one are you planning for?”

Wendy stared him down angrily as he sat across the table from her, not smirking, not amused… just asking her a simple question that she did not have an answer to.
“So let me hear your big plans, huh?” Wendy sneered, trying to be as quiet as possible, so as not to cause a scene, “what’s your great plan for after high school?”

“Don’t got one.” Cartman shrugged, before looking her in the eye intensely and staring her down in that way that made her feel like he would stare into her soul. “But at least I admit it.”

“Ok, one turkey sandwich and one side salad. Good thing about simple orders is they come out fast.” The waitress smiled, handing them their food, clearly not reading the room. Wendy sat across from Cartman, glaring at him, while Cartman stared back at her calmly.

“I have a plan, Cartman.” Wendy snapped, the second the waitress turned her back and started walking away.

“Ok.” He nodded in acceptance.

“You don’t always have to argue with what you don’t understand.” She snarled nastily.

“I said ‘ok’.” He shrugged and held up his hands defensively.

“I am getting into college and I am getting out of this town—”

“Look, you don’t gotta put on a big show for me, Wendy. Ok? Who the fuck am I?” Cartman pointed a forkful of salad towards his chest before shoveling it into his mouth and muttering under his breath as he chewed, “Let’s just hang out.”

“Fine.” Wendy conceded, relaxing her posture and diving into her sandwich.

After a few moments of awkward silence, Cartman spoke up again.

“You know Wendy,” he mumbled before swallowing a mouthful of food, “women can do anything they set their minds to, I don’t know if you know that.” He joked with a smile. He was looking at her in that way again.

Wendy narrowed her eyes at the lighthearted grin and heavy amusement steadily growing on his face.

“I know that, thanks.” She sassed, unable to stop herself from grinning slightly at the thoroughly entertained look on his face.

Eric chuckled. “Ok, just checking.” He smiled, popping one of her onion rings into his mouth.

By the time the check came, their table had an extra plate of onion rings on it.

Wendy had made him order his own when she literally had to shield her plate from him by twisting her body and holding the plate against her chest.

When the waitress dropped them off, he’d pushed them to the middle of the table so she could take back her share.

Wendy paid, and they settled the bill over Venmo. When Wendy got the notification a few seconds later, the note read ‘best date evr’ with a halo emoji. He was snickering to himself amusedly while she read the notification. She was about to scold him, panicked that someone would see and think this was a real date, when she noticed that he’d already privatized the transaction. It made Wendy feel sort of guilty, for reasons she couldn't be bothered to understand.
She pocketed her phone and handed him his crutch.

“Ok.” His eyes lit up excitedly, softened by a sweet expression, “Let’s go visit Nana.”

Wendy found herself in a position she never thought she’d be in: sat next to Eric Cartman, on a bench outside the hospital, rubbing circles against his back as he cried his eyes out into the palms of his hands.

As much as she and Eric have had a rocky past, it genuinely hurt to see him like this. This wasn’t Eric scraping his knee in the middle of a kickball game, or Eric upset that the teacher took his toy away at recess. This was Eric Cartman helpless, scared, and broken hearted over the loss of what little family he had left, and every sniffle and sob tore her to pieces.

“I don’t know what to do,” he moaned into his hands, voice loud and gruff to hide the tremble in his throat, “I don’t know if I should even tell my mom… I don’t know if she’d care.” Eric sat up abruptly, wiping his eyes and clearing his throat. He collapsed slightly again, before pulling his hand away from his mouth and sitting up straighter than before.

He was practically painting on a hardened mask right here for Wendy to see.

It was… hard to watch.

“Ah. It’s ok, it’s ok,” he chanted to himself as he shook his head and his hands to jostle his thoughts. “It was just her time.” He lectured coldly to himself.

He wouldn’t look at Wendy.

“I’m so sorry, Eric…”

She didn’t know what else to say, she felt like that’s all she’d been able to say to him since it happened.

He made an involuntary whimpering noise in the back of his throat and looked up at the sky to blink away the tears.

"She's in a better place..." Wendy attempted, though her delivery felt unconvincing.

"That shit's not real." He scoffed coldly in a whisper.

Whoa. That one really threw Wendy for a loop...

“I'm sorry.” She repeated for the millionth time. "I... I don't know what else to say..."

Wendy placed a hand on his forearm and watched as his wide eyes drifted directly to it.

Eric sniffed and cleared his throat aggressively. “Don’t be sorry.” He groaned with a gravely voice, adjusting his speech to cover any weaknesses, “it’s just life, I knew it would happen eventually… it’s over, it happened, and I’ll just have to get over it. Fuck, she was old as shit.” He chuckled. Wendy wasn’t amused.

“Eric…” What could she even say? This was the version of him she didn’t know how to talk to: the fully-guarded, ‘fuck you, I do what I want’, stubborn, immovable, callous, ‘realist’, ‘truth-telling’, asshole who could never be hurt. Only this time it was different: he didn’t seem so convinced.
“Eric, look at me.” She pleaded. He turned towards her, big brown eyes stained red and bloodshot. “It’s gonna be ok,” She promised emptily, "it's ok." Wendy moved her thumb back and forth where her hand rested against his red sweater. He looked down at her hand.

“It’s not.” He argued brokenly.

“No, it’s not.” She agreed. “But that’s ok.” He leaned back against the bench, tilting his head to the side to look at her.

She continued, “it’s ok to feel sad, and it’s ok to wish things hadn’t turned out this way. It is life… but you don’t need to stop feeling it because of that.”

Eric looked down at his balled up fists. “Just… FUCK! Dude, I… I wish I could have been here in time to see her and say goodbye...” His voice trailed off into nothingness.

Cartman’s lip trembled. He doubled over again, head falling into his hands as he audibly wept, as softly as he could possibly manage, which was still pretty loud.

Wendy rubbed circles against his back again, and Cartman tilted his body, leaning towards her, just slightly, as she comforted him. He wasn't pulling away anymore. It felt extremely foreign, but not completely wrong.

“You couldn’t have known.” Wendy spoke softly, "Even if we did get here in time, you wouldn’t have wanted to see that.” Eric sat up slowly and breathed through his mouth.

“I know”. He sniffled as he started to calm down again. “No, I know, I know…” Wendy removed her hands and folded them in her lap.

Wendy and Cartman sat in still silence until he finally spoke again.

“You know she asked about you.” He tilted his head slightly towards her.

Wendy smiled, tears brimming her eyes as she thought about the sweet and spunky old woman that she’d only met once — a woman who was dying from a disease that strips people of their cognizance and memory, yet had somehow remembered the apathetic girl who had stood in her doorway, counting the minutes on her watch. “She did?”

Cartman looked vaguely in her direction and chuckled detachedly. “Yeah," he wiped at his eyes with the back of his hand, "last week when I went to visit her by myself, she asked for 'that pretty brunette girl’… I’m pretty sure that’s you.” Eric's eyes met hers steadily. Had he.. just said that? Wendy was about to be shocked when he smirked and uttered, “I don't see it, but—”

Wendy smacked him in the arm as he started to laugh. It was the first genuine laugh she'd heard from him since they'd been coldly informed that Ellen Cartman was no longer a patient at the hospital, having passed away that morning, just under an hour before the kids had shown up. Conveniently, her room had already been packed up neatly in a cardboard box and handed off to Wendy at the front desk — a box of crocheted items, dying flowers, and photos of Ellen, Eric, and Liane. Some pictures were framed, some were loose memories developed onto thick glossy paper, and some were screen grabs of a daughter who'd stopped visiting, that Ellen had had to print from social media on dull, lifeless, computer paper. One photo of the three of them — a small, wallet-sized Kodak print from a happier time — was folded up small into a tiny square, wrinkled and faded. The one she'd carried around in her pocket.
Eric placed a hand on the cardboard box to his left and held it there.

“Man, she’s really gone.” He nodded his head slowly, biting his cheek.

Wendy nodded silently. She looked down and noticed that both of their hands were resting against the concrete bench, side by side. She hesitated, casting a shadow above his white knuckles before resting her palm gently against the back of his clenched fist.

Eric sighed deeply, “Let’s just get out of here, dude. Would you mind ordering us a Lyft home?”

Wendy nodded as she quickly lifted her hand up and pulled out her phone.

When their Lyft finally arrived, Wendy was ready to call it a night, though it was still only mid-afternoon.

Today had been an exhausting roller coaster, and she was ready to get off.

Once they were inside the car, the driver eyed Cartman worriedly through the rearview.

“Yeah, just… I don’t know, Wendy, you make up some joke, I can’t think right now.” Cartman closed his eyes and leaned his head against the window.

Wendy faced the driver’s scrutinizing gaze in the mirror and tried her best to come up with a funny reason for why Eric looked like an absolute fucking mess.

“…he just found out people in porn don’t love each other,” Wendy attempted, recycling a tired old internet joke that was too dull to really be its own meme.

Cartman laughed loudly, still leaning against the window with his eyes closed.

“Weak.” He criticized, chuckling under his breath, and wiping a tear off of his cheek.

“Well, you put me on the spot for a joke, so…” Wendy muttered, self-consciously. Eric opened one eye and grinned at her slightly. Wendy couldn’t help but grin back.

The Lyft driver looked between them strangely.

“… You guys are weird…”

Wendy sent the Lyft to Eric’s house. At first she was going to make it a stop along the way to her house, but after the day they’d had, Wendy needed some time to walk in peace and decompress in the quiet.

As the Lyft driver pulled away, Wendy offered to help Eric climb the stairs.

“Don’t make it awkward Wendy, I’m not completely broken.” He laughed blandly, rushing to climb the first step so quickly that he did sort of stumble. Luckily Wendy was there to catch him, ignoring the gigantic eye roll and annoyed look on Cartman’s face, which was probably more projected towards his broken leg, than at Wendy.
Once Eric was safely in front of his door, he turned to face her.

“I’m sorry.” He blurted out with an embarrassed laugh. "For what I said." It was strange. It was not like him. Cartman usually whispers apologies that nobody else hears.

Wendy wasn’t really sure to what he was referring: technically, it could be anything he’d said (or done) to her over the course of their entire lives.

“Which time?” She half-joked, watching a surprised smirk light up his expression.

Cartman rolled his eyes before confessing, “Communications is not a housewife's degree…” He muttered, leaning in close lest anybody else overhears him admit that he was wrong. His eyes were burning into hers as she stared up at him surprisedly.

Wendy cleared her throat, “No it’s not…” She nodded, curtly.

“And…” Cartman bit back his own smile as he shifted his weight onto his good leg, “I do see it.” He stared down at her intensely.

Wendy’s throat tightened, like a rabbit preparing to feel the sink of a wolf’s teeth.

She pushed away the feeling and crossed her arms defensively.

“Yeah, well, apologies accepted.” She nodded.

“Yeah, ok.” Cartman laughed breathily.

“See you later.” Wendy waved as she turned and jogged down his front steps.

“Best date ever!” He yelled after her, grinning widely as she turned around to glare at him from the sidewalk.

“The best!” She called back sarcastically, much to his amusement, before waving him off again and walking the path back to her house.

Wendy picked up her phone as it began ringing early Sunday morning.

“Hello?” She greeted skeptically, recognizing the caller ID as it flittered across the screen.

“Hey.” He grunted in response.

Wendy pulled the phone away from her ear to check the name once again.

‘Eric Cartman’.

Wendy held the phone back against her ear. “…Yes?”

“I, um… listen, I’m sorry you had to see that yesterday… blubbering like a little bitch.” He chuckled guardedly.

“Eric, it’s ok…” Wendy insisted, a little bit annoyed that this is what he had called her so early in the morning for.

"Yeah, well… anyway, thanks… for being there, or whatever.”
“You’re welcome.” Wendy responded robotically. She didn’t even have time to say anything more than that before the receiver clicked and Cartman had hung up.

That seemed weird to Wendy, and she figured she’d better go check on him.

...Unless this was some childish ploy to get her to hang out with him again instead of asking like a normal person, and that was just what he wanted her to do...

No, not after yesterday. Wendy would put money on it that Eric was not even thinking about anything but his Nana today.

Out of sympathy (and a little boredom), she decided she had nothing better to do today.

Before she could change her mind, Wendy had thrown on an oversized lilac sweater, and marched out her front door to take a short walk.

“Nice dinosaurs.” Wendy commented, as Eric Cartman swung open his front door, probably expecting to see anybody but Wendy Testaburger on the other side.

“What, Wendy?” He sort of jumped and closed the door slightly, to hide at least one leg of his fuzzy dinosaur pajama pants.

“I was in the neighborhood.” She shrugged innocently, “Just wanted to stop by unannounced, seeing as how you enjoyed my company so much yesterday...”

“Ha, ha, you’re hilarious.” Eric droned robotically.

“It’s not even my best work.” Wendy bowed humbly.

“Smart and funny, we get it.”

Wendy just kind of chuckled, thrown off by the ‘smart’ comment that seemed irrelevant to their conversation.

“Whaaat?” He pronounced the word slowly, like he was asking a child.

Wendy’s brow furrowed as she tried to ignore the instinct to fire back at his tone. She stepped forward slightly. He leaned back a little, instinctually.

“I just wanted to make sure you were ok.” Wendy muttered quietly.

Cartman’s jaw tensed as he shifted off of his good leg for a second. “Yeah. I’m fine.” He promised, unconvincingly.

“Did you tell you mom?” Wendy whispered, checking over Cartman’s shoulder to see whether or not Liane was right behind him.

“Yeah. Yeah, I told her.” He mumbled towards the ground. “She didn’t really give a shit.” He shrugged sadly, brown eyes drifting up to hold Wendy’s in a magnetizing gaze.

“That’s her mother.” Wendy gasped, appalled, before she could stop herself.

“No anymore.” He droned. “She’d said her goodbyes the day she dropped Nana off at Hell's Pass.” Cartman explained flatly. After a beat of silence, he changed his demeanor and lightly
trilled, “You wanna come in?”

Wendy shrugged and nodded, stepping over the threshold into the Cartman house. If only 10 year old Wendy could see herself now. She’d beat the crap out of herself.

Eric got to work cleaning up slightly, picking up dirty plates and cups, wobbling his way to the kitchen to dispose of them.

“What were you watching?” Wendy pointed towards his TV, which had the DVD logo bouncing around on the screen.

“What? Nothing!” Cartman rushed back to the living room as fast as his little hobble could take him to snatch the remote out of Wendy’s hands.

She waited until he was right about to grab it before she yanked it away from him, raised her eyebrows, and pressed play.

“Ohh ya, sure. Freda, sure. Ah, she was the oldest livin’ Lutheran, now she’d dead as a doornail!”

Wendy snorted through her nose.

“What it’s a good movie! Sometimes ‘chick movies’ are good movies!” Cartman huffed defensively, still reaching for the remote as Wendy held it just out of his reach. She turned her amused, open mouthed stare back to the TV.

“Every year, every damn year I tell ‘em, ‘take down the Goddamn Freda sign, you lazy sons ‘a bitches!’”

“Wow.” Wendy gasped, jokingly.

“It’s a cult classic.” Eric insisted.

Wendy finally stopped reveling in the fact that Eric Cartman would own a DVD of Drop Dead Gorgeous, and turned to face him, handing over the remote. “No, this is actually one of my favorite movies. A little crude and outdated at points, but what do you expect from the early 2000s.” Wendy raised her eyebrows at him expectantly.

Eric glanced down at the remote in his hands to hide his amused expression, before smirking at Wendy out of the corner of his eye. “You wanna watch it?”

Wendy put on a big, dramatic show of thinking it over before finally shrugging and plopping herself down on the couch.

”Got nothing else to do today.” She grinned.

Wendy found herself in yet another situation, she never thought she’d be in: sitting on the couch in Eric Cartman’s house, watching a movie with him, and laughing at all the same jokes.

She even made popcorn for them in his kitchen (which did not go over well for her, inviting some very aggravating jokes on his part, and the return of the good old ‘kitchen wench’ nickname), and they even both quoted the iconic “most smartest” line, flawlessly, and in their best Minnesotan accents.
When the movie was finally over, an awkward silence fell between the two of them.

Eric popped the eject button on the remote and grabbed his crutch to stand up.

Wendy insisted she got it and shot herself off of the couch to go retrieve the disk from the player. She handed him the disk, clapping her hands behind her back and waiting awkwardly as she watched him secure it back into its case.

“I should probably go.” Wendy pointed vaguely towards the front door.

“Are you sure? We also got Miss Congeniality.” He offered with a cartoonish smile on his face.

“Which one?” She folded her arms with a smirk.

“Oh, we got all three.” He explained with raised eyebrows, which made Wendy laugh musically, “Liane loves her pageant movies.” Cartman rolled his eyes, lightheartedly.

“No, I’m… I think I’m all good on pageant movies for now.” Wendy chuckled.

She was about to turn and walk towards the door, when her feet moved without her permission, and sat her down on the couch next to Cartman again.

He cocked an eyebrow at her silently, a self-satisfied smirk spreading across his face as her expression warned him not to say a word.

“You know, I’m surprised you wanted to hang out with me after yesterday.” He mumbled, brushing some popcorn crumbs off his dinosaur pajamas before giving her a silent, apologetic look.

Wendy rolled her eyes, ‘Men’.

“Please, vulnerability is not a weakness, it’s a strength.” She explained, watching as Eric pulled a basket of DVD's out from under the coffee table.

Cartman nodded his head unconvincingly, but said nothing else.

Wendy rolled her eyes again.

“Oh, don’t be such a baby about it, it’s healthy.” Cartman ignored her as he sorted through the collection of disks. "You know, Stan never cried when he wanted to, and that actually irritated me way more than—"

“You’re comparing me to Stan?” Cartman smirked, leaning towards her slightly with his eyes narrowed impishly.

Wendy blinked, frozen.

"No... no, that's not what I meant, I just—"

Wendy was interrupted by Cartman's boisterous laugh. Wendy shoved him backwards lightly, which only made him laugh harder. “Better than the Great Boyfriend, Stan.” He mocked. He gasped excitedly as a look of fake realization flashed across his face, “Oh, fuuuun! Does that make me Wendy Testaburger’s next bitch?”

“Ugh.” Wendy rolled her eyes, disgusted and annoyed, and fed up with being teased like this.
“’Cause I’ll do it, I’ll do it, Wendy.” He twisted around in his seat to face her with a devilish glint in his eye, “I’ll go buy a little bark collar and a leash right now and get on my hands and knees.”

Ew. The vulgar way he spoke was revolting. It made Wendy’s hair stand on edge.

“You’re a pig.” She snapped at him, narrowing her eyes.

“That better be a joke about my personality.” He snarled playfully, leaning towards her in an intimidating manner. Wendy could see the expression in his eyes shift as he waited patiently for her to answer.

“It is.” She insisted, stiffly.

A part of Cartman looked genuinely relieved that Wendy wasn’t just about to make a fat joke.

“Good.” He grunted, distractedly. He seemed to be lost in his own thoughts as he stared at her closely.

“Cartman — Eric…” He seemed to sigh slightly at the sound of his name on her lips. Wendy looked back up at his softened eyes.

The next thing she knew Cartman had leaned forward and kissed her.

She didn’t even have time to form a reaction before he pushed himself away from her and scooted backwards towards the opposite end of the couch.

“Um.” He mumbled, wide eyed, expression frozen in as much shock as Wendy felt.

“What was…” Wendy’s voice trailed off, in shock.

“Um, haha,” He chuckled embarrassedly, face red.

Wendy blinked at him, unmoving. “I should go.” She shot up off of the couch.

“Yep! See ya!” He called stiffly, waving a hand and distracting himself with turning on the already on TV, refusing to look her in the eyes.

Wendy almost ran into Liane Cartman as she was coming in the door with shopping bags and groceries.

“Oh! Wendy! How are you?” Liane lilted sweetly.

“Sorry, gotta run, nice to see you Mrs. Cartman!” Wendy stumbled over the landing and cursed under her breath before smiling politely and slamming the Cartman’s front door.

Wendy stood on the other side for a second, while she gathered her thoughts.

“Eric, isn’t your little friend going to stay for lunch?” Wendy heard Liane murmur through the closed door.

“Nope!” He responded quickly, his voice a much higher pitch than usual.

Wendy chuckled, covering her mouth with her hand to hide the sound. When she pulled her hand away, her fingertips lingered against her lips, where Eric’s lips had just been. “No.” Wendy muttered, shaking her head back and forth in denial as she scolded herself in a whisper. “No
fucking way, Wendy Testaburger.”

Wendy jogged down the Cartman’s front steps and marched her way home.
Does it Still Hurt?

Chapter Summary

Kevin goes missing for a few days. It's less than his brother thinks, but it scares Shelly nonetheless when he shows up at her window again, drunk and shivering.

POV - Shelly

Kevin was supposed to go home.

He still hadn’t told her what was up with him when he showed up on Friday in the middle of the fucking night, nor how he managed to stay in her room undetected all weekend, without anybody noticing the full-sized man hiding out in Shelly’s room. He’d emerge from her closet, or from under the bed, to wrap her in his arms and whisper beautiful sins in her ear.

On Saturday night, he’d rummaged through her desk with little or no regard for her privacy. He said was looking for a cigarette. It still rubbed Shelly the wrong way.

By Sunday night, Shelly had had enough of sharing a twin bed.

“Go home, Kevin.” She’d folded her arms coldly, determined to sleep in her own bed by herself tonight.

But somehow, through promises of late night kisses and an amorous ache behind those sultry dark eyes, Kevin had managed to convince her to let him stay— with the condition that he leave first thing in the morning before school, of course.

And he had, sneaking out just before the sun rose, kissing her softly on her lips. So softly that she thought she was dreaming, and woke up a few seconds later to find her bed cold and empty, just the way she thought she’d wanted it.

She was both excited and disappointed to see him waving at her through her window when she came home from Anger Management later that night.

“Kevin! You nearly gave me a heart attack!” Shelly whispered, just loud enough for him to hear through the window.

"Hey, let me in.” He nodded towards the window.

Shelly closed her arms across her chest and scoffed at him, “What happened to going back home?”

Kevin closed his eyes and rested his forehead against his closed fist with a bang.

“Let me in, Shell.” He groaned in frustration.

“No.” Kevin stared daggers at her, but a wild tiger is never as intimidating behind its glass cage.
“Not until you tell me what gives you the right to be showing up at my house unannounced all the time? I'm not just here for a fuck and a warm bed whenever you need it, you know!”

“I'm not in the mood to play games.” Kevin threatened menacingly.

Shelly scoffed. “Clearly, you are. Showing up uninvited, demanding in let you in — which I don’t have to do, by the way!”

Kevin squeezed his eyes shut tightly. “C’mom, Shelly, I’m exhausted.” He begged her.

He looked horrible.

“…What’s going on?” Shelly asked, watching him carefully as his eyebrows pulled together in a pained expression.

Kevin grunted and slammed his fist against the side of the house, the heavy movement causing him to sway on his feet unsteadily.

Shelly took a step back from the window.

"Shelly!” He barked, muffled by the glass.

He repeatedly smacked his palm against the side of the house, heavier and angrier the longer she refused to let him in.

"What's going on with you?” She whispered in a loud hiss. “You… don’t seem ok…”

Kevin just groaned impatiently in response. His eyelids were heavy, and his eyes were unfocused. It had only been a few hours, and he couldn't hold it together for a few hours?

“…Are you shithfaced?”

“‘Are you shithfaced?'” Kevin mocked her in a cruel, high-pitched lisp, and look of instant regret washed over his face.

“Oh no, Shelly, I’m sorry,” he apologized desperately. “Marsh, please, I’m sorry!”

he begged, as Shelly began shaking her head back and forth, and backing away from the window, “I don’t have anywhere else to go!” He cried out desperately.

“Go home,” Shelly folded her arms and tried not to feel hurt.

“I… can’t” Kevin pounded his fist weakly against the side of the house for emphasis. A single tear ran down his cheek.

“Why?” Shelly demanded. Her eyes popped open widely as she heard footsteps coming down the hall. “Someone’s coming!”

Moments later, Stan barged quietly into her room. “Shelly, either let Kevin in, or tell him to leave, because he’s gonna wake up the whole house.” He reasoned.

“Stop eavesdropping, turd!” Shelly yelled in a whisper, throwing her pillow at Stan, who ducked. From a fucking pillow. Turd…

“I’m not eavesdropping, my window is right next to yours, damn…” He shot back defensively, weakly, like a fucking pussy. Shelly lunged towards him and he immediately ran back to his room, she didn’t even have to chase him back in there. Yep, definitely a fucking pussy.
When Shelly turned back to the window, Kevin was gone.

“I need to talk to you.”

Shelly peeked out from behind her open locker with a thoroughly baffled look on her face. She looked around confusedly to see if anybody was about to prank her or something. “Ok…”

“Have you seen Kevin? Is he still staying with you?” The middle McCormick asked quietly.

Shelly scoffed and sputtered, covering the noise with the sound of her closing locker, “Wh— me? Stay with me? That’s— When?”

Kenny ran out of patience and cut her off, “Cut the shit, I know he was with you, Stan told me.”

“That prick…” Shelly growled under her breath.

“I need to know, have you seen him?” Kenny raised his eyebrows concernedly. It suddenly made Shelly very nervous.

“No, I… told him to go home… he hasn’t been home?” She gripped her textbook a little tighter.

“When was that?” Kenny muttered low under his breath, jaw clenched in a way that reminded Shelly so much of his brother.

“Um… last week, last… Monday,” Shelly admitted reluctantly.

“Shit.” Kenny hissed.

“Why? When was the last time you’ve seen him?”

“Not since his Birthday.” Kenny whispered, terrified.

Oh shit, Shelly had completely forgotten that it was Kevin’s Birthday when he’d shown up at her window, sad and shivering like an abandoned puppy. She hadn’t wished him Happy Birthday or even acknowledged it at all that weekend…

Shelly tried to ignore the sick feeling beginning to stew in her stomach. “I’m sure he’s fine,” she dismissed, “I’m sure somebody’s seen him—”

“Not Skeeter, not anybody at the bar, not even the Tuckers.” Kenny’s eyes widened. “I even called the county jail, he wasn’t even picked up or anything.”

“Does… does he do this a lot?” Shelly asked, feeling strangely guilty at how little she really knew Kevin anymore, up until a few weeks ago.

“No.” Kenny shook his head. The first bell rang. Students were shuffling by in a hurry trying to get to their classes, but Shelly stayed planted firmly by her locker.

“Are your parents worried?” Shelly felt like this was a childish question.

“My parents don’t notice shit.” Kenny ran a hand through his hair, visibly stressed. “I’m just worried that… I’m sure I’m overreacting… Last time he ended up being fine…”

“He came back last night and said he couldn’t go home…” Shelly admitted, she felt her heart
pound in her chest as she said the words out loud. Kenny sighed in relief.

“Ok, well that’s not too bad…”

“But he was completely fucked up, so I turned him away…”

"Ok, well that's a little worse…"

“What happened last time?” Shelly wondered, completely ignoring the odd looks she was getting for talking so casually with Middle McCormick in the school hallways.

“It was after another massive fight with my dad — just like the other day — only the first time was right after he’d dropped out of high school… anyway, we couldn’t find him for five days, nobody could.”

“Wait, he fought with your dad?” Shelly heard the second bell rang, but she couldn’t give a shit if she was late to class at this point.

“Yeah, on his Birthday. He didn’t tell you?” Kenny wrinkled his eyebrows surprisingly. Shelly’s stomached turned at the mention of Kevin’s birthday again.

“No.” Shelly admitted, trying to remember if there were any signs she hadn’t picked up on… the bruise…

Kenny nodded his head absently. “Well, if you see him, let me know?” Shelly didn’t answer, still preoccupied with her thoughts, so he took that as a yes, and started walking to class.

“Where was he?” Shelly called at his back. “The last time?”

Kenny sighed and turned around.

“He was sleeping in his car.”

Another night went by, another morning where Shelly had woken up wishing Kevin would show up, just so she would know he was ok.

Wednesday night, she got her wish.

Shelly woke up to a faint tapping on her window. Repetitive, unrelenting.

Shelly walked over to her window to find Kevin, leaning against the side of the house, eyes closed, mouth agape, tapping on the window over and over again.

He looked cold.

Shelly immediately began taking off the window screen, guilt and panic wracking her bones and making her tremble as she fumbled unsuccessfully with the metal latches.

Kevin sighed deeply in gratitude and muttered her name in a quiet plea, so quiet she could swear he was only mouthing it, tracing the shape of her name with his lips.

“Shelly… Shelly please.”

Shelly helped pull him through the window. She didn’t fail to notice his car parked neatly out
front of the house this time.

The smell of liquor, sweat, and lingering vomit filled her room instantly.

Kevin stood in front of her and smiled down at her, swaying on his feet.

She ran a hand through his hair and it felt greasy and dirty.

Kevin brushed a hand against Shelly’s cheek, his eyes drifting closed the minute he felt her warm skin against his freezing cold fingertips.

“Um. Thanks. I guess. F’r letting me in.” He whispered, in a voice gravely with disuse.

“Eventually.” He chuckled, leaning towards her. He smelled foul. His eyes were bloodshot, and he looked like he hadn’t slept well in days.

Shelly placed a finger in front of his mouth and leaned away from him.

“Come with me.”

Shelly turned on her heels and led Kevin into the bathroom. She turned on the shower, practically shoving him inside while the water was still cold, hoping the jolt would sober him up, and not make him sicker.

“You coming in with me, Marsh?” Kevin slurred slyly, still managing to be halfway charming through his hair smelling like puke.

Shelly shook her head negatively. She took a step away from the tub and pointed out the towels on the rack for him.

She felt the air shift as her hand hit the doorknob.

“Stay here?” He mumbled, grabbing her hand as she turned to leave. He looked small; there were those hurt and sad eyes she’d come to know growing up, before they’d become rigid in a hard shell of self-arrogance and protective carelessness. He stood naked, one foot out of the tub, dripping on the tiles of the bathroom floor and trembling. He lowered his gaze and dropped her wrist, waiting for her to reject him.

Well… she can’t have him falling asleep and cracking his head open.

Shelly sighed and sat down on the toilet, “Ok,” she whispered gently, watching his face light up behind an unchanging expression, “I’ll stay here.”

Shelly talked to Kevin about ridiculous things like the weather or the newest episode of tv shows he watches, just to keep him conscious while he was in there.

He stepped out and Shelly handed him a pair of her baggiest sweatpants. The steam from the shower seemed to radiate off of his skin, and she couldn’t help but trace her fingers along his forearms as he stood in front of her. She handed him mouthwash and he did his best, gagging a little bit as he accidentally swallowed some of it. She brushed his knotted hair herself as he stood with a towel wrapped tightly around his shoulders, eyes fluttering and trying not to fall asleep under her touch. Shelly looked at his pale form through the mirror.

There he was: the great Kevin McCormick, reduced to dark circles and slumped shoulders.

He stood there swaying on his feet, waiting for something. Shelly didn’t know what. She turned
around and led the way out of the bathroom to toss his clothes in her hamper, and Kevin trailed closely behind.

He stood at the edge of her bed, looking lost. Shelly walked over and stood in front of him, brushing hair off of his forehead, affectionately.

Kevin kept his eyes locked with hers as he slowly sunk down onto the edge of the bed. Shelly stared at him curiously as he dropped his gaze, pulling her closer, burying his face in her chest and snaking his arms up around her back like a strong vine grows dependently around a weakening tree.

Shelly stood there, feeling him breathe, one hand laid absently against his arm, and one laying limply at her side. She could feel his hands ball into fists around her t-shirt.

“McCormick?” She whispered carefully. Kevin nuzzled his forehead against her sternum and held his breath. “Where did you go?” She could feel his chest cave in as the breath left him.

“Just be here, Shelly.” He croaked, his mouth was warm against the cotton fabric on her chest. He sighed to steady his voice. “I…… just…” Whatever he was trying to say, his voice trailed off into silence.

“It’s ok.” Shelly promised vaguely, tilting her head to kiss and stroke his wet hair. “It’s ok.” Kevin held onto her tighter and pulled her onto the bed with him, not letting go even as he pulled her comforter up over his shoulders.

Shelly drifted off to sleep in Kevin's arms, the smell of her soap sweet and soft against his skin.
Kevin woke up and he felt like he had been hit by a truck.

His entire body ached, and his still-damp hair clung to the side of his face as he peeled himself off of the pillow.

The light streaming in through the cracks in Shelly’s blinds stung his eyes and he squeezed them shut before rolling over onto his other side, and draping his arm over Shelly.

Or at least, where Shelly should have been.

Kevin’s eyes shot open and he realized he was alone in her bed.

He sat up quickly, only to find Shelly sat at her desk with her feet propped up on the edge, quietly reading a book. Kevin kind of sighed, and fell back against her pillow, rubbing his head. Shelly’s eyes flicked up from her book.

“What time is it?” Kevin groaned dazedly.

“3:45. Pm.” Shelly answered matter-of-factly, setting aside her paperback copy of ‘Jaws’ and smirking at him reservedly. “You slept well.” She chimed cheerily, full on snickering at him now.

“Ohyeahuwuuh,” Kevin made an unintelligible string of sounds that somewhat resembled ‘yeah’, with a sarcastic swallow in his voice.

“You were still asleep when I got home from school, so I thought it was best not to disturb you,” she explained, swinging her legs off of the edge of her desk and walking over to the bed to sit on the edge near his feet. “How are you feeling?” She asked him carefully, only looking up at him once she’d finished asking.

“Can I get some water?” Kevin rasped, hoping to distract her enough that he didn’t have to talk about how he was feeling.

Shelly pointed to the nightstand, where a full glass of water was already waiting for him, no longer dripping with condensation, despite the coaster underneath it being soaking wet.

“Ohhoho, Shelly, Shelly Marsh you are the best!” Kevin exclaimed loudly, rearing his head back in excitement (despite her requests for him to keep it down), before grabbing a hold of the room temperature water and chugging it down greedily.

Kevin froze, a gulp of water still stored in his cheeks as he noticed Shelly still watching him expectantly from the corner of his eye. Kevin swallowed the water and continued to stare at her, sideways. She shifted uncomfortably under is unmoving gaze, but she otherwise kept his attention, refusing to back down. He raised his eyebrows confusedly at her and placed the empty cup back against the cork coaster with a thud.
“I haven’t slept that good in days,” Kevin admitted quietly as he leant back against the headboard.

“Yeah, you hadn’t showered that well, either, it seems,” Shelly snarked with a sideways grin. Kevin chuckled in admission, and nodded his head concedingly.

Shelly watched him steadily, concern etched on the surface of her face, sinking deeper and deeper into her features until it settled there like a dark and looming shadow. Kevin swallowed thickly and ran his hands through his hair as he sighed.

“I’m gonna go home.” He announced quietly, “tonight.”

“Good.” Shelly chirped. She leant against the footboard and crossed her arms, with her legs stretched out in front of her. She sized him up again, silently.

The silence began throbbing in Kevin’s ears like a vacuum, until Shelly finally spoke up again.

"Happy Birthday, by the way... from last-last weekend... I kinda forgot..." Shelly admitted flatly. The mention of his birthday made Kevin's stomach lurch, and for a split second, he was worried he may get sick. Instead he squeezed his eyes shut and took a deep breath.

"Thanks." He nodded with insincerity. Shelly rubbed a hand over the Kevin-shaped lump near the foot of the bed. After a few seconds of silence, she spoke again, without looking him in the eyes.

"Did you at least leave the heat on?” She pressed meekly. Kevin didn’t say anything, didn’t move, didn’t even flinch. “In the car?” She clarified, looking up at him pointedly.

Kevin sucked in air through his teeth before dropping his gaze pathetically to his hands. “How did you know?” He whispered ponderously.

“Kenny.” Shelly stated plainly.

“I’m surprised he cared.” Kevin drawled with a light scoff.

“You’re surprised people care about you? Your family?” Shelly snapped at him. Words she was on the verge of saying stopped like a choke in her throat before she shook her head and gently whispered, “Me?” Kevin felt a hollowness carving its way through his chest.

“You can’t leave the keys in the ignition, you’ll burn out the battery, otherwise you’re wasting gas.” He explained unceremoniously.

Shelly narrowed her eyes at him, quickly losing patience. “You sound like shit.” She announced matter-of-factly, referring to the heavy rasp in Kevin’s sore throat. Kevin shrugged noncommittally, resisting the urge to cough, thus illustrating her point. “What did you do all day?” She worried.

“Mostly tried to sleep, never really succeeded.” He answered honestly, deciding there was really no reason to lie at this point. Kevin looked calmly at Shelly’s suspicious expression, before admitting in a small and rushed voice, “All the booze and weed in the world couldn’t make my backseat more comfortable than your bed.” Then, even softer, “Your arms…”

Shelly’s eyebrows knit together as she pursed her lips, unconvinced. Kevin crawled his way to the foot of the bed to lay next to Shelly, on his side, looking up at her. He lay still and silent as she traced a light touch over his bare shoulder — caked in dry sweat and grime from a feverishly good
Kevin dropped his forehead against his fists. Propped up on his elbows, he wrung his hands until his knuckles ached, before rasping out a shakily whispered admission, “I’m too old for this shit, I know. Running away, I mean… it’s stupid” Kevin shook his head back and forth before looking up at Shelly apologetically “it’s cowardly,” Shelly’s expression began to soften, as Kevin mumbled his meager apology, “I admit it…”

Shelly bit her cheek, “You forgot ‘childish’, and ‘selfish’ too.” She snarled, half-heartedly. Kevin nodded his head in agreement.

Shelly stilled for a moment, emotion laying dormant in her system until it seemed like she could no longer keep it inside, and tears filled up behind her stony expression. Kevin felt a hollow pounding in his chest as he watched her grow more and more upset.

“I’m tired of saying it.” She breathed exhaustedly — warningly — tears spilling onto her cheeks as she clenched her teeth. Kevin exhaled through his nose, eyes falling. Shelly tangled her fingers in his hair and locked eyes with Kevin pleadingly. “Don’t disappear again,” she begged with restrained agitation, before tears doused her fiery expression and she whispered with a quivering lip, “Please.”

“Fuck.” Kevin cursed under his breath, scrambling to sit up and collect Shelly in his arms. She placed both palms flat against his shoulder blades and buried her face in his collarbone, breathing steadily. Shelly always hated to let people see her cry. “I won’t, I’m sorry.” Kevin whispered against her hair as he tightened his grip, mostly to keep Shelly pressed up against him so that she wouldn’t see the guilty tears welling behind his own eyes. He squeezed them shut tightly, and relaxed against her, as she held him safely, wondering why the fuck he ever left her arms in the first place. “I won’t, Marsh, I promise.” He mumbled, before pulling back and looking at her — makeup smudged after a long day at school, sensitive cheeks already blotchy from tears, and a sad expression stitched between her dark eyebrows. She was beautiful — the same old Shelly Marsh.

She sank against him and laid her head upon his shoulder, draping an arm around his waist and squeezing him tightly. Kevin held her closely and listened to her even breath as it blew across his chest. Kevin closed his eyes again and rested his lips against the top of her head as he held her. “Marry me.” He whispered against her hair.

“What?” Shelly jumped up, straightening her back rigidly as both of her palms slammed flat against her mattress with a thud. Kevin sunk down against the mattress until he lay flat on his stomach next to her (the closest thing he could get to being on his knees while the two of them were still in bed) and looked up at her. He wrapped an arm around her waist tenderly and held her.

“Marry me, Shelly.” Kevin repeated, seriously, staring her straight in her wide eyes with a smolderingly intrusive glare.

He watched her sputter and stammer with a look of appalled horror on her pale cheeks, until Kevin could no longer keep a straight face.

He burst out laughing, burying his face in her stomach as he cackled loudly, the sound muffled by her cotton t-shirt.

“Oh… You asshole.” Shelly smacked him against his bare shoulder with a thud, which only made Kevin laugh louder. “God, you scared me,” she sighed in relief. Kevin rolled over onto his back, cackling wildly into his palms as Shelly sank against the footboard, leaning her head against the
edge and laughing relievedly, “wow, my heart is beating so fast.” She breathed heavily, chuckling, with her hand pressed against her chest.

“You’re laughing, though,” he pointed out with a grin.

“Yeah, but I nearly had a heart attack, McCormick!” She scolded, panting and chuckling. Kevin burst out laughing again.

Kevin rolled over to face her. “Oh, the look on your face, Marsh, it was priceless.” Shelly shoved him lightly. She fell silent as his laughter died down.

“I’m never getting married.” She muttered under her breath, lost in thought, eyes locked on nothing in particular.

Kevin got up on his knees next to her, hovering just high enough over Shelly, lips inches from hers and eyes locked on hers steadily. Kevin brushed his fingertips underneath her chin, and lowered his face to hers, kissing her with slow intensity.

Kevin pulled back just slightly, looking down at at her with a steely and unmoving expression, as he muttered definitively:

“I won’t either, then.”

When Kevin had walked through his front door hours later, it was not good.

As soon as Kevin walked through the door, everybody fell silent. Kenny nudged his mother — who was still stirring something on the stove — and nodded towards Kevin as he finished setting the table (fucking golden child that he was), then sank obediently into a chair.

“Where the fuck have you been?” Carol snapped at him, turning the heat off of the pasta sauce and leaving it simmering on the stove. She wiped her hands on a dish towel and perched her hands against her hips expectantly.

Kevin just looked around the room dumbly.

“Out.” He finally grunted.

“Where?” Karen drawled with attitude from her seated position at the dinner table. Kevin shot her a wide eyed glare, but he knew he couldn’t scare her, anymore.

“None of your fucking business.” He spat, as Karen continued to stare him down.

“Then you will answer me, because it is mine. Where?” Carol demanded firmly.

“Just… at a friend’s.” Kevin mumbled quietly, annoyed with himself that it came out as less of a shrug and more of a whine.

His family looked at him silently, disbelievingly.

Kevin gave them a stiff wave and a gigantic eyeroll and began stomping his way to his room with a leisurely stroll.

He heard a chair scraping from the kitchen as somebody got up to follow him.
“Hey.” Kenny hissed, jogging up in front of him and blocking his way in the hallway. “What the fuck is wrong with you?” He whispered hastily.

“Where do I start?” Kevin answered sarcastically, irritated.

“Shelly said you weren’t with her this whole time is that true?” Kenny mumbled, checking over Kevin’s shoulder to see if anybody had followed him.

“Why do you care?” Kevin sighed, annoyedly.

“Because we didn’t know where you were—!”

“10 bucks says Mom didn’t even notice until you told her.” Kevin hissed under his breath. The look on Kenny’s face told him he was right. Kevin raised his eyebrows at his brother.

“Ok.” Kenny admitted, reluctantly. “But they noticed you weren’t here, they just didn’t realize it was… consecutive.”


“Is that what this is about?” Kenny chuckled with cruel amusement. “Running away to get ‘Mommy’ and ‘Daddy’s’ attention?”

“No.” Kevin protested through clenched teeth.

“You’re 21 years old, man, grow up — happy birthday by the way, since I haven’t seen you in two weeks.” Kenny smiled sarcastically.

“Fuck you, dude.” Kevin shoved past Kenny.

“Fuck you!” Kenny screeched, teenage voice cracking. “Hey!” He barked, ducking away from Kevin and jumping in front of the doorway, blocking it with his tiny body.

“Move.” Kevin drawled, threateningly.

“What happened, dude?” Kenny’s eyebrows knit together, worriedly. Everybody was always so fucking worried about him lately… Kevin’s jaw tensed as he stared down at Kenny warningly. He tried to step passed him, but Kenny’s arms shot out, blocking the doorway. “Just…” Kevin waited with apathetic patience as Kenny’s voice trailed off. He finally settled on a quiet plea, “come eat dinner with us, Mom was worried sick.”

“Doubt it.” Kevin grunted, before physically picking Kenny up by his skinny arms and placing him outside the door.

“Hey!” Kenny protested, right as Kevin slammed the door in his face.

All hell broke loose when Stuart came home from Skeeter’s.

It was about 2 am.

Kevin heard light mumbling coming from his parents’ bedroom, and then shouting, and then stomping footsteps echoing down the hall.

His bedroom door flew open with a bang.
“So the spoiled brat has finally come home, huh?” Stuart slurred from the doorway. “Where do you get off?” He hissed through his teeth.

Kevin shrugged.

Stuart flew in the room towards Kevin’s bed, and grabbed him, pulling him out of bed and dragging down the hall by his hair with incredible strength, despite Kevin’s protests and meager attempts to defend himself.

Stuart threw him down onto the carpet in the living room and bellowed “Explain yourself!”

Kevin’s hand flew up to the back of his head, which felt sore and tender, cursing the sting of tears behind his eyes that he tried to convince himself was a physical reaction, and nothing more. It was then that he noticed his mother had made her way out into the hall, and was watching from a distance tearfully.

Stuart sunk to his knees, red face shaking and inches from Kevin’s, his trembling hands hovering over his son’s face and neck threateningly. Stuart finally sighed concededly and lowered his hands, breathing heavily out of his nose like an enraged bull. He shot up to his feet quickly and began pacing around in a small circle, breathing wildly and running his hands over his face in exhaustion.

“You are not a child anymore, police can’t come to collect you and bring you to my door like a stray dog no more, you need to grow the fuck up.” Yeah right, because Kevin had the most ‘grown up’ role models of all time. His parents acted like fucking teenagers...

Stuart’s lips pressed together tightly before he finally took a shallow breath and exhaled thinly. “I’m sick of looking at you, after what you pulled, and you will not do it a third time,” Stuart mumbled under his breath, refusing to look at Kevin as he stalked around in a small circle, “If you want to live on the street that’s fine!” he drawled angrily, voice heavy with sarcasm. Stuart stopped pacing and turned to growl at his son with a venomous glare behind his eyes, “But you will not put us through it.” Kevin backed away from his father like a scared little boy as the older man rushed forward to howl in his son’s face, "You choose to get the fuck out again, then you NEVER COME BACK—!

“STUART NO!” Carol shrieked. Stuart whipped around in surprise, as his wife stepped forward, glaring at him down from her nose.

“What?” He barked at her challengingly.

She stepped forward again, eye to eye with her husband, and declared boldly, with a steady voice, “You do not get to tell my son that he has no home!”

Carol stared down at him fiercely, tears welling in her eyes, though she stood solid and strong in front of him.

Stuart sighed regretfully and looked between his wife and his son with an apologetic expression. Eventually he just waved his hand dismissively and stormed his way back to his bedroom, past his other two kids, who were loitering in the hallway to watch the show. They all jumped as the door slammed behind Stuart.

Kevin looked up at his mother to thank her, and his gratitude was met with cold stoicism.

Carol stood above Kevin, arms folded, watching him silently. She waited patiently as he sat unmoving from where he’d been thrown on the floor.
Kevin reluctantly stood to face her.

“Sit.” She demanded before his spine could stretch to full height.

Kevin sunk onto the couch without protest.

Carol walked around the sofa to stand in front of her son, towering over him with her arms crossed.

“So… where ya been?” She asked, calmer now. It reminded Kevin of the “good cop”, now cocky, and convinced that the perp will talk after “bad cop’s” interrogation. It irritated him and got under his skin… at least it did, at first, until he heard his mother beg exhaustedly, “Kevin…” her voice and expression completely drained.

“…with Shelly.” He confirmed. Carol remained unsurprised.

“And then?” She tipped her chin up and waited for the response.

Kevin looked past his mom’s shoulder towards Kenny, whose expression remained blank as he and Karen unashamedly looked on.

“Nowhere.” Kevin answered honestly.

Carol slapped him so quickly across the face that he barely registered the movement before he felt the sharp sting spread across his cheek. Kevin squeezed the couch cushions underneath his palms, blinking away shallow tears behind shocked eyes.

“Don’t ever again.” She scolded him roughly, before storming off to her bedroom, where the door closed softly behind her.

When Kevin finally had the guts to look over his shoulder, his siblings had vanished from the hallway.

About an hour later, Kevin was sulking in his room, having downed more than a couple of shots worth of those easy-to-steal mini-bar bottles that he sometimes lifted from grocery stores for the fuck of it, and he was growing more and more angry as he sat in the darkness and let it envelop him.

Who the fuck does Kenny think he is?

First he snitches to Shelly (which was fucking embarrassing), and then to their parents?

Fuck him!

Right?

Right.

Kevin stormed his way into Kenny’s room to tell him off.

He flung open the door and walked across the dark room.

Kevin sat on the edge of Kenny’s bed and shook him awake.
Kenny gasped like he had just resurfaced from drowning, and jumped like he’d been jolted back to life from an electric shock.

“What the fuck?” He mumbled in a shaky voice.

“Don’t ever rat on me again.” Kevin explained, before dumping a nearby cup of water onto Kenny’s head, listening to him sputter and choke on the frigid cold liquid as Kevin stormed back to his room, feeling even worse than before — his guilty conscious replaying Shelly’s words on repeat like a never-ending eternal punishment in his own personal Hell: “you’re surprised people care about you? Your family?” Kevin slammed his fist against the wall and slid down it collapsing into a heap on his floor as Shelly’s voice echoed in his head: “Me?”
This one took a VERY long time to figure out, and I organized and reorganized the events a million times. Many white board markers were used lol I finally settled on a duo-POV, switching back and forth between Wendy and Cartman as needed.

I decided to add the dates in there to define the passing of time, because I really felt like this unofficial-fwb-relationship that they have going on couldn't happen overnight, and it needed to go through various stages before the end of the chapter, so it takes place over the course of two weeks, I hope that makes sense.

It's really like a bunch of chapters rolled into one, so settle in with a snack or a drink, this is gonna be a long one.

ALSO --
Why do I get so wrapped up in Nana's storyline? I don't know, but I think it's partly to honor my grandmother, and the lost love she never got to have with a man she met before my grandfather. Nana's memories are going to play a big role in bringing Eric and his mother back together again, and I just felt like she could do the same with Wendy as well. Idk, I think it's sweet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
When she’d finally gotten home and quarantined herself in the safety of her bedroom alone, she’d just burst out laughing at the sheer absurdity of it all. It felt like she’d been laughing for hours when Wendy finally realized that she just didn't find it all that funny anymore.

She decided she would blame her reaction on biology; it wasn’t that the thought of Eric Cartman — presumptuous-dickhead-extraordinaire — that made her head swim when she thought about the primal desperation etched between the lines of his starved lips; it was just a boy who had caught her off guard, and that was what had flustered her.

Either way, Wendy thought it best to steer clear of Eric Cartman for a while.

She’d planned on ignoring his calls, but he never called her.

She planned on avoiding him in the halls at school on Monday, but he took off hobbling away as fast as he could the minute she rounded the corner.

By lunch time, Wendy had begun to grow annoyed, and by the end of the day, she felt entitled to some answers.

That’s why when she couldn’t even find him by his locker by the end of the school day, she drove straight to his house and marched right up to his front door.

Her fury was cut short when nobody answered the door, and there was no car in the driveway.

By the time the Cartman's car had rolled up a few hours later, a lot of the fire had been drained from Wendy's system, along with a lot of her energy, too.

"Wendy! Hi," Liane lilted as she helped guide her son out of the car. She seemed not to notice the way he batted her hands away, refusing her help, rudely. He was such an asshole...

"Hi Mrs. Cartman," Wendy greeted politely, holding her hand above her eyes as she squinted into the setting sun.

"Eric, I wish you would have told me your little friend was coming over, I would have stayed home," Liane scolded, in the most mildly passive aggressive apology ever.

"Oh, I'm not staying," Wendy explained awkwardly, ignoring Cartman's dramatic eye roll, "I just had to talk to Cart — I mean, Eric, about something. School. A school thing." She lied. "It's due tomorrow..."

"Oh, well you are welcome to stay if you'd like. She's welcome, right Eric?" Liane checked her watch and opened the car door again.

"I guess." Cartman gestured like the outcome was out of his hands, whether he agreed or not. Wendy glared at him subtly. He glared right back. Liane was oblivious.

"Ok, well, have fun kids. See you later, Eric."

"Bye," He waved her off as she drove away.

Cartman limped across the street to meet Wendy on the sidewalk in front of his house.

“Kitchen Wench.” He greeted with mock politeness as he bowed his head with a grandiose hand gesture.
Wendy cut right to the chase, “Why have you been avoiding me?” She questioned sternly, crossing her arms and narrowing her eyes.

“Oh. So you think my whole world revolves around you?” Cartman jeered at her with a cruel laugh, matching her body language to a T. It made Wendy’s blood boil.

“Don’t Gaslight me,” Cartman laughed in denial at Wendy’s astute accusation, "I saw you hobbling off down the hall after third period—"

“Well, why do you care, huh?” He drawled lazily, uncrossing his arms and putting more weight back on his crutch. “You want me to talk about it? Sit in a fucking hippie circle and talk about our feelings, huh, is that what you wanna do—?”

“Don’t be a dick.” Wendy spat at him.

“I'm being a dick?!” Cartman gestured towards himself in surprise, “I didn’t show up at your house in the mood for a fight—”

“This isn’t a fight—”

“What is it?” Wendy stared back at his hardened expression and tried not to let him intimidate her.

“A discussion.” She retorted, with a little less bite than she wished she’d had.

Eric's eyes flashed with regret over his otherwise stilled expression, just for a second, before he continued with his exhausting confrontation.

“So I kissed you, so what? You want a fucking promise ring?” He snarled.

Wendy was taken aback by his hostility.

“Why are you doing this?” She whispered in a hiss, defensively matching his energy.

“Why. Did you come here?” He interrogated through gritted teeth, his voice breaking slightly at the end.

Wendy stared back at his furrowed brows and clenched jaw with hurt, confusion, and a little bit of pity.

“I just wanted to talk… Never mind…” Wendy spun around and took a step away from him.

“No — Wendy,” Cartman sighed regretfully and reached forward to grab hold of her wrist.

She was about to whip around and demand he get his hands off of her when she heard him whisper an apology so quietly, he may as well have been completely silent.

“I’m sorry.” He repeated, a little bit louder, but just a little bit.

Wendy snatched her hand out of his grip and straightened her posture.

She pursued her lips as she considered walking away, letting it go, and never bothering to bring this up to Eric Cartman ever again.

Instead, she sighed and gestured half-heartedly towards her car.
“Wanna go for a drive?”

Wendy was now driving, with no particular destination in mind. Cartman didn’t seem to mind, busying himself by looking around in the cupholders and sunglass holders of the car, nosily.

“No way, you have CDs!” Cartman laughed loudly over the sound of the wind whipping through the open windows.

Wendy shrugged a little defensively, “Yeah, sometimes I get them as gifts and my car is the only place that has a player so…”

“‘Why do we… crucify ourselves?’” Cartman sang in a ridiculously nasal voice, holding up Tori Amos’ *Little Earthquakes* album.

“Give me that.” Wendy reached for the CD, trying to hide her amused smile.

“No, dude, we’re going to listen to this.” Cartman mumbled, loading the CD into the player.

Wendy looked over at him — chuckling with quiet amusement to himself as he put the empty CD case back in its place.

Wendy squinted into the setting sun and tucked her wind-whipped hair behind her ear.

“Never would have pegged you for a Tori Amos fan.” She announced in his general direction.

“Well, I wouldn’t consider myself a fanatic, but I enjoy it…”

Wendy could see him distractedly drumming his fingers against his knee out of the corner of her eye.

Cartman turned towards her, smiling lightheartedly.

“Where we going?”

She caught his eyes for just a second, caught the fear behind his smirk, but just for a second.

Wendy stiffly turned her attention back to the road and nodded towards the slowly approaching diner.

“Hungry?”

The waiter left after taking their orders, leaving the two teens to sit in awkward silence.

“Third date!” Cartman announced boisterously, raising his glass as if for a toast.

“Not a date,” Wendy mumbled flatly. “And technically it’s four,” Wendy looked above her eyebrows at Cartman's pleasantly surprised smirk and shrugged, “if you count the movie.”

“Four, then.” He chuckled softly, smirk spreading into a genuine smile for just a second. He took a sip of his drink and folded his hands on the table. “Is this the part where you grill me?”

Wendy groaned exhaustedly. “Nobody is grilling you! You know, you are making this so much
bigger of a deal than it actually is—"

“Good then let’s drop it—”

“I’m not the one who brought it up again.”

“Ok then we’ll drop it.”

“Ok.”

“Good.”

"Good."

Just then the bell under the door dinged and Wendy saw a horrible sight: Heidi, smiling with wicked amazement, and walking over towards their table.

“Fuck.” Wendy hissed under her breath.

“What?” Cartman struggled to look over his shoulder with his leg still propped up on Wendy’s side of the booth.

“Heidi, hi!” Wendy greeted with as much sincerity as a plastic fork.

"Wendy... Cartman.” Cartman waved curtly with one hand at Heidi's smug greeting. She looked between the two teens amusedly. “So is this like a date, or—”

Wendy cut Heidi off with an uncontrollable bout of hyena laughter that didn't even feel like it was coming from inside her. Heidi laughed along with her, a cruel expression of relief obvious on her face as she and Wendy exchanged unspoken dialogue about this embarrassing misunderstanding. Cartman raised his eyebrows and muttered, 'okay...', before leaning back against his booth and waiting out the chatter.

Once she had stopped stalling long enough to formulate a believable response, Wendy cleared her throat and actually answered Heidi.

“Uh, nope! Just... ran into teach other and didn’t wanna eat alone, right Cartman?”

Wendy glanced at Eric, who looked like someone had just punched him hard in the stomach. His tongue darted out from his lips as he shook his head and looked down at his hands.

“Yeah, sure.” He muttered unconvincingly, hurt apparent in his voice and on his face. He wouldn't meet Wendy's panicked and pleading eyes. And Heidi could see right through it.

“Wow.” Heidi grinned stiffly, cocking her head to the side before folding her arms and leaning in towards Wendy. “Cartman? Really?” She muttered under her breath, like Cartman couldn't hear the cruel tone of distaste in her voice as she uttered his name. He flipped her off casually and she shot him an apologetic smile that was as fake as her tan. She turned her attention back to Wendy with artificial concern painted on her face, "Do you really think this is the best way to get back at Stan?” The hiss behind Heidi’s cheery words hit Wendy like a brick. She wanted to respond, but she could only sit there, stammering, mortified and defeated.

“Well, I’ll see you later Wendy!” Wendy glared back up at Heidi's entertained expression, which she then turned to the boy on her left. “Bye, Cartman.”

Cartman gave sort of a half smile in Heidi’s direction, not even bothering to look her in the eyes.
Cartman rolled his eyes and addressed Wendy half-heartedly.

“You can't listen to Heidi, she’s a bitch.”

Wendy got up out of her seat in a movement so quick that is startled Cartman. She stared down at him pointedly as she snatched up her purse, shoved past him and kept walking out of the restaurant doors.

“Wait what the f— we’ll be right back, don’t cancel our orders — Wendy!”

Wendy stood with her back to the entrance of the diner. She was hoping he’d just stay put and wait for his fucking salad but she heard his heavy steps and uneven huffing catch up to her, unfortunately.

She'd stormed off by a few feet when she heard his crutched gait finally make its way out the door. She still had her back turned to him when she shouted at him.

“Why. Why! Why do you always have to ruin everything?!”

She turned around to see Cartman frozen in confusion. “I… don’t mean to ruin everything, I—”

“Then why. Do you?” Wendy asked through grit teeth, tears beginning to pool in her eyes.

Cartman's mouth dropped open in horrified bafflement. “I don’t know. I... I didn’t mean to… what did I even—?”

"You couldn't be more convincing than that?" Wendy snapped. A look of realization crossed Cartman's face, followed closely by defense.

"What?" He almost laughed.

"You know Heidi," Wendy snarled (he should know her, he only dated her for an entire year in 8th grade), "she'll use anything to start a rumor, she's a fucking gossip, she'll tell the whole school—!"

"Why would that be so terrible?" Cartman challenged her, already visibly formulating her hurtful response in his head.

Wendy stepped closer and looked him directly in the eyes. “Did you even stop to think about how Stan would feel?” She whispered tearfully. She was feeling guilty and disgusted with herself as Heidi’s words rang in her head ‘Do you really think this is the best way to get back at Stan?’

“We’re just eating dinner, Wendy,” Cartman explained plainly.

“No, we’re not just eating dinner because you made it more than that!” She snapped, and his expression grew hurt.

They stared at each other wordlessly before she shook her head.

“What am I doing here?” Wendy pleaded, though she didn't know to who.

“I thought we were friends,” Cartman shrugged sadly.

“I don’t even like you, Cartman!” Wendy resorted back to her usual insults, that held very little truth now, but a lot more weight.

Cartman just laughed off to the side in denial. "That's not true." He muttered with a snarl, shaking
"You drive me fucking insane! We always fight—"

"That shit goes both ways Wendy..."

Wendy scoffed and stepped forward to spit her next hateful lie right in his face.

"I hate you..."

"Careful." Cartman growled as he took one step closer to her and his eyes glared down at her ferociously.

Wendy gulped as she looked up at him — breathing heavily like a bull in the sightline of a red flag — as she tried to take back the hurtful words.

"I wish this never happened," She shook her head and whispered, "I wish I never agreed to go with you on Friday."

“No, you don’t mean that.” He spoke truthfully — like he knew — and then pleadingly as she turned and walked a few steps away from him, “I know you don’t mean that, Wendy Testaburger, I know you—" "YOU DON'T. KNOW ME." She hissed at him as she spun around, waving a manicured finger in his face.

"I've known you my whole life." He reasoned calmly.

Wendy's lips pursed tightly together as she tried to calm down enough to actually think of something to retort with. Wendy got distracted looking down at her still poised pointer finger... damn, there's a chip. She'd have to get that fixed as soon as she got home...

“I don’t need you to tell me, ok, I know.” Cartman barked, snapping Wendy out of her head and back to the conversation.

“Know what?” Wendy questioned through clenched teeth.

“It was stupid. The kiss.” He explained, "And it meant nothing, but especially to you. I don’t need you to tell me that, ok? I know. I’m sorry if it made you uncomfortable, but I didn’t even mean it, and I hope we can still be friends now. Happy?"

“No,” Wendy answered, shaking her head confusedly, “I… That’s not — don’t just tell me things I wanna hear—"

“Oh my God, Wendy, you are so up and down.” Cartman scoffed exhaustedly.

“What is that supposed to mean?” She rolled her neck as she folded her arms.

“What do you want?” Cartman shouted exasperatedly. “Do you want me to tell you I love you? Do you want me to tell you I lost my balance and slipped into your face by accident, what do you want?"

Wendy recoiled, feeling tears welling in her eyes again. “I want you to talk to me.” She pleaded, quietly. Cartman’s eyes filled with tears (quickly), and he dragged a hand over his face to hide it.
“You are so fucking conceited!” Cartman laughed incredulously, looking anywhere but at her.

“Excuse me?” Wendy snapped, stepping to her left and forcing herself inside his field of vision

“Why do you think I don’t want to talk to you about this shit, huh?” He snarled tilting his head slightly so he could chastise her at her level. “You spent so much energy in there, worrying about what Heidi thinks of you — fucking Heidi Turner! — that I bet you didn’t even stop to think about how that makes me feel! That you won’t even condescend to be fucking seen with me, how do you think that makes me feel!”

Wendy hadn’t thought about it that way... she was just worried about what it would mean for her and her reputation, and then Stan and his feelings, she hadn't realized...

She stammered with weak apology, “Cartman, I—”

“You’re a bitch.” He declared, decisively.

“Hey!” Wendy shouted scoldingly at him as he began limping his way towards the car.

“Come on, take me home.” He muttered over his shoulder, just loud enough for her to hear his dejected voice, “Tell the waiter I’m not hungry anymore.”

The drive back to Eric’s house was silent. The CD kicked on, naturally, but Cartman had smacked the volume knob with the palm of his hand so fast that Wendy was worried he broke it. She jumped at the sound, but resisted the urge to yell at him for it.

After a few more seconds of uncomfortable quiet, Wendy squeezed her hands around the steering wheel for courage and spoke up.

“I’m not embarrassed to be seen with you, I’m embarrassed to be seen with anyone after just breaking up with Stan.” She admitted.

“Well, we’re not dating anyway, so...” He mumbled from the passenger seat.

“Ok, so I guess it didn’t matter.” Wendy admitted apologetically.

“I guess not.”

It was quiet again until Eric could no longer stand it. Wendy relaxed gratefully as Eric gently pressed the power button and allowed music to distract them from their toxic thoughts. Seconds felt like hours as the end of the second track gave way to the beginning of the third, and Wendy’s throat threatened to spout honest words not yet filtered through her brain in the vacant silence, before a somber piano could speak first. She was relieved to hear the silence broken, and she gladly bit her tongue.

About halfway through the song (with his head still leaning back against the headrest, eyes closed), Eric began singing along, so softly, a gentle octave below Tori's pleading voice.

"'Years go by, will I still be waiting for somebody else to understand; Years go by, if I'm stripped of my beauty and the orange clouds raining in my head; Years go by, will I choke on my tears 'til, finally there is nothing left; One more casualty, you know we're too easy, easy, easy’"

Wendy pulled over on the side of a residential road.
“Am I being kidnapped?” Cartman chuckled lazily.

Wendy lowered the volume on the radio and put the car in park.

“What is with you Eric Cartman?”

“Well, I was born in South Park—”

“That’s not what I meant.”

Wendy stared at him patiently — this kid who was confusing, and so hard to read; who laughed at schoolyard embarrassment, but cried when the class pet died; who said hurtful things to people, and said even worse to himself; who lived life in a suit of armor, and put up walls upon walls until even he wasn't really sure who was trapped inside anymore.

His eyes watched her sadly, before survival instincts kicked in again.

“Well, I’m sorry Wendy, I’m not a mind reader,” he snarked, "What's with me? I don't know, you tell me..." he offered passive-aggressively. When Wendy refused to fall into his defensive trap, he shrugged and continued, “I guess I'm just a fucked up kid who thought a pretty girl was into him for 0.5 seconds, but I see now that I was wrong, and I am truly, truly sorry that I ever thought you could be into someone like me, apologies.” He pouted, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

“You really think that’s gonna work on me?” Wendy retaliated, "That self-pitying act? You think that’s a healthy way to start the relationship you claim you don’t want?”

“I don’t want it!”

“Clearly, with the amount of times you’ve brought it up tonight, over and over again, and how often you’ve deflected and acted defensively any time I breathe a word of negativity on the subject, you really do. You're projecting.” She pointed out rudely.

Eric clapped his hands together sarcastically, “Oh, nice shrink work, Wendy, you come up with that diagnosis on your own?” He praised her sarcastically.

“See? Right there!” Wendy yelled, gesturing wildly with her hands, "That’s the shit I’m talking about! Protecting your own fragile ego by attacking me!”

“And so what? I’m not allowed to defend myself in this interrogation?” He chuckled unaffectedly, "Aren’t I entitled to a lawyer? Can I use my one phone call to call Kyle?”

Wendy shook her head in absolute astonishment.

“You’re such an asshole.” She breathed.

“Yeah.” He agreed with a flat tone.

Wendy seethed quietly in the driver's seat.

“Get out of my car.” She demanded firmly.

Cartman scoffed at her, but otherwise didn't move.

“Get out!” She screeched.

Cartman leaned in close. “Or what?” He snarled, challengingly.
Wendy was fuming, glaring at that smug face, echos of an empty threat that dripped like honey from his voice. It made her furious, it irritated her down to her core — and it also made her heart pound with a thrill that she couldn't quite explain, that had turned her on in a way that Stan had never gotten close to.

She had barely registered what she was doing before she lunged at him, kissing the smirk off his arrogant, aggravating face and grabbing into the back of his neck with a tight fist, accidentally pulling on his hair just slightly as she curled and uncurled her fingers indecisively.

And he kissed her back almost instantly. Cartman's hands immediately found their way towards Wendy — running his fingers through her hair, then down her back, and around her waist greedily — until her entire body was covered in chills. His lips moved around hers hungrily, and his breath sighed heavily out of his nose as her lips parted, desperate to let him in.

It all happened so fast, then it was over as quickly as it had begun.

“Goddammit Cartman!” Wendy shrieked, pulling away from him and burying her face in her hands.

“That one wasn’t me.” He chuckled, failing to hide the dopey smile on his face. “Wendy,” He breathed huskily, with hope on his face and vulnerability in his voice, “Wendy, I—”

“Shhhhh, just.” Wendy cut him off, kissing him again.

She barely registered the swell of violins playing softly on the stereo — it sounded as if they were miles away.

Tuesday, September 21

"Hi, Wendy."

Wendy closed her locker to see David Rodriguez smiling at her politely.

"Hi." She responded to him skeptically, but with a smile.

"How are you?" He grinned at her handsomely.

"I'm good, David, how are you?" Wendy half-flirted back, a little absently.

"I'm good," he chuckled, "thanks for asking. Listen, I just wanted to say I'm sorry about you and Stan, I just heard."

"Yeah, well, it was time." Wendy shrugged.

"Yeah, and so, I was wondering, if you're ever not doing anything, would you be open to hanging out with me sometime? Just chill? Maybe grab lunch sometime?" David raised his eyebrows expectantly.

"Um, yeah, sure, maybe," Wendy agreed noncommittally, distracted by the phone buzzing in her back pocket. She pulled it out.

"Ok cool," David breathed a sigh of relief, interpreting her interaction very differently than Wendy.
was intending it. "So, I'll give you a call sometime?" He leaned in and drawled, smoothly.

"Uh, yeah, sure." Wendy waved him off distractedly, staring down at her phone screen agitatedly.

"Awesome." David grinned.

"Awesome. I gotta go," Wendy shoved past him typing, deleting, and typing again furiously as she stormed down the hallway.

**From Eric Cartman: lock down David for a three-way, will you, babe?**

**To Eric Cartman: You're revolting**

**From Eric Cartman: Yep**

She rounded the corner and found him leaning against some lockers, arms crossed, and waiting for her.

"Ki-hih-itchen Wench," he greeted sleezily.

"Why are you the way that you are?" She snapped at him, gripping her phone tightly with both hands so that she couldn't accidentally reach out and slap him.

"Eh, life's more fun this way." He smirked with a shrug.

"I have to get to class," Wendy fumed, shoving past him.

"See you after school," he drawled lazily in her direction as she passed by. Wendy stopped in her tracks and spun around to glare at him, sputtering for a comeback.

Cartman just cocked an eyebrow and gestured towards the speakers right as the first bell rang for class.

Wendy shook her head back and forth, fuming, as she marched her ass to American Lit.

**Wednesday, September 22**

**POV - Eric.**

“This is wrong.” Wendy breathed, tracing the words around Eric’s lips.

“It is?" He gasped sarcastically.
Wendy nodded coyly, with wicked innocence, biting her lip to hide a smile.

“Good.” He purred. Wendy melted in his arms, sighing against his lips as he swallowed the beautifully hypnotizing taste of that fucking mango chapstick.

The truth was, Eric knew that although he didn’t see anything technically wrong with what they were doing, it wasn’t completely right. He knew he was seriously breaking the bro code, and if Stan ever found out he would not be happy about it.

He’d tried to convince himself that she was just a warm body — the first one to hold him like that, kiss him like that, touch him like that... but every time Wendy leaned in, when her hair would fall in front of her face and sweet coconut strands would brush against his neck... when Eric felt her hands pressed against his chest or felt her warm breath against his ear, he knew: it was just her.

He’d never tell her though, not as long as she still saw him as the bookmark to hold her place while she was still deciding whether or not to turn the page. Not if it meant he could lose her.

He knew that’s all he was to her, but he was willing to be that bookmark if it meant that she would come back every day, even if the purpose of the visit was just to yell at him — which sometimes he made sure of, on purpose, just to see her in between classes in the halls at school.

No, he’d never tell her.

But that night he did ask.

“Wendy,” He breathed, placing a hand on her shoulder and running it down her arm, “What are we doing?”

“I know, I know,” Wendy pulled away from him, leaning against the back of the passenger seat and covering her face with her hands, “we shouldn’t be doing this, this has to stop” she muttered from behind her hands.

“No!” Eric instinctively reached out for her, “No, haha, no that is not what I meant.” He clarified, his thumb tracing back and forth around her hips in a desperate attempt to just keep her here.

“I’m asking... what this is? What all this... means.” He questioned clumsily.

Wendy looked back and forth between his eyes with an unreadable expression. Her eyebrows knit together in thought, but she continued to stay silent.

“Say something,” he chuckled lightly, trying to sound calm and breezy although his heart was beating faster and faster the more she just said nothing.

Wendy climbed off of Eric’s lap and fell into the seat beside him. He winced slightly as she bumped into his leg from where it stretched out into the middle of the car, but by now it was mostly healed, so it didn’t hurt too bad.

“I’m sorry.” Her hand darted out to touch the wounded leg, but it just sort of hovered above him.

“It’s ok.” He blew air out through his mouth and adjusted the way he was sitting.

He turned his head to the side and watched Wendy, eyebrows knit, facing forward, trapped inside her own head. She opened and closed her mouth once, before swinging her legs up underneath herself, and turning her whole body to face Cartman.

“What this means,” she parroted, tucking her hair behind both ears before she continued, “is that
we both have more in common than we thought: mainly very little self control, and nothing better
to do on a Wednesday night.” She answered vaguely.

Ouch. Cartman’s shoulders tensed. He scraped his palms down his thighs and exhaled sharply.
“That’s it?”

“What do you want me to say?” She responded flippantly.

“I don’t know.” Cartman admitted, honestly.

Wendy made an irritated, ‘what-the-fuck, then?’ gesture with her hands.

“We can’t be ‘boyfriend-and-girlfriend’, Eric,” she explained harshly, “I just got out of a
relationship with Stan—”

“Then we won’t be.” He piped up, hopefully, “We’ll just be two lonely people, who need someone
to not-be-so-lonely with, anymore.” Wendy’s eyes softened. Eric’s heart beat out of his chest as he
reached for her hand, and she actually let him take it. ”Not a commitment, just a promise.” He
clarified. He knew she wasn’t going to stay. He just needed to know that she’d come back.

Eric swallowed his pride and whispered, “Please just give me that.”

Wendy searched his eyes with a stern expression on her face.

“Ok.” She answered calmly. “I can give you that.”

Thursday, September 23

It still felt sort of like what they were doing was going on behind Stan’s back, and some rare
nights, long after his head had hit the pillow, Cartman would consider telling Wendy that they had
to stop meeting. It was looking more and more like ‘the right thing to do’, though he never used to
care much about that kind of stuff before...

He’d almost brought it up once, almost completely surrendered this beautiful thing he had
somehow managed to capture and hold. She’d pulled away from him, sensing something was
wrong, and looked down at him with soft brown eyes.

But he couldn’t do it. Cartman willingly succumbed to his weakness, and pulled her back down to
him.

For that brief moment, he had known it was wrong, but when she was with him — the feeling of
her fingers brushing against his skin, and the shape of her body traced beneath the palms of his
hands — he realized that as long as she was asking, he could never say ‘no’ to her.

So he didn’t, and she had come back every day since, despite having no idea how or why he even
deserved it.

Today was sort of a rainy day, and the humidity had settled in Cartman’s joints, popping and
expanding painfully with every wrong move.

“Wendy,” he winced as the weight of her entire body pressed against his sore ribs.
She gasped apologetically, “I’m sorry!” Her hands hovered over him without touching him, “Does it hurt a lot?”

“No, it’s fine,” he sat up on his elbow, touching the sore spot, ”it comes and goes, today’s just a bad day.” He explained, breathing through the ache radiating in his bones.

Wendy nodded and settled for resting her hand against his forearm.

“Well, this is fucking embarrassing.” He muttered quietly, trying to find any humor in the situation.

“You don’t have to be embarrassed, I shouldn’t have rolled over like that. Lay down again, I’ll stay right over here—”

“No, this sucks.” He laughed, if only so that he didn't cry, "You have no idea what it’s like, Wendy, how much I want you closer to me... but I’m just fucking broken... how long am I supposed to stay broken like this—?"

"Cartman — Eric..." Wendy corrected (he loved the way she said his name now), "You're going to get better, it just takes time—"

"That's not the point." He shook his head before reluctantly continuing, "I was always tough, or at least I thought I was," he continued with a detached chuckle, "Eric Cartman, bully, Eric Cartman, best punching bag around... Ok so I always cried and complained a lot, but I was always able to stand on my own two feet, which I literally cannot do anymore—!

Wendy kissed him softly. It was the most beautiful sin in the world, the only thing that could make him forget how closely he resembled a porcelain doll that got dropped and abandoned on a muddy sidewalk.

“I wanna make you feel better,” she whispered, running her thumb along his bottom lip. It sent chills down his spine.

Cartman reached towards her and pulled her lips back to him.

Wendy’s hands roamed around his body, carefully. Too carefully. He was about to complain about her overly-cautious affection when she pulled away, just enough to peel the soft fabric of her cotton t-shirt off of her body.

"Sweet.” Cartman drawled, with a wide smirk on his lips.

This was definitely a positive side effect of finally convincing Wendy that his mom was quite literally almost never home right after work anymore, and that his room actually was safer and more secluded than the car.

He took in her body and outlined her every curve with hungry eyes as he traced the shape of her hips with his hands.

He was so distracted by the feeling of her skin beneath his fingertips that he barely registered her palms sliding down his chest.

Alarm bells started ringing in his head as her fingers curled around the fabric and began lifting it up over his stomach.

Cartman gasped, grabbing her wrists in a panic, before loosening his grip and gently prying her
hands off of him.

“Does it just hurt too much today?” She whispered, running her fingers through his hair, in any attempt to be a source of comfort for him. Eric swallowed thickly.

“Yeah,” he agreed with an insidiously growing numbness, “it hurts too much.”

**Friday, September 24,**

The next day, Eric told Wendy that his mom was unexpectedly home. She was ‘sick’, or something.

“Ok, well, tell her I hope she feels better,” Wendy was about to hang up when Cartman stopped her.

“Wait!”

“Yeah?”

There was silence on his end as he contemplated anything to say to Wendy to get to see her today.

“Wanna go for a drive?”

“Actually,” Wendy’s voice sounded so soft over the phone, Cartman could almost feel her breath against his ear through the speaker, “my parents aren’t home right now, it’s their anniversary so they went out to dinner.” She scoffed, ”like some empty loveless ritual would actually fix their marriage… come over?” She begged softly on the other end of the phone.

Eric pulled the phone away from his ear and banged his fist against his forehead. ‘Damn’ he mouthed to himself, knowing full well he would have a hard time resisting that sweet, pleading way she cooed ‘come over?’. Somehow, he managed.

“Wendy, you know, I actually think I may be coming down with something too.” He lied. “Can I take a rain check?”

“Oh.” She sounded surprised, and maybe a little bit confused, “Yeah no problem. Feel better, Cartman.”

Eric paused. “Yeah. Thanks.” He grumbled, before hanging up the phone and deciding that maybe he did actually feel a little bit sick today.

**Monday, September 27**

**POV - Wendy**

Wendy had not heard from Cartman since Friday night.
She had tried reaching out to him, tried calling and texting... she considered walking over there, but she weirdly felt like she wouldn't be welcome.

There was a growing distance that had been festering between them since Thursday night, and Wendy wasn’t quite sure why. They’d spent one afternoon in his room, and all of a sudden it was like he didn't want to be alone with her anymore. She couldn't help but feel a little bit concerned and self-conscious: was it her?

Wendy wondered if she had done something wrong.

She'd only ever been with Stan — who never asked for much, aside from vanilla sex and the occasional blowjob (but given that they were both still in high school, and living with their parents, neither one happened very often) — and although she wasn't unpracticed, she would consider that inexperienced.

After Eric had told her that he was in too much pain that day to continue making out, Wendy still offered to... take care of him, so to speak. His original plan was that they could 'just talk', but something about that idea had scared Wendy tremendously, and once she offered an alternative, he readily accepted. He seemed to enjoy it, but now she wasn't so sure...

Maybe she had done something wrong, or maybe they had just gone too fast — left very little to the imagination, and now he was bored of her. A part of her knew that wasn't true, but she couldn't figure out what the problem might be.

It didn’t escape Wendy’s observation that Eric always flinched slightly the first time she touched him each day, like he wasn’t prepared for it or wasn’t used to it or something. So maybe it wasn't all about her, maybe it wasn't anything she did or didn't do, at all. Either way, it still sucked to get ghosted, and she wasn't going to stand for it.

Wendy needed answers, and she was going to get them.

After school Wendy had found him out near the front entrance, waiting to be picked up.

"Why have you been ignoring me?" She questioned, jumping right into it.

Cartman blew air out of his mouth, like he was trying to come up with a dismissive way to answer her question.

"Is it me? Is there something wrong with me?" She asked shortly. His expression shifted.

"No." He insisted, softly.

"Because you didn’t start ignoring me until after... Thursday..." Wendy implied, delicately, "and I just need an answer so my head stops jumping to conclusions—"

"It's not you." Cartman insisted.

"Then what is it?" Wendy wondered.

"I don't know." Cartman lied.

"Talk to me!" Wendy demanded.
"I don't know, ok?" Cartman snapped, inappropriately, and it caught Wendy off guard, "God, can you ever just let things go when someone asks you to without fucking nagging all the time?" He complained, before sighing and whispering under his breath, "Fucking bitch..."

"Hey! Don't talk to me like that!" Wendy screamed, "I can tell this isn't about me, ok, something else is going on, and you're just taking it out on me because... I don't know, maybe because you're having doubts, given the way you keep bringing up imaginary inadequacies—" Cartman guffawed "—and the way you keep pushing me away, just like you do to everyone else!" Wendy screeched, fists shaking by the end of her lengthy accusation.

Eric clapped his hands together in a slow, sarcastic, and cruel applause that made Wendy feel smaller and smaller with every pop of sound. "You know, Wendy, I really should have you call my therapist so you guys can compare notes." He snarled, "Actually, why don't you go ahead and tell her that her services are no longer needed because you seemed to have cracked the code!" Now he was applauding faster, "Well done, you've figured me out, good job, genius."

"Maybe this was a mistake." Wendy declared plainly, throwing her hands up in defeat.

"You're only just now figuring that out?" He retorted with a snarl.

Wendy took offense to his tone. "What is that supposed to mean?" She folded her arms combatively.

"Wendy, a girl like you is not supposed to be with a guy like me." He explained with a cruel chuckle, raising his eyebrows condescendingly.

Wendy felt her blood boiling. "Who are you to decide who I wanna be with?" She challenged, stepping forward and raising her voice, despite the fact that there were still some kids milling around the school and parking lot, looking at them strangely.

"Oh, please, you don't want to be with me, you are with me, it's convenience, there's a difference..." He shot back coldly, without missing a beat, before briefly looking over his shoulder at a group of passing kids.

"And what makes you such an expert about me and my feelings?" Wendy demanded to know.

Cartman rolled his eyes and drawled tiredly, "It's your pattern Wendy, we all know it: you break up with Stan because he's boring as shit, and then you realize you're all alone, and jump right back into it—"

Wendy nearly screamed at the way he pouted the words 'all alone'.

"How dare you? I don't have to be with anyone!" She snapped defensively, though not very convincingly.

"—only this time you substituted Stan for someone new because you finally came to your senses"—"

"Where is this coming from?!" Wendy pleaded in confusion.

"—Jump right onto the next guy, and I just happened to be in the right place at the right time—""You know, Cartman, there's a reason people think you're just an insensitive jerk most of the time!"

"—if it hadn’t been me it woulda been Token or David—"
"That's not fair!" Wendy felt her face growing red, trying not to think of the way she actually had considered who would be her next fling after she'd just broken it off with Stan (she would never have even considered Cartman in a million years if circumstances hadn't pulled them together against their wills, and against their better instincts).

"—Just not me, unless it's a secret, because there must be something wrong with me," Cartman martyred himself pitifully.

"That, that right there. That's the reason." Wendy pointed at him angrily.

"What is?" He sighed with fake exhaustion.

"These little mind games," Wendy explained with irritation, "you hurt your own feelings, and then manipulate people into feeling sorry for you! I'm not doing it!"

"I don't need your pity!" Cartman spat back disgustedly.

Wendy came right back at him with full force, "Then what do you need? Huh? What is going to stop this ridiculous temper tantrum?"

Wendy was breathing heavily, she could feel herself on the verge of screaming in frustration as a silence spread between them.

Cartman's eyes followed the sound of a honking horn to the parking lot and his armored expression fell.

"Wendy, I have to go," he spoke regretfully.

"Go... what?" Wendy shook her head confusedly, and turned to see Liane waiting in her car. She waved at Wendy happily before turning her attention back to her phone. Wendy turned away from the idling car and back to Cartman. "Now? We need to finish talking about this... Eric..."

"I have to go. Wendy," he whispered apologetically. His eyebrows knit together as his eyes flicked back to the car, and then back at Wendy. "I'm..." Cartman's hands reached out for Wendy, but she yanked her arm away from him, just out of reach, and the words got stuck in his throat. "I'm... Fuck." He cursed under his breath. For just a split second, Wendy was sure he was about to apologize. She was not very surprised when he didn't. He shook his head back and forth, before brushing past her, without looking her in the eyes, and muttering, "See you later..." under his breath, leaving Wendy to watch him go, feeling hurt and confused, standing alone in the abandoned steps of the school.

Sometime after dinner, Wendy heard a knock on her front door.

"I'll get it." Her mother called from the living room. Wendy could barely hear her from where she sat doing her homework at the kitchen table, but she was able to make out the sound of a male voice, and her mother offering for him to come inside. Apparently he refused, as Wendy's mother called her over shortly after.

For a split second, Wendy feared it may be Stan. But then again, it may be nice to see a familiar face right about now...

She stood up from the table and walked to the door.
"Cartman?!"

"Wendy..." He began in an apologetic sigh, cutting himself off and shooting a nervous glance towards her mother.

"I'll be in my room." Wendy's mom announced casually, before sauntering through the living room and flicking off the TV on her way down the hall, then shutting the door quietly behind her. Wendy turned back to the frazzled boy in front of her.

“It’s me.” He blurted out quickly.

Wendy shook her head confusedly, "Eric, what are you—?"

“It’s me. It’s not you,” he clarified, taking a deep breath before repeating, “it’s me.”

"...Is this your weak attempt at an apology or is it a cowardly effort to break off... this?" Wendy pointed between them, then folded her arms.

"Wendy..."

"Because if so, you could have just told me nicely this afternoon, instead of blowing it up and lashing out at me before..."

"I'm sorry." He breathed, holding his arms out at his sides like he had nothing left to hide. "I lashed out, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." He repeated, strongly, with a clear voice, and with more conviction each time. He met Wendy's gaze with despondent eyes.

"Ok." Wendy acknowledged skeptically. "So, what then?" She shrugged. "Do you not want to do this anymore?"

“No.” Cartman stated flatly.

Wendy tried not to look as shocked (or disappointed) as she felt.

“Ok.” She nodded, "We don’t have to continue, then... It’s been real, I guess…” She shrugged, beginning to close the door.

“No, I mean ‘no, that’s not what it means’.” Eric clarified quietly.

“Well, what does it mean?” Wendy stepped outside and closed the door behind her.

Cartman looked off into the distance, pretending to watch something imaginary that had caught his attention, so that he didn't have to look at Wendy while he gathered his thoughts.

"Eric..." She pressed.

“I need to trust you." He admitted weakly, in a shaking voice with an uncertain lilt at the end of it.

“What do you mean, you don’t trust me?” Wendy whispered, concerned and slightly offended.

He shook his head back and forth.

“I don’t trust anyone.” Cartman shrugged, voice going up at the end, phrasing it more like a question. He chuckled as tears began to fill his eyes and shrugged. “Never have.” He dropped his gaze as his eyebrows pulled together, pained.
Wendy stepped forward.

“Look, I know this… thing between us is nothing serious or anything, but you can still trust me.”

“No, yeah, I know, I know.” Cartman nodded his head quickly, not meeting Wendy’s eyes.

By now, not many people were out and about in South Park. Some woman was walking her dog across the street, and some kids were playing a dumbed-down version of flashlight tag in a neighboring front yard, but Wendy didn't pay them any mind.

She placed her hand tentatively against Eric's cheek. When he didn’t pull away, she lightly traced her thumb against his skin, tenderly, watching his tough expression soften with every touch.

She placed both of her hands on either side of his face and looked up into his eyes.

“I am literally broken.” He whispered dejectedly.

“Your body will heal.” Wendy reasoned, gently.

“That’s not the only kind of broken I mean.”

Wendy readjusted her grip on him, as if he'd soon vanish and fade away, “Eric, please hear me when I say that I do want you — as much as past Wendy would never have believed it if I told her,” Eric chuckled genuinely as a tear fell from his eye. Wendy casually wiped it away with her thumb and continued, "I do want you, you and I think you know I would not hesitate to tell you otherwise.”

“I don’t understand you.” Cartman croaked, with a humorless chuckle and a wounded look on his face.

“What do you mean?” Wendy cooed, running her fingers through the sides of his hair.

Cartman paused. “You could be spending your time with literally anybody else, but me. You could be spending your time with literally anybody else in addition to me... but you haven’t.”

“I don’t need you to tell me what I could be doing.” Wendy announced firmly.

“I just don’t get it.” He shrugged.

Wendy thought about it for a second — what she could say to make him understand these feelings she could barely even begin to dissect, herself? She decided that there was really nothing that she could say; it was going to take time... and trust.

But she wanted to say something.

So she planted a soft kiss against his lips and caressed his cheek steadily with her palm. Wendy pulled back and looked up into his scared expression, unmasked.

She grinned, and insisted softly, “You’re too hard on yourself.”

He chuckled and beamed down at her through a smirk. “Why?” He sighed bewilderedly.

“Why what?”

“Why do you still want to be with me?” His smile began to fade as the words spilled out of his mouth.

Cartman smirked down at her triumphantly through the tears in his eyes. She smiled at him and he chuckled, tipping his chin down to hide a soft smile.

**Tuesday, September 28**

**POV - Cartman**

Eric limped his way into Wendy’s room and threw himself onto the bed with a thud.

“Wow, someone's in a rush,” Wendy giggled. He couldn't argue with that. He watched as she crawled across the bed, sliding up next to Eric and propping herself up on her elbow, one hand posed against her waist animatedly. “Hi.” She grinned.

“Hi.” Eric laughed in response.

“Welcome to my room,” Wendy gestured widely with her arm before setting it back against her hip.

“Thanks,” He chuckled.

The two teens moved towards each other and kissed delicately.

"How long do we have?" Eric whispered very softly, smiling and twirling Wendy's hair around his finger absently.

"My parents are out to dinner, so at least a few hours." She smirked.

"That's it?" He pouted, only half-kidding.

"We'll make the most of it." Wendy’s smirk grew devious as she rose to her knees and peeled off her shirt.

Damn, she's hot.

"You did that fast.” He chuckled.

“Yeah, well I have home court advantage.” She grinned.

“Oh yeah?” He raised his eyebrows amusedly.

“I know sports things.” She giggled, wrinkling her nose and flipping coconut-scented hair over her shoulder.

Wow, she's cute.

Eric must've been staring because Wendy tilted her head, tucked her hair behind her ear and wondered, “What?”
“Nothing.” He grinned watching her as she continued to eye him suspiciously.

There was a time when Wendy and Eric couldn't stand each other, but that's what you get when two very stubborn people butt heads over and over again. He could hardly remember it now; it felt like it'd been years since Cartman was content to live his life without Wendy in it.

For a split second, Eric thought about Monday night: when he'd almost sent Wendy away before she could do it to him (having come to that conclusion on his own, after poisoning his own mind with negative thoughts and self-doubt), being mean-spirited and rude so that when she told him he was no longer worth it, he could at least blame it on something as shallow as his attitude, rather than who he was deep down, just like he always did. He'd gotten into his therapists’ office about an hour later and cried and screamed into a pillow, punching the soft fabric of the couch while he lamented regretfully. The Dr. didn't even have to coach him on what he needed to do next, because he already knew — and so after his mother had dropped him off at home and driven away for her shift at work, Cartman had walked right back out his front door and limped all the way to Wendy’s house on one crutch to apologize like he fucking meant it, because dear God he did, and the thought of losing her scared him much more than the thought of surrendering his pride ever could.

Afterwards, they'd 'went for a drive', but this time they only talked. He'd opened up to her about everything, everything, and she had opened up to him — about their fears and insecurities, uncertainties, and how it had all been affecting their relationship so far. It was all on the table, and she didn't run away, didn't make fun of him, or change her mind about fucking around with him (as he'd deeply feared). She understood him now, and he understood her. They'd even come to an unspoken agreement about undressing consent, and Wendy totally understanding. It was then that Cartman realized what an amazing person she really was (‘when she wasn't being a teacher's pet or know-it-all brat’ he'd thought to himself, teasing her in his head, so as not to admit just how much he'd completely taken to her).

And this amazing person was here, with him. He had no idea why he deserved her.

Cartman ran his fingers through her hair gently, just looking at her, as she smiled down at him questioningly.

“What?” Eric chuckled.

“Nothing.” Wendy shrugged innocently before brushing her mouth against his and parting her lips greedily.

My God, she's beautiful.

“You’re really gonna kick me out?” Cartman joked as he idled by the front door.

“My parents will be home soon,” Wendy whispered, regretfully, twirling her fingers around the string of his sweatshirt, absently.

“Mhm.” Eric bit down on his cheek to hide his smirk.

“Well… see ya,” Wendy stepped sideways, opening the door for him.

“Yeah, see ya later.”

Then he messed up.
Cartman leaned in instinctively, with an awkward, tentative motion, and kissed her goodbye.

As a rule, they never kissed goodbye — that was something couples did, and they were not a couple.

It always felt strange to Cartman when they would say goodbye like friends — like the spell had been broken, like crumbling walls were being slowly built back up, like he hadn’t just had his mouth in way more intimate places on her body just minutes before.

He hadn’t meant to do it, but then again he hadn’t meant to fall for her either.

When he pulled away from her, his first instinct was to apologize. He didn’t, but she could tell by his mumbled ramblings that he wanted to.

“It’s ok,” Wendy insisted, pulling away from him, before reversing the motion, stepping forward and giving him a light peck.

“See you tomorrow.”

**Wednesday, September 29**

**POV - Wendy**

Wendy was back in Eric’s house, being led down the hallway to his room. He stopped to kiss her clumsily in between limped steps, and Wendy chuckled, opening the door with a playful grin, while he had her pinned up against the hallway outside his room.

The door swung open and Wendy noticed an old-looking cardboard mailing box in the corner of Eric’s room next to his bed. She quickly recognized it as the same box containing the last tangible memories of Ellen Cartman.

It was scary to Wendy how everything, all that was left of this woman by the end of her life, was able to be squeezed into just one measly box of things. It raised chills up her arms (or maybe that was the smooth feeling of Eric's lips and tongue against her neck). He broke away from her and limped inside his room, sighing from a long day and staying up on his feet.

Wendy nodded grimly towards the half-open receptacle, “That your grandmothers?” She asked clumsily, though she already knew it was.

“Uh, yeah,” Cartman limped over to his bed and sat down, kicking the skewed lid off of the box with his foot. “I originally just stashed this stuff in the closet, but I’ve been… looking through it lately,” Eric was struggling to bend down and pick up a picture off of the top of the box from his seated position. Wendy picked up the entire box and sat on the bed, placing the delicate cardboard treasure chest of memories between them. “Thanks,” he mumbled distractedly before grabbing the item he wanted: the folded up picture with the creases down the middle. The one that the nurses had said always resided in Nana's housecoat pocket. Wendy would like to think that she kept it there so that she could always look at it, but a gnawing ache in the back of her mind wondered if maybe one day Ellen had just simply forgotten it was there — and so it grew discolored and wilted not from loving admiration, but from neglect. “I wanted to go through this box with my mom,
but… she’s never here anymore, so…” Cartman’s voice remained calm, though his jaw jutted forward slightly and tensed. Wendy sort of felt bad for him, though she’d never admit it. She resisted the urge to place a comforting hand on him, but things had grown complicated since they’d started meeting up, and circumstances were different now — and that day at the hospital that seemed so far away. Emotional boundaries needed to be observed, now.

Instead, Wendy kept her hands to herself, and watched with unacknowledged guilt as Cartman leaned across his bed in a twisty way to grab a framed picture off of his nightstand. It was an identical copy of the small photo in his hands, only this one was full-sized. He carefully tucked the folded up copy in the bottom right hand corner of the frame and smoothed it against the glass, carefully.

“You… have the same one,” Wendy blurted out dumbly, shocked at how much Eric Cartman seemed to surprise her every Goddess-dammed day, revealing more and more of his rarely seen sensitive side — a version of him that was buried so deeply in his being, that Wendy had genuinely believed had shriveled up and died many years ago. More surprising still was how he did so fearlessly, with less and less concern with how he may or may not be teased for it. Because it was Wendy. He trusted her now, and that scared her.

Eric exhaled a laugh through his nose before tapping his index finger twice against the wooden frame. He turned a sad smirk towards Wendy. “Who do you think gave her the picture?”

Wendy wrung her clasped hands together, reminding herself of the boundaries she’d put in place to keep him at a safe distance. And how easily he’d complied…

Eric reached back towards his nightstand and placed the framed picture with its new addition back in its rightful place. He adjusted its placement slightly before leaning back against his headboard and placing his good leg across Wendy’s lap, physically lifting his casted leg to plop it down right beside the other. Wendy’s hands gravitated towards him magnetically, and she could only think about it for a quick moment, before she decided ‘fuck it’ and rested her palm against his shin. She tried to tell herself it was muscle memory, but it wasn’t. Wendy distractedly rubbed her hand up his shin, to his knee, and back down again.

“You really love her.” Wendy observed, tenderly.

Eric nodded darkly, “I did.”

“Do.” Wendy corrected, squeezing his good knee comfortingly. Eric closed his eyes. Wendy suddenly felt the air grow heavy as his gaze shifted back down to her thumb — tracing back and forth over soft fabric comfortingly. She peeled her hands off of him cautiously and sat silent in the tense stillness. Wendy looked behind her to the left and surveyed the box of memories, without touching it. “Do you want to show me?” She offered tenderly, ”I mean… I’ll go through this box with you… if you’d want me to…”

Eric Cartman’s face lit up like nothing Wendy had ever seen before.

“Really?” He questioned, disbelievingly, kind of in a rude way — out of context, you’d think he was making fun of Wendy for something she’d said that he knew for a fact to be wrong. She didn’t take it personally, she didn’t have to.

Wendy wordlessly picked up the box and scooted up towards the headboard to sit next to Eric, who was beaming brightly.
He excitedly explained pictures of Ellen in her youth; how she was part of the Feminist Women’s Movement in the ‘60s, beginning when she was only 16 years old, and how she had to lie about her age to participate in the rallies and protests — like a bunch of grown 20-somethings and 30-somethings didn’t know there was a teenager in their midst.

She was also quite vocal about her distaste for the Vietnam War, and volunteered as an assistant at a local, underground newspaper that published protest essays and distributed them in four major cities around the country. There was even a copy of the only essay she herself had written, and Wendy had to say, it was beautifully written, heart-wrenching and angry. She spoke of a love who had been ripped away from her and sent to war.

It was then that Eric picked up a picture of a strikingly handsome man in a military uniform. He had dark hair and piercing light eyes, with a strong jaw and prominent nose.

“Is that your grandfather?” Wendy asked, sitting up on her knees and holding onto the far end of the cardboard box as she leaned over Eric’s shoulder to stare at the handsome man.

“No, definitely not.” Eric answered slowly, with knit eyebrows and confusion in his voice. “My grandfather was a horrible man, she wouldn't have any pictures of him,” he explained plainly. Wendy expected him to drop the subject right then and there, but Eric elaborated, looking closely at the face in the picture as he spoke, “My mother grew up without him, actually, which was probably better for her since he was very jealous, abusive, and controlling — at least according to Nana, but to my mother he was just very cold. He left when she was seven months old, and didn’t come back again until she was seventeen. Mom moved out, he moved in, and he ruined my Nana’s life for nearly five years until he finally had a heart attack and dropped dead when my mom was twenty-one. She said she never rejoiced in someone’s death until her father… if you can even call him that…” Cartman shook his head like he said something he wasn’t supposed to say, or didn’t want to say. “Six months later, I popped out, and that was it, I never met him.” Cartman shrugged casually.

“So who is that?” Wendy wondered, changing the subject, curious as to why Cartman’s Nana would have a beautiful picture of a mysterious man that she’d kept all these years.

“I don’t know,” Eric flipped the picture over to find faded letters in beautiful cursive handwriting that simply read ‘Adam’. “Adam,” Cartman read out loud in a marveled voice, “This is Adam… this is Adam…”

“…Are you saying that because it’s a mystery or because you know who that is?”

“Adam was a friend of my Nana’s.” Cartman explained excitedly with a smile. “Oh wow… He was a little older than her, by about seven years, but he was more of a father figure to my Nana than her own father — who had a whole other family, if you can believe it.” Wendy felt sort of strange learning all this Cartman family gossip, like she was intruding in a narrative that she had no part of, but it seemed to be therapeutic for Eric to talk about the small family he knew very little of, so Wendy let him talk. “Seriously, it was just my Nana and her mother, and then this whole other family with three kids and a dog that he saw eleven months out of the year — only staying with my Nana one month in the summer, where they would celebrate Christmas with the money he was supposed to send in December.” Cartman stopped talking, shortly, like he’d just had an epiphany, before chuckling darkly and muttering to Wendy half-heartedly, “I guess I come from a long line of shitty men.” He joked, but he was not laughing.

Wendy literally did not know what to say. She just sat frozen, staring at him pityingly while she searched his expression for something she could say that would console him. She sort of felt guilty for staying silent for so long, especially because Eric had brought the subject back on track before...
she had the chance to say anything comforting to him.

“Anyway, Adam — you should’ve seen the way my grandmother’s face would light up when she’d talk about Adam,” Eric smiled genuinely, and Wendy imagined it must have looked something like exactly what she was looking at right now. Eric and his Nana shared the same piercing, round eyes brewed inside a chaotic storm. “My mother always hoped he was her real father but… this photo is dated over a decade before she was born… and he looks nothing like her.” Eric gently placed the photo back in the box and rubbed his face tiredly.

“What did she say he was like?” Wendy asked, genuinely interested, wrapped up in a captivating love story from decades long ago.

“Well, he sang,” Cartman explained, twisting to lay on his right side with his elbow propped up against his head, “opera. He was a war hero, but he never lost his optimistic love of life, that’s what she always used to say. Nana said he was as young and naive on the last day she saw him as the first. They met when she was young, but like I said he was much older than her, by about six or seven years or so, which I guess isn’t that big of a deal, but she always stressed how he protected and looked out for her like a father figure would, although she wanted more than that, and some of their love letters from when he was deployed in Vietnam would prove he felt the same way, as well…. He taught her how to drive, I think. Anyway, he went off to war, she didn’t see him for a while, and by the time he came back she was married to my grandpa. They continued talking and seeing each other for a few months, but once my grandfather found out he became incredibly jealous and forbid her from seeing Adam anymore… My mom says he used to brag about ‘breaking’ such a strong woman like Nana, like she was a fucking horse…” Eric swallowed like he wanted to push down the words he’d just let slip, “I guess sometimes fear outweighs happiness.” He shrugged, sadly. “She always spoke about the last time she saw Adam: my mother was about a year old, and they ran into each other in the street. By now my grandfather was out of the picture, but Adam also had a new wife. She had kept her distance from him for too long, and he had moved on. You can’t really blame him, they were just really bad at timing…” Wendy didn't realize it, but she had begun to tear up, “Then he died very young, and my Nana always regretted never going to his funeral.”

“That’s incredibly sad,” Wendy really felt for Ellen Cartman, such a strong and vibrant teen reduced to pain and yearning in her womanhood.

Eric nodded, mumbling quietly. “Mom always said he was the only man my Nana ever truly loved…”

“Do you believe in love?” Wendy asked him quietly, almost surprised to hear the words that came out of her mouth so quickly, like they had echoed from somewhere else in the room. Wendy tucked her legs under herself and sat back against her heels, safely back in her own personal space. She half expected him to laugh at her, maybe call her a wuss, and change the subject. Instead he thought about it, and he thought about it very carefully before answering.

Eric finally shrugged not negatively, but indecisively. “I’ve never seen it.” He mumbled distracting himself by busying his hands with nothing in particular. After a moment, he looked up at Wendy to question her with a strange stammer. “Do… you?”

Wendy thought about it, remembering childhood games with Bebe, where she would claim an imaginary husband and think the world of him; or moments when, as a more grown version of herself, she would ponder her relationship with Stan and wonder, but ultimately come to no conclusions.

“I think I did… once.” She nodded.
“But you don’t anymore?” He asked it casually, like the severity of the conversation they were having wouldn’t mean anything if they just didn’t acknowledge it that way.

Wendy thought about her parents, for just a split second.

She shook her head, confidently certain, “No…” Cartman nodded and busied himself with pulling more items out of the box. “You never said.” Wendy observed quietly. Cartman put everything down and looked up from the box of memories. “You never said whether or not you believed…” Wendy’s voice trailed off at the end, feeling stupid for even bringing it up again.

Cartman’s brow furrowed as he thought it over, “I’d like to think so,” he admitted staring at Wendy softly, and a little distantly, “I don’t think I want to live in a world where it’s not out there, somewhere, for everyone, eventually.”

It was then that Liane stuck her head through the open doorway and knocked on the frame, scaring the shit out of both of them and making them both jump.

“Just wanted to let you know I’m home,” she announced with a sideways smile on her lips, and Wendy felt like she and her blushing cheeks were being observed under a microscope, “I’m about to make some dinner, Wendy, dear, would you like to stay for dinner?”

“What time is it?” Wendy asked, she felt almost dazed, like she was waking from a strange dream. Eric leaned towards Wendy and presented his watch to her, and she took his wrist to steady it as she looked. It was already 6:15. Wendy could feel Liane watching her with suspicious excitement. Wendy quickly dropped Eric’s hand.

“Um,” Wendy thought about it, looking quickly at Eric for a hint as to what to do, but he was pretending to be preoccupied with something on his phone, a stupid grin mocking her from the corner of his twitching lips. “S-sure. Why not,” she finally decided, ignoring the faint chuckle to her left.

“Wonderful!” Liane sang lightly as she clasped her hands together excitedly, “Dinner will be ready in 20 minutes. Do you want me to call your parents and let them know you are here?”

“No!” Wendy protested, a little too quickly, feeling the ugly sting of guilt grumbling in the pit of her stomach. “No, no, I’ll text them. I’ll let them know.” She explained, calmly.

Liane smiled warmly and walked away, and Wendy tried not to let Eric see her phone screen — where she had typed a message to both of her parents that simply read “eating dinner with a friend”, before falsely elaborating with a simple, “Bebe”.

After twenty minutes, Liane had called them in for dinner, and Wendy helped pack up the many precious items that had been strewn about Eric’s bed before they both headed down the narrow hall.

She helped Eric off of the bed, handing him his crutch, but he insisted that he didn’t need it to walk such a short distance. Wendy leant it against his bed and walked quickly down the hallway, ahead of Eric.

Wendy felt a tug at her wrist as she passed him.

“Thank you,” he whispered timidly, “for… this…” Eric gestured his head in the direction of the box of old photos on his bed.

“No problem,” Wendy insisted, a little bit robotically, but genuine nonetheless, “she seems like a
wonderful woman… I’m glad I met her when I had the chance.” She meant it.

Eric’s eyes quickly filled with tears and he looked up at the ceiling embarrassedly, laughing at himself with an uncomfortable grin as he tried to calm down.

One tear spilled over, and Wendy wiped it away lovingly, before she realized what she was doing. It was one of those weird instinctual moments, where her body seemed to be on autopilot, offering up a familiar gesture that had usually been reserved for Stan (she was also hyper-aware that today was somehow feeling different for her, in comparison to their usual trysts; less physical, and yet somehow more intimate. She had wiped his tears away once before, but that time had felt more platonic, automatic, and the gesture of comfort went almost unnoticed by both of them. This moment, by contrast, felt suffocatingly too intense). His cheeks singed underneath her palm as his brown eyes widened timidly. Her fingers trailed down his hot cheek, before falling limply at his jaw, and landing limply at her side.

Eric took a small step forward, and raised his hand to mimic the affectionate gesture, resting a tender hand against her cheek with a gentleness that seemed so out of character for him, but also completely natural to him. Wendy felt her breath hitch in her throat as he leaned forward. She took a step back, Eric falling just short of her lips as he lurched towards the sudden absence of her.

“Sorry,” she apologized, cowardly.

“Oh… me too,” Eric dismissed.

“It’s just… too personal.. for our arrangement…” She explained as her heart pounded in her chest, screaming at herself in her head.

“Yeah, definitely,” he agreed over-enthusiastically. “S-sorry.”

Wendy stared up at him. She’d only seen under the mask for a second — seen the vulnerable Eric Cartman that the world rarely got to see, but that he had given to her with fearless abandon — but then she fucked it up. Great job, Wendy. Real nice.

A second call for dinner was a welcome distraction, as the two of them awkwardly made their way down the hallway towards the scent of butter and vegetables.

The kids were now sitting side by side on the living room couch, while glassware and silverware clinked pleasantly from the kitchen. Wendy felt a little bit weird not helping with dinner, but Liane had insisted she sit down.

“Sorry we don’t eat at the table…” Cartman apologized quietly while Liane was still in the kitchen fixing her plate. He adjusted his place setting against the TV dinner tray and half-smiled embarrassedly.

“It’s ok,” Wendy insisted with a wave of her hand, “this is chill. Much more relaxing at the end of a long school day than deadly quiet dinners with my parents, I bet.” She chuckled, not completely sure why she’d said all that.

“I hope you like chicken pot pie,” Liane sang daintily as she made her way towards the couch. “If it’s not to your liking I can make you something else, sweetheart, just say so.”

“No! This looks great, it smells delicious!” Wendy insisted with a smile, not wanting Liane to feel like Wendy was ungrateful just because dinner came from a frozen box.
Mrs. Cartman smiled proudly and dug into her meal, pressing play on the TV.

Wendy was honestly grateful for the distraction; not in the mood to answer questions about her life, her studies, or what she was doing over at Mrs. Cartman’s house, hanging out in her son’s bedroom, with the door half-closed, and navigating a constantly confusing and perplexingly evolving relationship that kept her up at night and occupied her dreams.

Mrs. Cartman looked over at Wendy and smiled. Wendy smiled back and shoved pot pie in her mouth.

About an hour later and Liane had already cleared everybody’s plates. She apologized that there was no dessert, but both kids insisted that it was ok.

They had decided to continue watching TV instead, and Liane had gone back to her room, leaving Wendy and Eric alone on the couch, both kids sitting stiffly, keeping to their own personal space, diligently.

After a few more minutes, Wendy felt Eric’s elbow brush up against hers. She thought it was an accident, but then he didn’t move away. She was about to turn and look, see if maybe he was trying to tell her something when she felt the back of his hand brush up against hers ever so lightly, and rest there. Wendy stayed frozen facing forward.

‘This isn’t right’, she thought to herself curling her fingers away from the affectionate gesture, but leaving her hand where it lay pressed against his. This was supposed to be a physical arrangement, a safe distance away from ‘relationship’… and he was getting too comfortable…

Wendy could feel Eric tensing next to her, both of their gazes locked firmly but hazily on the TV in front of them. She could feel him just about to pull away when Wendy stretched her fingers out against the back of his hand. Eric hesitantly straightened out his digits and slowly slipped his fingers in between hers. Tentatively he brushed his thumb against her skin, caressing it softly against her stiff hand.

Wendy swallowed the voice in her head and brought her hand to the other side of his quickly, before she could tell herself it was wrong. Wendy pressed their palms together and intertwined their fingers. Eric’s digits slipped comfortably in between hers and rested there.

Wendy looked at him out of the corner of her eye. He glanced towards her, biting back a smile. He quickly inched closer to her, settling in against her, shoulder to shoulder, before he peeled his dopy gaze away from her and back towards the TV.

And Wendy thought to herself, with an unsteadily beating chest, ’Oh, fuck.’

**Thursday, September 30**

"Hi Wendy."

Wendy closed her locker to find David standing in front of her again.
"Hi David, what's up?" She readjusted the books in her arms and waited.

"I just wanted to say, I didn't know about you and Cartman, so I'm sorry if me asking you out was weird. You don't have to explain, I totally understand—"

"I'm sorry, me and who?" Wendy asked, not sure if she was hearing things.

"Cartman. I mean, right? I saw the way you guys were flirting after school yesterday, and I just assumed... I mean, you guys left together, right—?"

Wendy slammed her locker shut and began to walk away, before turning right on her heels and marching back up to David.

She tried to think of something to say, but she was too frazzled to do anything but stammer and let out a high-pitched, frustrated groan before turning on her heels and marching down the hallway to her last class to wait out the final hours before she could scan hallways again in search of four idiots.

“Eric Cartman!” Wendy yelled from across the hall, as she stormed her way over towards him and his friends.

“Uh-oh, what did he do this time?” Kyle sneered with an entertained smirk on his face.

“I didn’t do anything!” Cartman snapped defensively, turning his body slightly like he wasn’t sure if he should run or face her.

“Hi, Wendy!” Stan jogged up to her with a hopeful look on his face, walking next to her as she made her way towards the group for just a few steps in a hopeful move that just came off as awkward.

Wendy clicked her tongue in disapproval as she waved him off and stood in front of the other three.

“We need to talk.” Wendy folded her arms and addressed Eric, waiting.

“What’s up Wend... bitch?” Kyle and Kenny groaned disapprovingly at Cartman’s lousy, unnecessarily rude and panicked greeting.

“Nice. Glad you got that out of your system,” Wendy snarled sarcastically and rolled her eyes. Cartman eyed his surroundings nervously. “I need to talk to you about something.”

“What about, Wihndy? I’m kind of in the middle of a conversation with Stan. You see Stan is right here, in front of both of us, right Wendy?”

“Oh my GOD, Cartman,” Kenny scolded with tired judgement, like he found the whole thing as ridiculous as Wendy did. “Look, we’ll make it easy for you, you don’t go anywhere, and we’ll just leave.” Kenny turned and walked out the front doors of the school, waving over his shoulder without looking back. Kyle followed suit, ushering Stan away with an arm around his shoulders, just in case he planned on continuing to stand there and stare at his ex-girlfriend dumbly forever.

“I think he knows.” Cartman whispered as his eyes followed Stan out the door.

“That’s what I need to talk to you about,” Wendy helped walk Cartman to a nearby bench and sat
down next to him, “We have to tell him.”

“No!” Cartman jumped back like he'd been startled by a snake.

“What are you so scared of?” She chuckled, “Do you not want people to know you're with me?” Wendy’s eyebrows furrowed sadly.

“Wendy,” Eric lowered his voice to a throaty whisper. Hearing her name said in his voice like that sent chills through her body, “I think you know that’s not true.” He shot her a pointed look.

He was right: if anything it was Wendy who could benefit from not being seen with him… but she would never tell him that, at least not in any more specific ways than her actions had already shown, before she realized that she really doesn't care what people think anymore.

“He deserves to know.” Wendy whispered. The hallways were emptying now, but Wendy was still being careful in case anybody was listening.

“It’s none of his business,” Cartman whispered back robotically.

“You don’t think the guy I dated for six years deserves to know that one of his best friends is now dating his ex-girlfriend?”

Cartman’s expression scrunched in confusion, “Ok, couple of things: first, you didn’t ‘date for six years’, ok, you dated on-and-off-whenever-you-damn-well-felt-like-it for six years.” Wendy tried not to admit to herself that this actually was a more accurate way to describe her relationship with Stan, “and second... did you just say we were dating?” Cartman smirked, teasingly.

“Figure of speech.” Wendy explained, dismissively.

"Uh-huh." He smiled, disbelievingly.

"Don't." She put her foot down, sternly.

He only shrugged.

“Ok fine. So we don’t tell Stan.” Wendy agreed. “Unless there's a way he could find out from somebody else. As long as nobody knows, it can’t get back to him.”

Wendy conveniently let out the part about how David definitely at least suspected that something was going on, but she told herself that she would just talk to him later, and she trusted him to let it go if she asked him to.

“Right, as long as nobody else knows, we’re good.” Cartman agreed quickly.

Wendy paused.

“Say that again, but slower.” Wendy narrowed her eyes threateningly. They popped wide open again when she realized exactly what he meant, and his silence proved her point. “Who did you tell?!” She hissed.

“Kenny.” He answered flatly.

“You told Kenny?!” Wendy whined, already feeling a stress headache coming on.

“I tell Kenny everything!” Cartman whispered frenetically.
Just then a red-headed freshman walked by, staring at the arguing couple strangely.

“We can’t talk about this here,” Wendy whispered. Cartman snorted, laughing at the paranoia written all over her face. She glared at him.

“Wendy, I really don’t think anybody cares if we’re seen talking to one another after school,” he chuckled, condescendingly. Wendy thought about David.

“I care.” Wendy snapped. Eric’s face fell slightly. “You know that’s not what I meant.” She assured him, dismissively. “Just... follow me.”

Wendy and Cartman walked out into the parking lot towards her car.

As Cartman twisted his body to put his crutch in the back seat, he noticed a familiar album laying in the cupholders.

“Aw, have you been listening to our song?” He cooed sarcastically.

“Which one is our song?” Wendy asked flatly as she closed her car door.

“Eh, any of them.” He shrugged, buckling his seatbelt.

Wendy turned the car on with a sputter, and music burst to life through the speakers; a song that neither of them would admit was actually entirely accurate in describing both sides of their relationship.

‘China all the way to New York, I can feel the distance getting close.’

“Wow... that’d be a shitty choice.” Cartman laughed dryly.

"Yeah", Wendy agreed, not knowing whether or not to turn it off or leave it on, so she settled for awkwardly lowering the volume a few notches instead.

“Well, I guess we don’t need a song, because we’re not dating, right?” Cartman piped up, with a flat drawl.

“Right.” Wendy agreed, before clumsily offering, “...I guess we could say that’s our ‘album’?” She shrugged. Wendy turned briefly to look at Cartman, who had a huge, entertained smile on his face.

“Right.” He agreed with a chuckle.

Instead of talking, Wendy and Eric were sitting on the edge of Eric's bed, hands and lips all over each other, as anyone could have predicted. Eric had jokingly played the last track of 'their album' on his phone but they’d gotten distracted before he could turn it off, so drums and pianos played in the background out of sync with their beating hearts.

However, that's not why they were supposed to be here right now.

Wendy was about to speak when Eric's mouth latched against her neck, trailing tongue, lips, and teeth down to her collarbone. Fuck it, they can talk later. His hot breath sighed against her skin as she pulled off her sweater and began unbuttoning her collared shirt. Eric rested his forehead
against her collarbone, and paused for a second, just breathing deeply against the scent of Wendy's skin as she peeled off the cloth, and his hands gravitated towards her bare hips.

But Cartman remained still, and Wendy suspected something was definitely on his mind.

"Hey," she cooed encouragingly, tipping his chin up with her forefinger until they were eye to eye. "What's going on?" She wondered gently.

"Nothing," he mumbled unconvincingly.

"Eric," Wendy insisted, "I know something's wrong with you, ok?"

"Oh yeah?" He challenged, weakly.

Wendy nodded. "12 years and you think I don't know you?" Wendy chuckled, and Cartman smiled and exhaled a small laugh out of his nose. "What is it?" Wendy cooed, ignoring the way her sentence cut off awkwardly, right before the instinctual 'babe' could worm its way from her lips.

Eric leaned forward slightly and pulled Wendy back towards him.

Gutted lyrics lilted quietly in the background: 'And I hate elevator music / The way we fight / The way I'm left here silent'

He broke the kiss suddenly, and murmured desperate words against her lips: "Be with me."

“What?” Wendy pulled back slightly to look at him confusedly.

“Be with me.” He repeated strongly, though his confidence did not appear so unwavering on his face as it had in his voice.

“I already am?” Wendy asked confusedly, though she knew exactly what he meant.

“No, you're not. Not completely.” He clarified, with a pointed expression carved in stone.

Wendy sighed, pityingly.

“Eric—”

“Wendy, I know you feel it too.” He insisted with a desperate whisper. He smiled, just barely, “I know you, remember?”

'Oooh these little earthquakes'

Tears filled Wendy's eyes, for reasons she was not entirely sure of.

“We can’t,” she whispered tearfully.

'Doesn't take much to rip us into pieces'

“Why?! Because Stan wouldn’t like it? Fuck Stan!” Cartman declared, a slight edge of panic to his voice.

“It’s... it's more complicated than that!” Wendy insisted, though when she searched her mind for reasons why it was so, she could come up with none.
“Not for me it isn’t.” He declared firmly. Eric stared into Wendy's eyes steadily, as she stared back with uncertainty.

"What's so wrong about what we've got now?" She asked with a wounded tone.

"Nothing," Eric insisted gently, running his hands down Wendy's arms comfortably, "but it's just... the rules and the limits... I want to be closer to you than that... but how can I be if you won't let me hold you—"

"Eric..." Wendy interrupted with an exhausted sigh.

"—or kiss you goodbye—"

"Stop it..."

"—Or talk about how I feel about you—"

"There's a reason I have those boundaries in place!"

"—yeah, because you're afraid to get close to me, but I'm tired of being afraid that you're just gonna leave!"

Eric's words stung Wendy down to her core. He closed his lips, as if to prevent anymore unsolicited confessions from plummeting out of his mouth, and waited. Now that it was out there, there was nothing else to say. Cartman slammed his finger on the pause button so they could talk seriously, without distractions, and the silence engulfed them.

Wendy pursed her lips, and tipped her chin down as she tried to hide tears that were beginning to cloud her vision. "Then I think we need to break up." She uttered quietly.

"What?!" Cartman gasped, equally as confused as he was horrified.

"This was good, Cartman, this was so good," Wendy promised honestly, as tears began to fill his eyes now, "but if we can't be on the same page about it—"

"Wendy, we're having a conversation, not every argument has to end in a breakup, slow down a second." Cartman insisted calmly, as a single tear fell past his cheeks. Wendy stood up, but he grabbed a hold of her hand and begged desperately, frustratedly, "Stop running away, sit down with me and talk this through!" Wendy looked down at him, heart breaking as he softly whispered, "Please." And for a second, she was almost afraid that she would walk out forever, per her usual pattern. Instead, she resisted it.

Wendy sat back down, and Cartman sighed in relief.

"We can't do this... in exactly this way anymore," Wendy explained her side of things, "...we either need to tell Stan so we can stop worrying and holding back... or break this off."

"That's it?" Cartman questioned frustratedly, "We either tell Stan about something that is no big deal, and none of his business, or we stop seeing each other — no matter how casual it has been, no matter how many times you make it crystal f*cking clear that this all means nothing to you—?!"

"It means nothing to you, you said so yourself—!" Wendy retorted shrilly.

"When?" He demanded to know, breathlessly.

"When we first agreed to the terms!" Wendy shrieked in frustration.
"And how did you gather I said that?" Cartman asked calmly, through clenched teeth.

"By agreeing in the first place!"

"I agreed because I didn't want to lose you!" He cried out. Wendy froze. Eric continued, "Wendy, I would accept anything you would give me, just to have you, even for a few hours in a cramped car with your body putting pressure against the thigh of my dislocated knee." He chuckled. Wendy's eyes filled with tears again that fell down her cheeks instantly, "Don't you get it? I want you. But since you didn't want all of me, I would take any part of you I could get. Anything you would give me. And I never asked for more because I was grateful for what I did have, and I knew that if I did, you could take it all away from me in an instant." Cartman's calm confession dwindled down to a whisper. "But, Wendy," He sighed her name breathlessly, "I'm sorry, but it is killing me, always wondering when you're going to finally come to your senses and realize you could do so much better—"

Wendy cut him off, kissing him deeply as a tear of hers melted against his cheek.

Before she had even fully pulled away from him, a tentative hand reached up to gently press against her cheek, before wiping away Wendy's tears with a somewhat awkward hesitance, like he was not sure how to comfort her (or if he even should). Eric's other hand quickly reached up to caress her other cheek, wiping his thumb along her cheekbones with only slightly more confidence, and only slightly less uncertainty. Wendy wrapped her fingers around his wrist and tipped her chin forward to rest her forehead against his.

She didn't open her eyes again until she felt Eric reach up, and sweetly kiss her on her forehead, alarmingly tenderly, so much so that it made something deep inside Wendy ache painfully. Wendy would have described the affection as 'uncharacteristic', but she was starting to learn that maybe that was not entirely the case; and it was then that Wendy was met with a horrifying realization that she may actually enjoy Cartman for more than just a rough make-out session, and a phenomenal third-baseman.

"I want to give you more..." She admitted honestly, shaking her head, before swallowing her pride and whispering, "I'm just scared."

"I know," he nodded intertwining their hands slowly and carefully, "I'm sorry, I know," he apologized sympathetically, before searching deeply in Wendy's eyes, "but it scares me too." He whispered with a breathless chuckle — and it was nice to hear she was not alone. It took a few moments for Wendy to answer.

"Ok." Wendy readjusted the way she was sitting on the bed, so that her legs folded up underneath her as she faced Eric Cartman. "So no more boundaries." She agreed. He nodded happily. "But no more commitment, either. This is still casual, we just don't have to limit ourselves anymore."

"That's all I want." Cartman agreed eagerly.

"And we won't tell Stan yet." Wendy compromised (although now her feelings had changed on the subject, anyway — suddenly the idea of actually sitting Stan down just to tell him that his friends were caught up in a lust-filled whirlwind seemed as stupid as it did terrifying).

"Wendy," Eric sighed with a grateful smile.

"Just don't make me regret this." Wendy cut him off shortly, staring him down before murmuring softly, "either of us".
Eric shook his head back and forth fervently, staring Wendy deeply in the eyes before declaring confidently, "I could never regret this."

He was looking at her in that way again — further intensified by the invasive existence of a personal connection, developed quickly, but deeply, over a span of only two weeks.

Wendy fell into his gaze and drowned in it. She leaned forward and kissed him, and he kissed her back with impassioned desperation.

The two fell into each other, never parting lips as Eric dragged himself and his casted leg backwards, not stopping until he reached a wall.

Wendy followed him closely, straddling his waist as he settled against the headboard and tangled his fingers in her hair.

Wendy hated comparing Cartman to Stan, but between the two, Cartman was attentive and passionate, whereas Stan always seemed to just be going through the motions, however pleasant Wendy had found those motions before she’d known any better.

"You're right." Wendy's words hitched as Eric's lips moved hungrily against her throat.

"Always, but what exactly are you referring to this time?" Eric chuckled against her skin.

Wendy pushed against Eric's shoulders and he leaned back to look at her.

"I could never regret this, either."

Eric smiled in ecstatic relief and leaned forward to kiss her. When he pulled away he whispered in her ear, wicked promises and beautiful vows of surrender.

The way it seemed to drip from his mouth so easily, like honey, it was disgusting. It was vile. Wendy wanted to hear it again.

The next thing Wendy knew, she was lying completely naked in Cartman’s bed, next to a completely naked Cartman.

She glanced over at him, exchanging an overwhelmingly concerned look that said they were thinking the exact same thing.

“We have to tell Stan.”

“We gotta tell Stan.”

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to point out a few other lines from the album that I thought stood out for this chapter, but didn’t get used

Girl - "She's been everybody else's girl / maybe one day she'll be her own"
Winter - "When you gonna make up your mind / When you gonna love you as much as
I do"
(nobody 'loves' anybody right now, but you get the point)
**China - "Sometimes I think you want me to touch you / How can I when you build the Great Wall around you"
(And maybe) Precious Things - "So you can make me come / that doesn't make you Jesus"

**This one I think is the most relevant (and it works for either character). I kind of sneakily mentioned it without being obvious, mentioning the opening line of this songs without cheescily choosing this specific line in the story

***Also, there's a B side track from this album that's literally called Song For Eric, but it's not relevant. (Or maybe just the line "Fair boy your eyes haunt me" is). I just found out about it as I'm editing and I thought it was an interesting coincidence lol
AW, SICK, DUDE!

Chapter Summary

Stan learns the truth about his ex-girlfriend and his friend.

(Also, in case the timeline is confusing, this takes place the day after Kevin comes home, which is also the day after Wendy and Eric agreed that they should probably tell Stan)

POV - Stan.

"Anyway, so the team has been training the new kids already, since they only have the two alternates, and apparently Firkle is super quick on his feet." Kyle chatted, leaning against the raining as Stan sat on the front steps of the school and copied Kyle's homework for Bio. Stan was actually pretty good at the subject (especially the chapters on marine life), but he'd just forgotten to complete it on time, as usual. He was cleaning his room and found some pictures of him and Wendy, so he'd spent the rest of the night sulking over her, as usual. "I mean, Ike's a good study, but Firkle apparently is a beast — I heard he reduced one of the seniors to stutters and stammers when it was time for their rebuttal. And that's just a practice." Kyle chuckled. Stan watched a far off look pass over Kyle's face, but it was gone as soon as it came, and the conversation resumed. "The points he made were good, but Ike said that watching him deliver them was like watching Muhammad Ali in the ring."

"Damn, that good?" Stan mused, writing lab summaries ferociously.

"Mhm, just straight savagery." Kyle confirmed.

"I guess ferocious condescension goes a long way at debate matches." Stan chuckled, picturing the short and skinny freshman scowling and rolling his eyes at the competition until they felt small and misinformed.

"Who knew." Kyle shrugged.

Stan held Kyle's emerald gaze for a second longer. Something seemed wrong, but Kyle pretended to scan the schoolyard and squinted into the not-very-bright-morning as a way of breaking the telepathic connection that Stan has always had with him. Something was definitely wrong.

Stan was about to say something when he saw Cartman speeding down the walkway (as fast as he could with one crutch), eyes on the ground.

"Hi, Cartman," Stan waved half-heartedly to get his attention.

"Gotta take a shit." Cartman grumbled as he flew past them.

"...Ok..." Stan stared off after the quickly retreating figure, hobbling away, past the boys' bathrooms.

...
Stan looked back at Kyle, who was staring off into the distance, leant against the railing, arms and ankles crossed with a distracted concern etched across his face. Stan stared at him for a moment longer.

When he realized he wasn't going to get a reaction, he shrugged and packed up his bag. He'd finish copying Kyle's homework at lunch. When he stood up, Kyle still seemed to be lost in obsessive thought.

"Hey." Stan nudged him with his elbow. Kyle's gaze followed the awkwardly comforting gesture back up to Stan's pitying half-smile.

"What." Kyle asked flatly.

Stan nudged him again. "You're sad."

"I'm not sad." Kyle denied, pushing off of the concrete railing and walking around to the front of the steps to collect his backpack from the ground.

Stan chuckled with disbelief, "I think at this point I'm able to tell exactly how you're feeling just by looking at you, Kyle."

The redhead slung his backpack over his shoulder and stilled, preoccupying himself with the woven cloth straps at the end of his bag before turning sad eyes back to Stan with the intensity of fire, and the softness of melted wax.

"Maybe not." He uttered softly. Green eyes locked Stan in a conflicted gaze — like Kyle was daring him to read his mind, and also begging for him not to understand.

It confused Stan for a second, but he quickly brushed it off. "Are you still ok with leaving? I'm sure Wendy will take you back on the team if you asked her." Kyle blinked, as if awoken from a trance, but the movement was so subtle, Stan only picked up on it, subconsciously.

The redhead quickly looked at the ground and shook his head, joking with a forced humor, "I don't want to talk to Wendy anymore than you do right now, dude."

"Point taken," Stan chuckled flatly.

The first bell rang and Stan was about to march his slacker ass to class on time for once when he saw Kenny strolling his way down the sidewalk, dragging his feet like they each weighed an extra five pounds. His hair was a fucking mess and the bags under his eyes were deep and purple.

“Damn. Who killed you last night?” Stan joked.

“What?” Kenny drawled, clearly not in the fucking mood.

Stan looked at Kyle for a second, just to see if he was also seeing what Stan was seeing. “You look like death, dude.” He explained to Kenny, gently.

“Like the walking dead.” Kyle agreed, nodding flatly.

“Oh.” Was all Kenny said as he took his phone out of his pocket to use as a mirror to fix his messy hair.

Stan and Kyle looked at each other.
Kenny rolled his eyes. “I got no sleep last night, and then fucking Hurricane McCormick wreaked havoc in our house until 4 in the morning. I practically didn’t sleep.”

Stan nodded sympathetically. He’d heard this story before. They all have.

“…What happened?” Kyle’s concern was overshadowed by the second ring of the morning bell.

So much for getting to class on time.

At lunch Cartman was nowhere to be found. He claimed he had a project to work on, but Stan still felt like he was avoiding him for some reason.

And then Wendy walked up to their table and stood right in front of Stan.

"Meet me outside after school. We need to talk." And that was all she said to him.

She turned on her heels and walked out of the cafeteria.

Stan's heart did a full-on backflip in his chest as his imagination ran away with him, mystery giving way to scenarios he found more and more likely the longer he pondered them.

Stan turned to look at his friends to see if they had just witnessed the lunchroom miracle that had just taken place.

Kenny only shrugged, detachedly, not nearly as excited as Stan was hoping he'd be.

Kyle wouldn't look up from his tray.

In the middle of his last class, Stan got a text notification:

**From Wendy:  Cartman and I will meet you by the big tree.**

Cartman? Why the hell did Cartman need to be there?

Stan's teacher yelled at him to put his phone away, and he readily complied, not wanting it to be confiscated again, like last time.

The whole rest of the day, Stan was focused only on theories as to why Wendy needed to meet him after school. His pounding heart started feeling less like butterflies and more like indigestion.

After school, Stan felt an uneasy twisting and turning in his gut. Something just didn’t feel right.

He waited right outside the side of the school, right where Wendy said she’d be. Part of Stan hoped Wendy was here to apologize; to grovel before his feet and beg him to take her back. But that wouldn’t explain why Cartman had to be here too… The whole thing seemed suspicious…
Stan tried his best not to let his brain go the only logical explanation.

“Stan!” Ah, her voice! It was so beautiful, high pitched like a bird’s song.

He turned around to face her. She looked so beautiful. Wait… what was she doing?

“Eric! Come on, we have to do this now!” Wendy was pulling Cartman by the elbow over to where Stan stood confused, his head tilted like a lost puppy.

“What—”

“We have something to tell you.” She cut him off.

Stan blinked blankly. “Ok.”

“Sit down, hon.”

Ew, ‘hon’. Wendy only called him that when they were broken up. It was a term of endearment that kept him a safe distance away from ‘babe’.

“Ok.” He repeated, sitting down on a nearby park bench that faced the football field.

Wendy began. “Hon, listen,” Stan cringed, “we have something we need to tell you… and I want you to hear us out before you freak out, ok?” Stan nodded, brain on autopilot, although he could definitely not promise that he wasn’t already freaking out completely.

“Um…” She fidgeted, her sense of leadership suddenly faltering. “Eric?” She offered. Cartman’s eyes flicked towards Stan like a deer in headlights, then back to Wendy, then back to Stan.

“...Ok.” Cartman agreed after a long pause. What is happening? “Stan… you know your my best friend… so I wanted to make sure you heard this from me… and well, Wendy is Wendy and… she wanted to make sure you heard it from her, too, so… here we are… and, well… Stan… you see…”

“We’d been spending a lot of time together, Eric and I,” Wendy took over the conversation, ”and it turns out he’s not as intolerable as you’d think.”

“And Wendy’s not really a horrible bitch, go on.” Eric gestured for Wendy to continue as she glared at him, his face innocent.

“Anyway,” Wendy snarled at Cartman, before turning a pitying look back to Stan, “We have started... sort of... seeing each other, and we’re going to continue seeing each other, so we wanted you to hear it from us first before rumors begin to spread.”

Stan felt like his brain was exploding. It must’ve shown on his face because Wendy reached for his shoulder concernedly.

“Stan?” She shook him slightly, as if waking him up. “Stan, say something.”

“You two are dating?”

What followed next was an indecipherable mess of unintelligible sounds: Cartman scoffing and dismissing the claims with uncomfortable chuckles and sounds of disgust, and Wendy mumbling about the semantics of what ‘dating’ entails, all without ever really saying anything aside from some troubling key words and a bunch of ‘um’s and ‘well, you see’s.
“Somebody form an actual sentence!” Stan yelled at the two of them with a panicked shriek.

“Don’t.” Wendy barked at Cartman, who opened his mouth immediately. He backed down like a trained dog. What is HAPPENING?!

“Stan, hon,” Wendy stepped forward, putting on her best formal façade, “The short answer is no, we are not dating, but we have been seeing each other, and we both agreed you needed to know before you heard it from someone else. That’s it.”

“Not dating, just fucking.” Cartman explained calmly, like he actually thought that would help.

“AH!” Stan screamed in horror, eyes bulging wide disgustedly.

“Do you really think that’s helping?” Wendy chastised Cartman.

“No.” He chortled in amusement, watching the expression on Stan’s face grow more and more confused.

“Stan?” Wendy turned back to him carefully, before snapping her fingers in his face to get him to look her in the eyes, “Are you gonna be ok?”

Stan’s heart sank. She was really serious.

His expression relaxed into numbness as he forced himself to calm down.

“Yeah!” He chirped, in a way that came off much more excitable than it did calm.

“...Yeah?” Wendy questioned him skeptically.

“Oh, absolutely, mhm,” Stan assured breathlessly, nodding his head. He was starting to feel nauseous.

Wendy and Cartman shared a concerned look before turning back to Stan.

“...Are you sure?” Cartman double-checked.

“Uh-huh.” Stan insisted, already backing away from them, “This is great. You guys are great, I gotta go, I’m... just gonna go find Kyle, perfect, yes, find Kyle, I’m supposed to help him with... something, bye!”

Stan heard them calling after him, but he couldn’t register what they were saying with the way his head was swimming: Cartman and Wendy, it was barbaric!

Stan broke into a run as he went to go find Kyle and Kenny behind the school.
A Dire Mistake (And Not Yours To Make)

Chapter Summary

[summary redacted... for drama lol]

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

POV - Kenny

“Love is dead, Kyle.”

“Oh, boy…”

Kenny rolled his eyes at Stan — who was borderline catatonic, draped like a depressed ragdoll across the length of a warped park bench, his head propped up against the side of Kyle’s thigh as he moped. His left arm dangled with dead weight off the edge of the rotting wood, carelessly squashing a patch of grass underneath his heavy limb. Kyle was mindlessly staring down at his friend with his hand clamped motionlessly around Stan’s limp shoulder.

“No, Kenny, it’s true!” Stan countered defiantly, “Wendy broke up with me, and now she’s dating Cartman…” he spat the name like a cursed word, “and I may never love again. I mean if I can’t work things out with Wendy…” Stan’s voice trailed off as he shrugged, “I’m going to die alone.” Stan declared with absolute certainty.

“No you’re not.” Kyle promised, an edge of defeat in his voice.

“I am… And that’s ok.” Stan nodded against Kyle’s thigh. Kyle muttered annoyances under his breath and Kenny rolled his eyes before Stan continued with his melodrama. “Nobody will ever love me again, and I just need to accept that now before I grow old wondering why I never ever got laid past the age of seventeen.”

Kenny and Kyle shot each other matching looks of annoyance.

“God, such a drama queen.” Kenny complained as he sunk against the park bench, lifting up Stan’s feet in order to sit.

“I am not.” Stan argued with minimal effort, craning his neck to look at Kenny by his feet. “I’m realistic… These are just facts.” Stan shuffled onto his side in a sort of fetal position, still using Kyle a pillow and Kenny as a footrest. “Just you wait and see, we all die alone some day. Wallowing in darkness… I’m just destined to live alone for the rest of my life until that time. I’ll probably die alone in an apartment with a bunch of cats… I bet nobody will come looking for me for a few days after it happens… I bet the cats will start to eat me…”

“Wow.” Kenny scoffed, genuinely impressed and mildly entertained at the ridiculousness of the inner-workings of Stan’s brain.
“Stan, that’s statistically unrealistic.” Kyle reasoned with annoyance. Stan sighed loudly before declaring, in a whine that would make the goth kids jealous, “You guys just don’t see the world the way I do… for what it really is… you just don’t understand…” Stan began picking at a stray thread on Kyle’s corduroys distractedly.

“Stan,” Kyle continued flatly, visibly uncomfortable at Stan’s repetitive touch, “you do realize that in the 70 some odd years that you’re bound to be alive after this, it’s statistically improbable that you will never meet someone else…ok?” Kyle’s matter-of-fact tone softened as Stan tilted his head to look up at Kyle with puppy dog eyes. Kyle continued, “it’s gonna happen again for you… it’s just not gonna happen today.”

Kenny shot look at Kyle. The redhead’s eyes was soft, but his jaw was tense. It almost looked like his expression was carved out of wood: hard and unreal. Kenny tried to get his attention. It was ignored. Eyes only for Stan. It broke Kenny’s heart.

“If Wendy doesn’t love me, no one will love me.” Stan uttered, darkly. Kenny winced on Kyle’s behalf.

“We still love you.” Kyle murmured, softly. The tone of his voice and the pain on his face made Kenny’s chest ache in a horrible way. He shot Kyle a sympathetic glance and was met with stiff shoulders and a familiarly detached stare: a wall of stone — one built up deep, and impenetrable, sturdy from years of Kyle expertly hiding his truest feelings. It made Kenny feel sick. He bent forward and leaned against his elbows in an attempt to push down his sudden onset of nausea.

Stan just scoffed, “yeah, whatever.”

“You know what?” Kenny stood up suddenly, knocking Stan’s feet to the ground as he did so.

Kenny waved his hand around in the air. “I’m sick of this. Quit being a fucking downer every time Wendy breaks up with you. It’s annoying! You don’t belong together, you never have, and you should never be together again. It’s done! Move on! I’m sick of seeing you make yourself sick over her!”

Stan sat up slowly, eyebrows knit together in confusion as Kenny continued, “It’s not fair to her, it’s not fair to yourself, and it’s not fair to us who have to always, always pick up the pieces when you refuse to help yourself! Get. Over. It.”

Stan looked like he had just been hit with a truck, but Kenny couldn’t stop himself. So he continued, talking over Stan as he began to protest weakly, “No, stop, I’m sick of seeing you sulk, I’m sick of worrying about you, and I’m sick of seeing what you do to Kyle every time you ‘relapse’ back to that manipulative bitch.” Stan turned his head to stare at Kyle, who was hanging his head in defeat and eyeing Kenny carefully, warningly, silently begging him not to say anything he’d regret. “It kills him, Stan, and he just takes it because he loves you, we all love you, and you don’t even realize it!”

An uncomfortable silence fell between them all as each boy looked at the other, processing all of what had just been said.

Kenny felt a horrible headache coming on, whether that be from lack of sleep or stress from this dramatic performance from Stan, he couldn't say.
“Is that… true?” Stan muttered, a new kind of sadness polluting his voice.

“Yeah, dude.” Kenny sighed exhaustedly.

Stan slumped his shoulders in genuine defeat.

“Kyle?”

Stan turned towards his best friend, blue eyes wide and vulnerable. Kyle opened and closed his mouth like a goldfish, looking desperately between Kenny and Stan. When he finally did speak, he chose his words very carefully.

“Yes, Stan… I’m sorry, but we all feel the same way about this… Kenny’s right, we all love you and it hurts us all to see you put yourself in this position over and over again…” Kyle’s voice trailed off, but his eyes burned into Kenny.

Stan sat there, nodding his head and processing this information until he finally spoke up.

“Well… I mean… it’s not like you really have a say in my love life… I mean, it’s my life, right… so I guess… it’s irrelevant…” Stan rationalized coldly. Kyle nodded. Kyle never concedes.

That was the last straw.

Unfortunately, lack of sleep had impaired his judgement, and what was meant to be an off-handed mutter had come out louder, and more revealing than he’d intended as Kenny scoffed rudely,

“Yeah, irrelevant, to the guy who’s been in love with you since seventh grade…”

It took him a second to realize what he had just admitted out loud.

Kyle’s face paled and his eyes glared daggers at Kenny, but the damage had already been done. Kenny’s eyes widened and he felt his own face drain of all color.

“In love…” Stan questioned confusedly.

“W-wait… no… I didn’t mean to say that…” Kenny covered his mouth with his hands but it was too late.

Stan looked around at his friends, hoping to clear things up, a look of pleasant denial on his face, "No… I mean, Kyles loves me but he’s not in love with me… right dude?” Stan questioned meekly.

Kyle couldn’t respond. Stan dragged his gaze back to Kenny — the look on his face telling Stan everything he needed to know.

“You… you, you… like me?” Stan turned to face Kyle slowly, leaning away from him tentatively as he did. "You’re… gay?"

“You absolute fucking bastard, Kenny.” Kyle spat under his breath, tears now glossing over his fuming stare.

“Kyle, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to!” Kenny pleaded, his voice muffled by his gloved hands.

Stan’s head swung back and forth in disbelief as he attempted to process this new information.

“You have… feelings for me? And have… for years? And you didn’t tell me?”
“Stan… it’s no big deal.” Kyle laughed dryly. “Listen, I can explain… I didn’t tell you because I wasn’t—”

“No… wait…” Stan held up a hand to stop Kyle’s unwanted explanation. Kyle froze, and Kenny’s stomach churned inside him, “Kyle, it kinda is a big deal, it… i-it-it feels like a big deal.”

“Why?” Kyle folded his arms, jaw set, ready to argue.

“We don’t keep secrets from each other, Kyle!” Stan yelled, unexpectedly. It almost startled Kenny.

“Ha… Ok.” Kyle scoffed and rolled his eyes, which only seemed to upset Stan more.

Kyle’s confrontational stare zeroed in on Stan, and Stan reciprocated. Kyle clenched his jaw tightly, blinking back tears as he explained, “Stan… you have to understand why I didn’t tell you, right? I thought it would make things weird, and I was right… ok? So I’m sorry, but I never wanted you to know.”

Kenny had regretted every word he said. He wished he could take them all back, but it was just too late.

Stan started visibly spiraling out of control in exactly the overreaction anybody could have predicted from this situation. “This is… this is not supposed to happen… first Wendy and Cartman, now… you and… you never told me—”

“Well, what do you do with that information, huh?” Kyle gestured to Stan wildly, “Clearly you’re not ready to handle it—”

Kenny shot an apologetic look towards Kyle before trying his own hand at reasoning with Stan in the midst of a freakout. “Um… Stan, calm down, it’s really not a big deal, you’re making it something it’s not—”

“I can’t… I can’t deal with losing Wendy, and now I feel like I’m losing you.” Stan admitted honestly as his breathing quickened.

“Well you’re not.” Kyle pointed out, a little condescendingly. “Just calm down a little and you’ll see—”

“This was so much less complicated before…” Stan lamented quietly, mostly to himself.

“…Well it’s not like you can help these things…” Kyle defended himself, quietly.

“Yes you can, Kyle, you just push it down until it goes away!” Stan insisted, manically.

Kyle laughed, “Wow, that’s incredible.”

“What?” Stan asked, half daring challenge, half vacant question.

“You’re not being logical.” Kyle uttered slowly under his breath, hands balling into fists.

“I’m not…” Stan scoffed.

“Yeah.” Kyle fumed.

“How?”
“I never wanted you to know!” Kyle’s voice cracked as he cried out desperately.

“I’m sorry… I’m sorry…” Kenny felt his own eyes gloss over with guilty tears as he apologized to both of them.

“How can you ask that of me?” Kyle’s narrowed eyes filled with tears as he gestured wildly and puffed out his chest. “‘Push it down’, do you know how HARD I have tried to do that?! God, Stan, I have TRIED EVERY DAMN DAY!” Kyle was close to sobbing by now.

“Kyle, I’m sorry, I didn’t know…” Stan sympathized softly. He always had a soft spot for Kyle and hated seeing him upset.

Kyle took a deep breath and wiped angry tears from his eyes. “Yeah, well… as we’ve established, I never told you.”

“I’m sorry!” Kenny whispered tearfully, though neither seemed to hear him.

Stan’s blue eyes glossed over as Kyle’s face grew wet with silent tears.

“I’m sorry, I’m not mad, I’m not mad, Kyle.” Stan’s voice softened sweetly, as he approached Kyle tentatively, “Just… I don’t know what to say, ok?”

“You don’t know what to say?” Kyle growled though clenched teeth.

“Yeah, I don’t know what to say!” Stan yelled combatively at Kyle’s argumentativeness.

“Well, don’t say anything!” Kyle exclaimed, “What could you possibly have to say besides, maybe, ‘sorry Kyle, I don’t feel the same way’.” Kyle spat bitterly.

Stan made a kind of distressed sound before he squeezed his eyes shut tightly and shook his head back and forth, as if trying to shake bad thoughts out of his head.

“I need time to process this.” Stan announced after a moment of silence.

"Why?” Kyle argued hotly.

“Because if we’re being honest, I kind of feel used.” Stan snapped back matter-of-factly.

Kyle’s face paled.

“Stan, that’s utterly ridiculous—”

“No… This is weird, this… it makes me feel weird…” Stan admitted, shoulders inching up to his ears as he shook his head and backed away from Kyle.

“This!… whatever this reaction you're having right now, that is what’s weird.” Kyle folded his arms, challenging.

“Dude, I slept over at your house…”

“...What?”

Kenny felt sick.

“You slept next to me, for years, while you thought about me… differently.”
Kyle rolled his eyes, though his body language suggested panic.

“Oh, no, Stan, grow up—”

“No, no, no…” Stan physically pushed Kyle away from him as disgust washed over his face, head shaking back and forth confusedly as a hush fell over the argument, “you want to FUCK me…” and yet you still let me sleep over, sleep in your bed, with you, unknowingly?...” Stan’s expression was growing crueler and crueler by the second. “That’s sick, Kyle.” Stan jerked away from him abruptly, looking between his two friends like he had just found out they had killed his dog. “That’s manipulative… it’s-it’s violating…” Stan was visibly disgusted, and Kyle looked like he was gonna pass out. Kenny felt horror wash over his body.

“Stan…” Kyle pleaded, panicked.

“You’re overreacting!” Kenny blurted out in an ill advised attempt to help.

“Shut up, Kenny!” Kyle yelled.

Stan ignored them both.

“W-was this all just some big plan to... seduce me from the beginning?”

Kyle shook his head back and forth, sinking back down into the bench and collapsing in on himself as he slumped forward in his seat. Stan was screaming at him now, panicked breaths escaping his throat as he began to hyperventilate. “Our friendship, our whole entire friendship, is just a lie? Just an elaborate scheme to get close to me? W-w-we’re only friends… so you can trick me?”

“Stan... no…” Kyle’s face was turning red. Kyle was pleading with Stan now, reaching for him and looking rapidly between his icy eyes as he searched for a little sympathy. “Stan, you can’t believe that, you have to believe me!”

“I want to Kyle…” Stan shrugged sadly, lingering a little too long onto the hand he was prying off of his forearm; lingering, just like Stan always did with Kyle.

Kyle, no longer frustrated or upset, now just boiled with rage as he pled his case.

“You know, it’s not like you never gave me hope.” Kyle snapped furiously, shaking himself free of Stan’s weak grip.

“Oh my God, Kyle!” Stan scolded shrilly, tears welling in his eyes as he shook his head in disbelief.

“You wanna talk about manipulating? You always treated me like your Wendy rebound. You probably don’t even remember since you’re always drunk, and why do you think that is—”

“No.” Stan shouted, horrified, advancing on Kyle. “No, you don’t get to do that.” He hissed, body visibly trembling now. Kyle stood up to face him.

“You know, I’m not the one who calls you to come rescue me, and begs to sleep in your bed with you when I’m feeling sad and lonely! That’s you.” Kyle argued, misdirected anger flying at a mortified Stan. “Face it Stan, you. Use. Me.” A strange look flashed across the brunet’s face as his shoulders collapsed.

“I can’t see you for a while.” Stan declared, coldly. Kyle collapsed against the bench again. He just looked broken, and it seemed to hurt Stan even more than it was hurting Kenny.
Kyle’s expression dropped as he looked around at everywhere but Stan. “And so what. We’re not friends anymore?”

Kenny wanted to throw up. In fact, the world was starting to spin around him, vision tunneling as the destruction of his actions blew up in front of him.

“Stan.” Kyle pleaded, hurt heavily polluting his voice as tears began to flow heavily. “We can just talk about this!” Kyle croaked.

“No. I don’t think we can.” Kyle's face fell at the finality of Stan's cold words. Stan turned away from the redhead and murmured detachedly over his shoulder. "Bye, Kyle."

Kenny shook his head back and forth and took a few steps back from his friends. ‘No, no, no, no, this can’t be happening!’

“STAN!” Kyle wailed in a heartbreaking plea as he reached for Stan, falling onto his knees. “PLEEEASE!” The pain in Kyle’s voice gutted Kenny in the worst way.

‘What have I done?’

Stan gently pried Kyle’s hand off of his arm and let it fall limply to his side.

Stan’s eyes grew distant, hurt dissolving to numb like it always did for Stan.

Kyle collapsed against his heels as Stan delivered the final verbal blow.

“Don’t contact me anymore.”

All Kenny could do was stand there, dumbly, while the whole world shattered to pieces around him. Kyle sat silent, still on the ground, watching Stan walk away. Eventually, Kenny finally managed to make any sort of verbal noise.

“U-um…”

“You're dead to me.” Kyle muttered dangerously, fists shaking, back still turned on Kenny.

"Kyle..." Kenny attempted to apologize, but he was cut off, "Kyle, I'm—"

"IT WASN'T YOUR SECRET TO TELL!" The redhead bellowed as loudly as he possibly could. "I wasn't ready to tell him..." Kyle's voice cracked and trailed off, as he dropped his head into his hands.

Kenny started crying silently. “I know I'm sorry... it was an accident... you have to believe me.”

Kyle stood up.

“You’re dead to me.” Was all Kyle repeated, still not turning around to address the sorry bastard behind him.

Kyle took in a shaky breath, shoulders climbing up to his ears, before stalking off in the opposite direction of where Kenny stood trembling on his feet, jaw rattling, head spinning.

Kenny cried all afternoon, the weight of his remorse crushing down on him until it manifested into
physical pains in his chest, and he was actually having trouble breathing.

He tried texting them, he tried calling them. He even called Cartman, whose reaction was definitely less than helpful, insisting it was just not Kenny’s place to get involved.

‘Butters... I need to call Butters...’

Kenny’s fingers trembled as he clicked on the familiar phone number. He tried to push the thought out of his head that not only had he just ruined the lives of his entire friend group, but he also had the undeserved luxury of a loving and understanding shoulder to cry on, whereas Stan and Kyle no longer did.

Kenny was almost relieved as the phone kept ringing and ringing, a heavy guilt washing over him when he finally heard the click of the receiver and Butters’ cheery voice greet him happily on the other end.

“Well, hiya, Kenny!”

“Leo...” Kenny croaked out, before sobs overtook his voice and he was unable to speak. There was silence on the other end of the line. After a few minutes, Kenny had stopped sniffling long enough to actually be able to hold a decent conversation.

“Tell me what’s wrong... And be honest, mister...” Butters asked, carefully. Kenny pulled the phone away from his face for a second, burying his nose in his elbow as he choked on a sob one more time. He took a deep, shaky breath and brought the phone back to his ear.

“I did something bad...”

Chapter End Notes

There were three chapters in this round of updates that took literally months to write -- and this is one of them. I had a million different drafts, it got very confusing — if you’re wondering what the bid hold-up was, it’s this... and definitely the previous Wendy/Eric chapter for many days as well, and also parts of the Wendy chapter before that.

In regard to Wendy and Eric's relationship, I spent many drafts really digging into fights they might have, sensitive moments they might have, and how the two would interact without coming across as either unbelievable or repetitive. I wanted it to be as natural as possible for the two of them, with just the tiniest hint of a sprinkling of fanfiction melodrama, without it being a big eyeroll like 'welp, that's fan fiction for ya'. I hope I succeeded, fingers crossed, but also I'm happy with it? so like, it's finished in my eyes, lol.

As for this... *moment*, I wanted mmm more like a *dash* of melodrama, like a great big *one shot of vodka* dash -- I kept having to remind myself that although it would probably go down as less of a disaster and more of an awkward fizzle in real life, this is fanfiction, and it’s GO BIG OR GO HOME so i WENT WITH IT. (Plus I feel like if there's any two characters who canonically rile each other up so much that they actually would blow up over something like this, it's these two).
Anyway, I hope you enjoyed Stan’s dramatic ass, and Kyle’s need to lash out when he's feeling attacked. These two always somehow manage to make everything worse, I love it

Thus ends the 11 chapter update dump that I kept meeting delays with, finally, such a relief, some of these have been sitting in my drafts box since August.

I plan to be back with another 3-4 or so fairly shortly.

Until then...
Chapter Summary

Henrietta gets the girls jobs at her place of work, but first they have brunch on Henrietta's back porch.

Chapter Notes

1. FIRST OF ALL let me say thank you to people who have commented and liked this work while I’ve been working on the next update/wishing I had the time to work on the next update. I see you all, and it really meant a lot to me, especially while I was studying for finals in March and really missing the feeling of writing this work. Thanks!

2. AND THEN SECONDLY: Sorry about the delay with this update, I had almost finished writing everything for this round of updates when MY COMPUTER DIED. COMPLETELY. I COULD NOT GET IT TO TURN BACK ON. I had to mail it in to get fixed. For 2 weeks I didn't know whether or not I would lose everything, but luckily I got it back all fixed up with all my files still on it. I spent all week writing and editing in between classes so that I could post today!

3. Don't ask me why, but I felt like I needed to make a cameo appearance for two of my favorite childhood characters! <3

Hope you all enjoy!

Thanks again for commenting and liking! I appreciate y'all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

POV - Ruby

‘Molten liquid metal glimmering, glitter a pigment she’d been teasing pang became craving, oh...’

Ruby took another sip of her orange juice as Henrietta took a long drag off the cigarette that had been smoldering lazily in an ashtray on the porch railing behind her. Her eyelids drifted closed as she blew light gray smoke into the cold morning air. Ruby watched as the wind carried it off on the breeze behind her, away from the cloud of light steam let off by Henrietta’s heavy sigh.

Henrietta turned back around and paused, locking eyes with Ruby, who just now realized she was staring.

“Sorry, it’s a bad habit.” Henrietta apologized insincerely as she picked up her coffee and took a
hearty sip.

Ruby shot her gaze back down to her plate and hastily picked up her bagel.

The girls ate their brunch, listening to the sounds of psychedelic synth rock blaring from the tiny speakers of Henrietta’s laptop.

…

“…do you want to try it?”

Ruby’s eyes shot back up to see Henrietta smirking back at her, having seemingly read Ruby’s mind.

“…I also have a mango juul upstairs if that’s more your speed…”

Ruby turned to look at Karen to gauge her reaction, which was not favorable.

“Don’t, it’s gross.” Karen accused, before realizing what she’d just said, “Sorry…” she apologized to Henrietta half-heartedly.

“That’s ok,” Henrietta shrugged, “it is pretty gross… that’s addictive habits for ya.” Henrietta chuckled, popping a piece of watermelon in her mouth and lowering the volume on Guerrilla Toss by one notch. “So…?” The older teen picked up the cigarette off the ledge behind her and held it loosely in her hand in a vague gesture of offering.

“No thanks, not for me.” Karen insisted, before turning to Ruby with a bossy and demanding glare.

Ruby shot back her best ‘you’re not the boss of me’ eyebrow raise, if only to see how comically angry it made Karen to be disobeyed so blatantly.

Ruby grinned mischievously and reached across the table, amusedly watching Karen roll her eyes the entire time.

Henrietta surrendered the smoldering cigarette in her hand. Ruby’s cold hands could barely feel the warm paper between her fingers. She held it up to her lips and paused only briefly before taking a tiny inhale.

“Holy shit!” Ruby coughed and sputtered as her throat instantly rejected the harmful smoke. Her lungs burned horribly as she sucked in cold October air at too fast a rate, in an attempt to clear the cigarette smoke from her body.

“Yeah, I actually don’t recommend it.” Henrietta chuckled darkly as she took another sip of her black coffee.

All of a sudden Ruby felt sick. She didn’t know if it was the constant coughing and attempts at grabbing hold of a solid breath of fresh Colorado air, or the very faint taste of sticky tobacco on her tongue. Ruby grabbed her orange juice and chugged it (which was probably not the best choice of beverage to wash a taste out of her mouth with, but it was all she had in front of her). She coughed in the middle and gagged a little bit, spewing juice out of the sides of her mouth as she continued to chug, all while still holding on tightly to the cigarette in her left hand.

“You get used to it.” Henrietta announced with apathetic disinterest as she checked a notification on her cell phone.
Finally, Ruby caught her breath again and her feeling of violent nausea began to subside; she sat still at her corner of the oval patio table with her left arm outstretched as far away from her as possible.

She turned to look at Karen’s half-disgusted-half-amused expression, the little one fully reveling in the fact that she had once again been right.

Ruby narrowed her eyes at her friend’s smug expression and poured herself more juice.

“Well. That’s cigarettes. Now you know,” Henrietta leaned forward, reaching to take the cigarette out of Ruby’s hand.

“No, I’m trying again.” Ruby snapped her arm backwards out of Henrietta’s reach as she put the carton of juice back in the center of the table.

“What?!” Karen scoffed loudly, as Henrietta raised one sharply penciled eyebrow in surprise, “you wanna do that again?”

“That one didn’t count.” Ruby explained as she brought the cigarette back in front of her face.

“Open your throat more.” Henrietta encouraged in a small voice. “You won’t choke as much.”

Ruby took a steadying breath and tried again.

She still coughed and sputtered, but not as much.


Ruby held her breath to push down a faint feeling of nausea until she was sure it had passed.

Once Ruby’s head stopped spinning she was left with a faint dizzy-feeling, which she actually found pretty pleasant. “Ok.” She concluded as she passed the cigarette Karen’s way (mostly just to see her freak out over the offer that she was bound to reject, in an offensive display of disgust no doubt).

Instead, the mousey-haired girl stared at Ruby’s smoking offer plainly, without moving. Karen’s little nose twitched like it always did when she was thinking really hard. Ruby grinned devilishly and Henrietta leaned forward on her elbows in amused anticipation of what Karen McCormick may or may not be about to do. Finally, the littlest McCormick rolled her eyes. “Well I can’t be the only one…” she muttered as she unhappily took the cigarette from Ruby’s hands.

“That sentiment will get you far in life.” Henrietta drawled sarcastically.

Karen shot her a half-hearted glare before bringing the cigarette up to her lips.

To Ruby’s horrified surprise, Karen took a steady breath in and held it easily, before blowing the smoke back out into the autumn air behind her like she’d been doing it all her life.

“There you go, McCormick’s got it!” Henrietta praised, thoroughly surprised and equally as impressed.

“So gross,” Karen complained through a choked up voice, coughing only a few times as she made a horribly disgusted face and quickly passed the cigarette back to Henrietta, who took it gratefully and inhaled one last slow drag before snuffing it out in the ashtray.

Karen grabbed a napkin off of the table and swiped at her tongue dramatically.
“It’s not that bad, drama queen,” Ruby criticized.

Karen snapped back, “We almost saw your breakfast spewed across this whole table so shut up.”

Just then the sliding glass door opened and an unfamiliar blonde boy stepped outside.

“Henrietta?” He asked nicely.

“What?” His sister snapped back venomously, not even looking in his direction. “This is my brother, Bradley, by the way — Karen and Ruby…” Henrietta rolled her eyes at the tedium of needing to make polite introductions.

“Hi.” Bradley waved shyly to the girls, and they waved politely back. He turned back to his sister, “can I borrow your—”

“No!” Henrietta snapped in response, without even letting him finish his request.

“But I just—!”

“NO!”

“Such a bitch…” Bradley muttered under his breath and slammed the sliding door closed.

“What did he wanna borrow?” Ruby asked, wondering what could be so important or breakable that nobody but Henrietta was allowed to touch it.

“Who knows.” The older girl shrugged disinterestedly.

Karen and Ruby looked at each other — as the younger sibling, both knew what it was like to be spoken to this way, and neither appreciated it.

“So,” Henrietta prepared to change the subject “I heard you and Canada-boy had disgustingly adorable chemistry at the movies last Saturday, according to one annoyingly jaded concessions worker.” Karen tried to hide her smile by taking a timid sip of her tea, but her red face gave her away anyway. “And you’re welcome, by the way, for not asking about this in front of the boys. They can be…” Henrietta twirled her hand around with a flourish as she struggled to rack her brain for the words she was looking for. “They’re assholes.” Ruby chimed in.

Henrietta snapped her fingers like Ruby had just reminded her of something, “Thank you, yes, they’re assholes.” Henrietta turned back to Karen with an uncharacteristically girly excitement, “So how was it?” She urged.

“It was fine…” Karen nervously adjusted her jacket around her shoulders, “the first debate meeting—match—game—whatever—is on Sunday, so they have an extra practice today. He’s just an alternate, but Wendy says you never know, and she wants everybody practicing. They trained the
newbies on Thursday during their normal meeting time, which I guess works out perfectly since they had to hold this emergency meeting today…” Karen stopped talking as if she had finally realized she was starting to get rambly. Man those big doe eyes were comically easy to read…

“Mhm. And, so, are you going?”

“Huh?”

Henrietta blinked back at Karen like she might be a little slow for not following the natural flow of conversation. “Are. you. going. to. the. debate. match. on. Sunday?” The goth teen droned condescendingly.

“Oh. No… why, should I?” Karen looked around the table panickedly in search of opinions.

“No,” Henrietta piped up, dominating the conversation before Ruby could even respond with some middle-of-the-road opinion. “Send him a good luck text in the morning and then turn your phone off for the rest of the day. When he looks around that auditorium and realizes you didn’t wander in there on your own he’s gonna wish he had explicitly invited you to come.”

“That’s… kinda manipulative… I like it…” Ruby praised, and Henrietta raised her mug in a cheers motion. “I mean after the last date he’s gotta be missing you already, right?”

“What happened on the first date?!” Henrietta’s interest visibly piqued, despite her best efforts to remain aloof.

“Nothing. Watched a movie,” Karen brushed off the question embarrassedly.


“I mean, we… kissed.” Karen offered with a shrug and a blush.

Henrietta guffawed.

“That wasn’t all…” Ruby prompted.

“It… was, though?” Karen responded, confused.

“No…” Ruby grinned and shook her head.

“But, I—”

“No…” Ruby repeated, voice at a teasingly higher pitch.

“It was, I swear!” Karen insisted defensively.

“You guys didn’t ‘do it’, right? ‘Cause you’re way too young for that shit, and you’ve got plenty of time.”

Karen’s eyes widened as she turned toward Henrietta with confusion etched into her eyebrows, “No?” She phrased it like it was a question, but Ruby knew it was a fact.

Henrietta nodded approvingly. “Good, keep that attitude. Boys ain’t even worth it at your age, trust me,” Henrietta drawled flatly as she picked up her coffee mug once more and took a sip.

“He called her ‘enchanting’,” Ruby teased, breaking the awkward silence and finally blurtig out
what she’d been getting at this whole time.

“Ew! He did?” Henrietta chuckled, clearly entertained by the dorky gossip.

Karen tried to hide her smile, “He didn’t technically—”

“He’s in love with her,” Ruby piped up, enjoying the embarrassed look on her best friend’s face.

“That he definitely never said,” Karen clarified sternly.

“Doesn’t make it not true…” Ruby muttered under her breath, raising her eyebrows.

“This is boring now.” Henrietta announced matter-of-factly, slapping her laptop closed and disrupting the natural flow of the conversation. “You guys wanna go bother Pete and see that new movie about those hot girls who kill everyone in their high school?”

Ruby shrugged in neutral agreement and stuffed the rest of her bagel in her mouth.

“Um,” Karen piped up quietly, tapping her fingernails nervously against her mug of rapidly cooling tea “I actually, sorta, don’t have any money on me, at the moment.” She admitted sheepishly.

“Oh, but I’ll still go with you. As long as you don’t mind paying for me, and I promise I’d pay you back another day, I just… yeah, I don’t really have any money…” Karen chuckled nervously at the end of her sentence.

“Yeah, me neither…” Ruby admitted reluctantly. She would’ve opened her wallet to check, were it not for the fact that she was absolutely, and undeniably sure that there was nothing but her school ID card in there — all alone, and resting in its blurry plastic casing, gathering dust amongst a bunch of empty credit card card holders. Ruby tried to look at that ugly, shiny, greasy-forehead-ed picture as infrequently as she possibly could.

“Oh. Well… We can always check out afternoon cheerleading practice on the field and bully the skirt-jocks about their high-kicks?” Henrietta offered as a casual substitution. Neither of the girls could tell if she was joking.

Ruby could not say that she was not intrigued by the idea…

“That seems… kinda mean…” Karen pointed out with a nervous chuckle. Henrietta tipped her chin lazily and glared at the little freshman from under furrowed eyebrows. “W-what if we just hung out here?” Karen suggested quickly, “or the park? Just anywhere where, you know, that I don’t have to spend money, since I don’t have a job…” Karen’s voice trailed off, and her mousy nose twitched as her gaze dropped down to her hands. Ruby could practically hear Karen’s inner monologue as if over a loudspeaker.

“Karen…” Ruby placed a comforting hand on her friend’s forearm, “bullying cheerleaders is free…”

Karen feigned a sarcastic smile for her friend’s sarcastic remark.

“You guys need jobs?” Henrietta piped up disinterestedly, rapidly texting on her phone before setting it down on the table and flipping curly extensions over her shoulder, announcing with a proud smirk, “I can get you guys jobs.”

“How much farther?” Ruby complained. They’d already been walking for ten minutes and she
was annoyed, tired, annoyed again, and super super bored.

Henrietta stopped in her tracks and tipped her head in the most apathetically offensive ‘are you dumb?’ Look Ruby had ever seen. Henrietta pointed across the street.

Down the road a small stretch was a small plant nursery — with an impressive array of potted plants displaced aesthetically in front of a beautifully painted wood sign.

“Oh.” Ruby shut her whining mouth.

The girls trudged the rest of the way in the chilly October air towards the nursery.

“Oh.” Henrietta stopped the girls right before they walked inside. “Couple of things, first is: I work here, so don’t embarrass me.” She glared between them warningly. Karen nodded rapidly. Henrietta continued, “Reggie is also a friend of mine, she was married to Michael’s cousin for a little bit, which is part of the reason she agreed to meet with us today, as a favor to me. She’s also really understaffed so that is another reason, and probably the main one now that I think about it. There will be some physical labor involved but you can’t whine about it, ok? It’s not gonna be that bad, you got that stretch?” Ruby was about to protest why the laziness comments were directed mostly at her (although that probably was the fairest assumption) when Henrietta interrupted again and Ruby was silenced in her tracks. “That’s her.”

Henrietta nodded in greeting towards a stunningly beautiful woman, 6’ tall (at least), glowing tan skin and piercing eyes that almost looked a rare black color — or maybe they were just very dark brown, contrasted by her waist-length bright purple hair with bangs that curled around her cheekbones flawlessly. She waved back warmly, cradling a potted plant in her arms as she finished talking with another employee near the entrance. Ruby was half sure her jaw was on the floor, but then again so was Karen’s. “I know right?” Henrietta chuckled, then turned back around and muttered under her breath, “So she’s really hot, but I wouldn’t recommend going for it because she’s like 35 or something... although she totally doesn’t look it, right?” Henrietta winked and blew past the girls, headed for the greenhouse.

“Why did she only say that part to me?” Ruby whispered anxiously. Karen shrugged and the girls followed Henrietta inside.

“New recruits?” Reggie chirped happily as she handed the potted plant off to another employee and greeted the teens at the entrance.

“Fresh sacrifices.” Henrietta clarified with a deadpan voice and a smirk.

“Bitchin’.” Reggie pulled her gardening gloves off of her hands and shook both the girls’ hands as they each introduced themselves. Reggie gestured towards the center of the store with an outstretched arm and a smile, “So let’s have a look around!”

Reggie led the girls on a small tour of the nursery, starting in the greenhouse — which housed a variety of household plants, as well as outdoor garden greenery, and colorful displays containing luscious bouquets of flowers. They walked around the back property — where a small orchard was home to a few breeds of budding, young sapling trees — and ended up back around in the front, which essentially functioned as a little supply store — complete with things like gardening tools, mulch, and fertilizer; as well as bird feeders, wind chimes, decorative stone fountains, pottery, and rustic pieces of woodburning art. There were a few shelves of colorfully painted yet tragically ironic lawn gnomes which were very creepy, so Ruby desperately wanted one — if only to hide it in Craig’s room at night to scare him.
It was overall a very cute place, Ruby had to admit.

This really seemed like a place Ruby could get used to spending a lot of time in.

Eventually, it was time to conduct the interview. Reggie led the girls to one of the outdoor picnic tables in front of the neighboring hot cider stand and treated them to a hot cider each as they all got to know one another.

“I gotta say I was very excited when Henrietta texted and asked if I was still hiring, because,” Reggie chuckled in Henrietta’s direction, “I mean, I need all the help I can get, don’t I?”

“Yeah, and I’m not playing gardener anymore. Pressing cash-register buttons is hard enough on the acrylics.” Henrietta tapped her blood-red talons against the wooden picnic table, which was so wet with frost and mildew that it hardly made a sound. She scowled in disgust at the way her stiletto nails slightly sunk into the soft surface.

Ruby discretely pulled her forearms off of the mildewy, rotted, damp wood and settled for just holding her hands in her lap.

“So anyway, to start I’ll just tell you a little bit about myself. I grew up in Southern California, and — yeah, I usually get those looks from people when I say that around here,” Reggie chuckled.

Henrietta nudged Ruby hard in the ribs.

“Sorry,” Ruby straightened out her expression apologetically, glancing at Karen as she also did the same, “but yeah, that’s a shock. I mean South Park is…”

“Just so…” Karen’s voice also trailed off, trying to come up with a word to help describe a town that was so… so…

“It’s a shithole.” Henrietta chimed in, not even glancing up from her phone as she did so.

“Well clearly I don’t think so mega-harshly of it, but I guess if you’re from here it can be different.” Reggie shrugged lightheartedly. “Anyway, I grew up in Southern California, and I was super into sports — I mean hockey, surfing, skating, you name it — but the thing that I really fell in love with was snowboarding. And I competed, too, both semi-professionally, and then pro for a few years near the end.”

“In other words, she’s BAD ASS.” Henrietta praised.

“As if,” Reggie rolled her eyes with a charming smile.

Henrietta rolled her eyes right back and addressed the girls under her breath, "she's got trophies all over her office."

“Anyway,” Reggie continued on with her life story, "I was on my way to Vail for competition and the semi-finals just so happened to be in South Park — well, the competition took place at that little ski resort just outside of town, but they put us up in South Park. Probably cheaper, whatever. Blah, blah, blah, on track for the olympics, torn ACL, you know the story.” Reggie brushed past the details that Ruby definitely felt should have been the focal point of this conversation. “By that time I was getting older, and retirement ages for sports players are much younger than you'd think.” Reggie shrugged sadly, “couldn’t get sponsored after that.”

“That’s so sad.” Karen sympathized out loud.
“Yeah it’s a brutal career. I did it. My brother really did it. Even my brother-in-law is a professional ice hockey player, and my husband… ex-husband… was actually semi-pro surfing for years,” Reggie gestured towards Henrietta (this must be the famed cousin she’d been talking about before).

Henrietta (who had obviously already heard all of these stories before) just raised her eyebrows in mock amazement at the news that a man could have a sports career, so groundbreaking.

Ruby had only met this woman for a few minutes now, but if she had to guess, she would probably say this rambly personality seemed uncharacteristic for the confident and stunning woman that had greeted them minutes ago.

Reggie shook her head like she was trying to find her train of thought again. “Anyway, when I got back to California I realized something about this quaint little Colorado town was calling me back. So I drove up here with very little money in my pocket and very little direction in life. I was driving around this unfamiliar town, completely lost, and that’s when I found this old and dying nursery off the side of the road with just the sweetest old lady attempting to run it all by herself. I fell in love with this place and with her right away, and together we reinvented the business. I worked for her for a little while, and then one day, a few weeks before she died, she just… gifted me ownership.” Reggies eyes started tearing up behind her smile, “It was the best gift I’d ever gotten, and I have been cherishing it ever since.”

“Wow.” Karen breathed. Ruby didn’t even have to look over to know that the little one was probably tearing up, herself. Ruby tried to pretend she wasn’t getting emotional at the moving story, as well.

“So yeah, that’s me.” Reggie concluded. “I hope I didn’t ramble on there like a total lame-o, go ahead, tell me a little bit about you guys!”

Karen and Ruby just looked at each other blankly.


“Hey!” Karen protested.

“And I… am also poor. We have no money, and we would like to get jobs… so that we could get some… money…” Ruby’s voice trailed off awkwardly, as she felt her cheeks heating up at her GODDAMN AWKWARDNESS.

Henrietta scoffed as she watched in amusement from the sidelines.

“You willing to work hard?” Reggie’s voice raised in excitement.

As much as Ruby would have normally said no, she figured it was best not to appear lazy at a job interview.

“Yeah sure.” Ruby shrugged.

“Absolutely.” Karen promised emphatically.

“Right on! That’s all I need to know!” Reggie announced excitedly. “So positions I’m looking for right now are general floor staff: people to tend to the saplings out back, water the plants in the greenhouse, and do some light landscaping chores around the area as needed — nothing crazy, just a little raking leaves, tidying things up, since the paid landscapers only come once a month. You’ll also help with the customers if they can’t find something, or if they need advice, easy stuff like
that. Does that all seem like something you guys would be interested in doing?”

“Yes.” Karen nodded with a smile.

“Yeah, sure.” Ruby shrugged.

“Wicked!” Reggie exclaimed. This grown ass woman really talks like some California cliché from a ’90s movie. “Well, the job is yours, if you’re interested. I can give you guys a moment to talk it over in private if you would like; otherwise you can give me a call tomorrow, if you need to talk it over with your parents first—”

“I’ll take it.” Karen announced with eager enthusiasm.

“She’s hungry, I like it.” Reggie nodded her head approvingly. Reggie turned her warm, dark eyes toward Ruby, “do you need more time to think it over, or—?”

“Nope. Don’t need time, I am down… man.” Ew what the fuck just came out of Ruby’s mouth. “…Dude…” She overcorrected.

“Stop.” Karen whispered while patting Ruby on the forearm.

“I’m trying.” Ruby agreed under her breath.

“Perfect! We just need to complete all the proper paperwork and the jobs are yours! We can go to my office and get started if you’d like, I’d just need to see some form of ID to confirm that you’re both of legal working age — school ID is fine for now, but if that’s all you have I’d just need you to bring something more legally legitimate some other time this week.”

“Rocket girl!”

Reggie’s head snapped around at the sound of that nickname.

“Kind of conducting an interview here, babe.” She called back over her shoulder, visibly recoiling at her own use of the word ‘babe’, which seemed to be awkward for whatever reason.

“Oh, sorry…” The man who’d called her apologized, fidgeting in the doorway of the mini candy store connected to the cider stand.

“…What…” Reggie indulged the adorably excited look on his face.

“I just have really good news…” He gushed with giddy anticipation.

Reggie sighed and shot a look towards the girls before waving him over, “Ok, come here, I’ll introduce you.”

The man bounded down the downward slope from the stand to the picnic table, almost skipping his way down it.

When he finally reached the table he sat down next to Reggie and greeted everyone excitedly. He reminded Ruby of a friendly dog — a friendly dog with red hair and freckles.

“This is my…” Reggie’s sentence trailed off.

“Hi, Twister Rodriguez.” The guy introduced himself holding out his hand to the two girls he didn’t already know. “Henrietta! Gosh it’s been a while — I think I haven’t seen you since…”
“Since the wedding?” Reggie guessed, awkwardly, and under her breath.

“Yeah…” He agreed with a sad, fake smile. “Nice to see you again.”

“Maurice.” The goth teen greeted him, thoroughly enjoying the way the older man winced at what was apparently his real name (what 35 year old man still goes by the name Twister, anyway?)

“What was your news?” Reggie turned to look at him, and suddenly it was like there was nobody else around but the two of them.

“Oh, I,” Twister giggled excitedly mid sentence, “I got the job. I got the job!”

“You did?! Dude, that’s awesome!” Reggie and her ex-husband did some kind of secret handshake of some kind, both barely able to contain their smiles.

“I know! It’s so sick!” Twister chuckled as he reluctantly pulled his hand away from hers. The two became uncomfortably quiet. To rephrase: the two became quiet, and it made everybody incredibly uncomfortable. “Um… yeah, so I’ll tell you more about it at home… your home… tonight. We’ll talk about it then. Sorry to barge in on your interview. It was nice meeting you guys! Later, Reg.”

“Alright, later.”

Twister got up and kissed her briefly on the cheek before jogging back up to the cider stand. Halfway there, he paused and turned around. “I’m sorry, that was—”

“It’s ok.” Reggie assured.

“Habit.” He explained apologetically.

“It’s ok.” Reggie mumbled with a quiet laugh, tucking her long hair behind her ear.

“Ok.” Twister clapped his hands together. “Nice meeting you guys. Nice to see you again Henrietta!”

“Maurice,” Henrietta stood up and bid him an overly formal Jane-Austen-esque goodbye, much to the older man’s genuine confusion, and the goth teen’s amusement.

“We haven’t seen each other in a year, he’s staying in my house, it’s been a little weird.” Reggie apologized rapidly as she got up from the table and led the group back inside to her office.

Karen and Ruby shared an amused look as everybody made their way back down the hill towards the nursery.

“Buncha dweebs, right?” Henrietta muttered under her breath, shaking her head and pulling out her phone yet again.

Henrietta was not kidding, Reggie's office was full of trophies and awards.

And it was totally bad ass.

“These are just a few. Most of them are in my house.” Reggie humble-bragged distractedly as she shuffled around her desk and sat down, flipping through papers. When she found what she was looking for, she paused. “Sorry, I’m not normally like this, I’m a little off today.”
“Maurice being in town and all?” Henrietta guessed flatly.

“Yeah.” Reggie deadpanned honestly, before gathering up the papers and getting right back to work.

After the proper forms were filled out and filed, Reggie shook the girls’ hands and welcomed them ‘aboard’.

Ruby saluted in response to the phrase.

“Well, I’ve gotta go. Been getting blown up all day by my future-ex-husband,” Henrietta announced, half-joking and rolling her eyes. “What would men do without us, huh?”

The goth teen waved a general and disinterested goodbye to the room, purposely never looking up from her phone as she walked out of Reggie’s office.

…

“…Is her mom still giving us a ride home?” Ruby asked Karen, confusedly. They both looked back the retreating Henrietta. The other equally confused teen only responded with a skeptical half-shrug.

It wasn’t until later in the day (after walking back from Karen’s, where Henrietta’s Mom had dropped the girls off), that Ruby finally shared the news with her parents.

“…I got a job today.” Ruby announced flatly at the kitchen table, as her family settled in for dinner.

“Wonderful!” Laura praised supportively, as she brought the salt and pepper over from the counter and set it down in the middle of the table.

“Very responsible.” Thomas commended. Ruby didn’t miss the quick glance their father had shot at her brother. His expression was unreadable, but the gesture must’ve meant something.

Craig glared at their father out of the corner of his eye, for just a few seconds.

“Yeah. Cool.” Craig agreed half-heartedly.

“I just have to bring some ID tomorrow and she’ll finish my paperwork. Do you know where my birth certificate is?”

“Yeah it’s in my closet in the box of important documents, I’ll get it later.” Laura promised as she began eating. “So, tell us, what will you be doing?” Laura asked it like this was the most exiting thing that had ever happened in the history of her daughter’s life. Just eat your chicken, Laura, it’s not that serious…

“Um. Well, do you guys know that nursery off Indiana Street? I’m gonna be, like, planting saplings, and potting plants, and doing light landscaping, shit… stuff like that.” Ruby explained with a shrug.

“Sounds like hard work!” Thomas’ voice boomed approvingly.
Craig snickered from his seat across from Ruby at the table.

“Yeah.” Ruby agreed, aggressively glaring at her brother. He rolled his eyes back at her.

“Good luck.” Craig muttered almost undetectably.

Like he could do any better. He would probably whine and complain about how many steps the hiring paperwork took, let alone the physical work.

Ruby was not denying how much she loathed the idea of raking dead leaves and picking rotten fruits off of trees. She just wasn’t gonna complain about it… or maybe just not in front of anyone but Karen.

“Fuck. you.” Ruby mouthed wordlessly across the table. She hoped that Craig could tell she was flipping him off under the table. She couldn’t completely tell, but she thought he was probably doing the same.

“Well, I’m very proud of you.” Laura commended flatly. Affection was always so formal in this house…

“Me too.” Thomas smiled politely.

Ruby half-smiled uncomfortably in response to both of them.

A boring silence fell over her boring family.

Ruby’s father nodded along to the sentiment in his head before clearing his throat and voicing it.

“Landscaping. That’s a job. Builds character.” Thomas praised in between bites of his dinner. Ruby smiled thinly and nodded half-heartedly. “Real man’s work!” Laura was already rolling her eyes at her husband. “Right?” Thomas chuckled to himself, “But that’s always been my Ruby! She’s like the son I never had.” Thomas joked, tastelessly.

An uncomfortable silence settled over the table, with only the sounds of Thomas’ good-natured laughter resounding disjointedly above the uncomfortable quiet.

Ruby froze in her seat.

Craig raised his eyebrows in disbelief and scoffed as he set down his fork.

“Thomas…” Laura scolded exhaustedly.

“What?” Thomas genuinely wondered, before realization set on his face. “Oh God, no, I didn’t mean it that way, I just meant—”

“That’s enough.” Laura muttered in his direction.

“It’s ok.” Craig drawled with heavy sarcasm as he stood from the table and loudly announced his departure. “I’m just gonna go eat in my room.” He locked eyes with his dad disapprovingly.

“Craig,” Thomas protested weakly as his son made a big show of grabbing his dinner plate and sauntering lazily down the hall.

He didn’t try very hard though: the one weak attempt was the only one he made.

A door slammed down the hall and Thomas sighed regretfully. “I’m sorry, I was trying to make a
joke. Rag on him a little bit… He’s the older one, he should have had the character-building-labor-intensive job by now, way before his sister… not that I’m not proud of our Ruby, too…” Dad apologized to everyone but the person he needed to apologize to.

Ruby was incredibly uncomfortable.

“It doesn’t matter anyway, Thomas, jokes need to have substance to be funny.” Laura quipped at him with dry bitterness.

Ruby wanted to disappear.

After a moment of uncomfortable, and unmoving silence, Thomas spoke up again.

“Oh, come on, he knows I love him exactly the way he is.” Thomas defended.

“I think you need to tell him that.” Laura insisted with a pointed glare.

“…He knows…” Thomas dismissed, shrugging like he had done nothing wrong.

Ruby stood up tentatively and grabbed her plate without a word.

“Oh, come on…” Thomas groaned woundedly. Good. He should feel at least a little bit guilty.

Ruby marched down the hall and into her bedroom. After she was sure her parents were engaged in a hushed and heated discussion at the table, she peeked her head out and snuck across the hall.

Ruby knocked on her brother’s door quietly and asked to come in.

“Ya.” He answered stiffly.

Ruby opened the door slowly and closed it as quietly as possible.

“Can I eat in here?” She asked tentatively.

Craig shrugged.

Ruby sat down on the floor next to him.

“He apologized after you left, you know. It doesn’t make much sense but… I thought you should know that he did.”

“I didn’t really care,” Craig drawled disinterestedly, “I just wanted him to know that he should feel bad about what he said.”

“But it didn’t make you feel bad?”

Craig shrugged and shook his head apathetically.

It made Ruby feel bad…

The two ate in silence, save for Craig’s laptop playing Bojack Horseman — a show Ruby had repeatedly declared her distaste for, due entirely to then sheer number of times that Craig had naggingly tried to get her to watch it with him.

After the episode had finished, he switched it to Futurama — a show they both could enjoy. She didn’t even have to complain, he just did it. Although she will admit she wouldn’t have minded
watching one more episode of his show, which was beginning to grow on her.

After a while, their dad knocked and came inside. He flatly apologized for his joke, defensively rambling about how he meant for it to be perceived vs. the way it came off, it until Craig finally stopped him and told him it was ok, he knew what he meant.

The way her brother had caved, seemingly giving up on defending himself made Ruby feel sick to her stomach.

The whole interaction felt empty, tense, and strained, and not something Ruby felt she should be forced to be a part of, outside of some weird or creative punishment. She sat stillly on the floor in agonizing awkwardness, smack dab in the middle of the most pathetic excuse for reconciliation since Nixon addressed the nation. She was surprised she knew the reference.

Then Dad left, and that was it. The two siblings continued watching TV with nothing else to say to each other.

Chapter End Notes

P.s.
I also just wanted to say that I am leaving this global pandemic out of this story because I just could not deal with that, I can barely deal with it in the real world. So no pandemic for me, I'm sure there are other great fics out there on the subject that I might read, but I cannot deal with a major plot change like that in this chaos of a monster fic.
Anyway...
A Sick Goth

Chapter Summary

Henrietta goes over to Michael’s house to comfort him.

Chapter Notes

I needed a chapter of Henrietta being nurturing for her character arc, and I thought it would be really nice to see her vulnerable and caring side, beyond just the usual mothering of all the boys. I also thought it would be sweet to see Michael and all-the-goths'-favorite-Mom interacting.

Decided to switch POV halfway through so we can see inside Michael’s mind (well, a fuzzy version of it), instead of it just being Henrietta the whole time.

Needed an excuse to add this amazing song by this amazing Chilean artist, because when I make the playlist I HAVE to include it.

POV - Michael

Michael was not having a good day.

To be blunt, he felt like shit.

It had been hours since he’d gotten out of bed, and that was only to go to the bathroom. That’s not to say that he’d been sleeping — he hadn’t — he just couldn’t get out of bed either. He hadn’t eaten anything, he didn’t drink anything, and he had yet to take his meds, which of course just made him forget that he had forgotten to take them. His entire body was sore, and he was beginning to develop a headache — though luckily not the worst of his migraines, like the ones where he would sometimes pass out or even vomit.

Overall he was doing super great. Just loving life in a body that constantly betrayed him. Amazing.

Michael had felt this dark cloud coming a few day ago: a twinge of pair here, horrible debilitating brain fog there… Today it had hit him full force. So close to Monday, he could only hope he would be ok enough to go to school next week.

He’d been texting Henrietta all day, reluctantly answering her probing questions, until she declared that she would be coming over. Period.

She knew what was wrong before he even had to tell her that anything was wrong. Even over text, Michael’s girlfriend could read him like a book. It was the most intimidating thing ever.
Henrietta is the most dangerous type of woman: one who does not need him, and would be just as happy being alone. A woman with a devilish smile and an enchanting smirk. One with a deadly wink, and hypnotizing eyes, the kind of eyes that penetrate your soul. She can make anybody feel special just by listening, and give anybody goosebumps just by placing a gentle hand against their trembling forearm. Someone who unashamedly enjoys sex, but also values her alone time; who appreciates but does not need a single man in her life.

That, is the most dangerous woman.

When the doorbell rang, Michael almost resented the fact that his girlfriend was making him drag his ass out of bed to answer it. Almost.

“What do you want to eat?” Henrietta stormed into the house, barely even looking at Michael, without a hello or a greeting of any kind. He shut the door and trudged into the kitchen with her.

“I don’t know,” he crossed his arms and slumped over against the countertop. Really he didn’t want to eat anything, but he knew that with Henrietta here, that was not going to be an option.

“Grilled cheese it is,” she announced as she pulled out the ingredients.

“Thank you.” Michael mumbled, a little embarrassed, but only slightly. Michael had mostly stopped being embarrassed at Henrietta seeing him like this a long time ago. Before they even started dating, long.

“It’s not my job to take care of a fully grown man, but I’m gonna do it anyway.” Henrietta announced distractedly as she buzzed about his kitchen. “Meds.” She reminded him bluntly.

Michael dragged his feet over to the medicine cabinet in the kitchen and pulled out his prescription, plus a bottle of Tylenol for his headache. He dropped one little pill from each bottle into his hand before realizing he had no water to take them with. As if having read his mind, Henrietta plopped a tall glass of water in front of him. Michael watched her busily walk back over to the stove to check on his sandwich. He almost wanted to cry. Almost.

Michael threw back the pills and chugged the glass of water.

Henrietta turned off the stove and grabbed a plate from the cabinet.

Michael slowly sat down at the table, wincing.

Henrietta eyed him closely as she set his sandwich down in front of him.

“Thank you,” he sighed for what felt like the millionth time today. She had no idea how helpful this was for him on days like this...

Henrietta wordlessly walked over to him and kissed him on the top of his forehead, holding it there affectionately. She pushed his bangs off his face, then walked over to grab the pan, bringing it over to the sink.

“You don’t have to do that,” Michael murmured quietly, before taking a much needed bite of food.

“What, am I just going to sit here and watch you eat? It’ll take me two seconds.” Henrietta muttered as she got to work scrubbing the pan. If Michael had any mental energy left he would’ve come up with something sarcastic to say in response.
Michael resumed eating while Henrietta finished placing the pan in the drying rack. Eventually, the dull pain in his tailbone began to crawl up spine uncomfortably.

“Hen, can you get me the, um… the, um…” Michael snapped his fingers trying to get the fog in his brain to dissipate long enough to be able to finally vocalize what he was asking for.

Henrietta went over to the fridge expectantly.

“No, the medicine cabinet,” Michael corrected, still trying for the life of him to remember what the fuck that little bottle was called...

Henrietta placed the little bottle of CBD oil in front of him and Michael snapped his fingers excitedly.

“Yes, that, thank you,” Michael placed a few drops under his tongue and sighed.

Henrietta pulled up a chair and grabbed a hold of his trembling hand. “This is a bad one, huh?”

“Yes.” He nodded, grabbing another sip of his water. Then he shrugged, “Not the worst.” At least to his memory, Michael could not remember a flare up where so many of his symptoms showed up at once, although luckily most of them were relatively mild today, and the brain fog and depression were the worst of it this time around.

Henrietta stood up and wrapped her arms around Michael’s tender shoulders from behind. “Wanna go for a walk? Maybe I’ll give you a massage?” She offered lightly against his ear.

“Maybe all of that.” Michael sighed. As much as he was fucking exhausted right now, usually walking and moving around helped his pain more than anything.

By the time they got back from walking around the block in the chilly October air, Michael had to admit he was in significantly less pain than he was this morning. How long that would last would be a question for a later time, but for now he was doing good. At least he didn’t feel like a fucking broken doll anymore...

The two kids went up to his room, and Michael laid down in his bed, while Henrietta ran a small towel under hot water in the bathroom.

She came back and placed it against his neck, and the warmth instantly soothed his aching skin.

He exhaled shakily and dropped his head against the backs of his hands. He began to cry.

“Thank you,” he whispered, trying his best to conceal the fact that he was crying.

Henrietta scratched her fingernails lightly against his scalp, tangling her long acrylics in his dark curls. She lay down on her side next to him silently, waiting patiently for him to look at her.

Michael tilted his head to the side and locked eyes with her.

Henrietta ran the back of her manicured finger across the delicate skin under his eyes and traced it down across his cheek. She craned her neck and planted a soft kiss on his crooked, hooked nose and pulled back to rest her head back down next to his.

She smiled at him sweetly, running her thumb across his unshaven chin affectionately.
He smiled back at her — back at the only girl who could make him feel as alive, and as free, as he did when he was with her.

**POV - Henrietta**

It was a few hours later, and Michael was visibly looking better. He said he was feeling much, much better too, which was something Henrietta loved to hear.

She’d covered his back and neck neck in warm towels and just laid with him, stroking his beautiful hair until he’d accidentally fallen asleep. Henrietta let him sleep, scrolling through Instagram and Twitter, and only taking a few pictures of the angelic way his lips pout when he sleeps.

He woke up as the towels began chilling against his skin like a mellow ice pack, which also helped his pain level, so he opted to leave them for a little while longer.

However, Michael’s mom would be home soon, and they both thought it was best that he probably put his shirt back on before she comes home and finds him shirtless, alone in the house, with Henrietta in his room.

Miranda was cool, but she was not *that* cool.

Henrietta hung up the used towels in the bathroom to dry while Michael grabbed something from his dresser drawer. Henrietta was a little disappointed she and her boyfriend didn't have time to fuck before his Mom came home, but what are you gonna do, they still lived under their parents' roofs.

Michael pulled out the juul he keeps for smoking inside the house, mostly just out of respect for his mother who can’t stand the smell of cigarettes (not since her husband left her, ten years ago).

He took a deep inhale and passed it to Henrietta, who breathed it in greedily before blowing it out slowly.

“*We should all really quit one day.*” she remarked emptily. She had been meaning to quit, and they’d all tried it over the years, but after smoking since middle school it was hard to quit in high school. She took another greedy inhale and smirked at Michael as she exhaled, “if we’re not careful we’re gonna get all old and wrinkly or something.” She joked sarcastically.

“So vain, Henrietta,” Michael scolded jokingly. She passed the juul back to him and watched as the muscles around his cheekbones contracted and relaxed around his sharp features.

If anyone, he really should quit. As much as Michael claimed smoking nicotine helped his chronic illness, Henrietta was highly skeptical. She had a hard time believing that it wasn’t just nicotine withdrawal he was feeling whenever he tried to quit, and not the ‘full force of his illness’ as he’d claimed.

She played with the soft ringlets around his temples as he sighed weakly.

“I haven’t told you yet but my dad called and asked me to come spend Hanukkah with him again this year.” Michael drawled flatly, rolling the juul around in his hands thoughtfully.

Henrietta shrugged. “Maybe you should go.” She offered quietly.
“And miss out on the magic of Christmas?” Michael sneered sarcastically, with a little bit less bite than usual. He inhaled again.

“I mean… it’s been a long time since you’ve spent a real holiday with him, right?…” Henrietta reasoned (she personally thought the month-long visit every 3 years did not warrant a healthy father-son relationship), “don’t you think it might be time?”

Michael furrowed his brows and exhaled vapor hastily, “I don’t want to fly to the middle of butt-fuck-nowhere in the middle of a school week to a freezing cold country where I don’t even speak the language—”

“You can get by fine enough.” She reasoned.

“Not conversationally.” He argued.

“He’s your dad.” Henrietta whispered.

Michael snapped back, “And she’s my mom, am I supposed to just leave her here?”

Henrietta pursed her lips.

Michael went back to smoking his juul, shaking his head as he was no doubt continuing the argument in his head.

Henrietta watched him carefully, “You can’t blame adults for not telling the whole story to an eight year old kid,” She pointed out, gently.

He shot her a glare and exhaled.

Michael’s father had come to this country from Poland and married his mother when they were both very young, already pregnant with Michael when they walked down the aisle. Her parents had been immigrants themselves (from Chile), so as a first-generation American whose parents were also from an impoverished country, she felt a flimsy connection to the handsome and moody Aleksander. When the relationship stopped working out, the only person who was surprised was their son, who had no idea of the drama going on behind his parents’ closed doors. He had resented his father for leaving ever since. Henrietta didn’t find it completely fair.

Michael scoffed and shook his head, “What’s gotten into you today?” He drawled flatly in a soft voice, with an even more unreadable expression than usual.

“I don’t know…” Henrietta answered thoughtfully, honestly. She sighed. “Maurice is in town. I saw him at work today.” She brought up, changing the subject.

“Yeah I know, we’re hanging out tomorrow. Lars is flying in to meet us for dinner, too, before he and Twist fly back to Ocean Shores. A whole family fucking reunion.”

‘Lawrence’, Henrietta corrected in her head, if only to entertain herself.

“I’m sick of this fucking town…” Michael whispered, eyes widening as he spaced out, lots in his own thoughts. Henrietta knew was really saying that he sick of everything about his life…

Henrietta placed her hand on his knee comfortingly, “Me too.”

Just then, the front door slammed shut, followed by the jingle of keys hitting the kitchen counter.

“Miranda’s home,” Henrietta announced dryly.
They heard muffled voices of Michael’s mom talking to the Alexa they keep in the kitchen, before the sound of pounding drums filled the house volume on 10.

“Here we go,” Michael shook his head amusedly. His mother tended to be prone to dramatics when she had something to say. It was awesome. Henrietta wished she was her mother.

They walked downstairs and into the kitchen to the sounds of horns blaring a beautiful melody. They rounded the corner right as the vocals came in, and found Miranda chugging red wine out of a delicate stemmed glass as heartbroken Spanish lyrics reverberated against the tiles.

’Hoy volví a dormir en nuestra cama

Y todo sigue igual

El aire y nuestros gatos

Nada cambiará

Difícil olvidarte estando aquí, oh’

“What’s going on, Mom?” Michael half chuckled. "You good?"

Miranda held up a finger as she finished tipping back the last of the wine in her glass then set it down on the counter gently.

“Nope.” She punctuated the word by popping the ‘p’ at the end. “You know that new guy I’ve been seeing, the one from the DA’s office?”

“I’m familiar with ‘the nark’, yes.”

Michael’s mother ripped her scanning badge off of her shirt pocket and slammed it on the counter.

Miranda worked for Social Services, and the man from the DA’s office was an acquaintance of an acquaintance of a coworker’s, whom she met at a bar one night after the office Fourth of July barbecue.

Henrietta knew that Michael didn’t really like him much. She’d never met him, but with a name like ‘Bruce’ she had to agree that he was probably a dick.

Miranda poured herself another hearty glass of wine and scoffed bitterly, “Yeah? Well, get this. He’s married.”

“No!” Michael and Henrietta shared matching expressions of disgust.

“Yeah!” Miranda took another few sips with raised eyebrows.

“He’s trash,” Henrietta consoled with a boiling empathetic anger, “you deserve way better than that garbage idiot.”

“Well, I should hope so,” Miranda quipped dryly, going in for another sip.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” Michael offered gently.

His mother clicked her tongue and grabbed his chin affectionately.
“Dance with me,” Miranda invited, holding the wine bottle up in one hand and her almost empty glass in the other as she swiveled her hips and stepped with her feet.

“What?” Michael guffawed, eyes shifting to Henrietta self-consciously for a second.

Awesome.

Henrietta folded her arms, “Yeah, babe, dance with your mother.”

“Come on! To the living room, come on!” Miranda set the half empty bottle on the counter next to her glass and closed her eyes as she waved him over tipsily. “Teach me a step.” This was thoroughly entertaining for Henrietta.

"....Whatever..." Michael conceded.

Henrietta watched in astonished amazement as Michael walked over to his mother and started dancing with her.

“Ok so it’s right foot back — no wait — left foot back, then together, then right forward, then together.”

“Easy,” Miranda assessed the dance moves with a wink.

Michael scoffed good-humoredly, “Yeah, well, it’s slow because there’s not a lot of dances that go with songs in 6/8, so...”

Henrietta leaned against the wall and watched in awe as Michael’s self-consciousness melted away, twirling his mother and pretending to dip her, laughing. Despite the way his day had begun (and despite still being in a little bit of manageable discomfort), Michael put all his energy into helping his mom forget what was hurting her. That’s what Henrietta loved so much about this boy: watching the way he loved others. Nobody could make Henrietta feel as beautiful or as light as Michael could, not even herself (as much as she hated to admit that). ‘Give me one positive’, ‘you tell me what’s beautiful about you’.

Henrietta laughed lightheartedly, dopey smile on her face as she watched the boy she loved dance with his mother.

As the song rose to the final chorus, mother and son belted out the lyrics — carefree, no longer dancing, and instead head banging and flipping their hair dramatically as they sang with theatric melodrama in the living room. Both voices cracking on the highest note, both laughing and smiling without a care in their world as they cathartically sang a song of heartbreak.

‘Ven y cuéntame la verdad

Ten piedad

Y dime por qué, no, no no

Cómo fue que me dejaste de amar

Yo no podía soportar tu tanta falta de querer’

Chapter End Notes
In case anybody is curious, because I didn't say it, Michael has Juvenile primary fibromyalgia syndrome (JPFS), which triggers severe bouts of depression for him when he has a flare up (luckily the meds prescribed for JPFS are antidepressants, so he doesn't have to mix prescriptions or anything to deal with both things). Most of the time he's ok, doing good, but I felt like I needed to write a chapter where he has a flare up and Henrietta shows her soft side and takes care of him.

None of the other goths know explicitly what is wrong with him, and it took him a long time to be honest with Henrietta, too.

- Also, no offense to anybody named Bruce, lmao
It's October 3rd...

Chapter Summary

Welp, it's time for the debate-team-match with North Park, and I still don't know how to properly phrase this terminology.

Being back in North Park is triggering for Bebe, who wishes she could be anywhere else other than at this damn debate.

Have fun reading about the argument concert.

POV - Bebe

“I’m… confused,” Bebe held her hand up to stop Wendy’s unwarranted confession, “Cartman? Eric Cartman.”

“Yes.” She nodded, eyes stubbornly locked with Bebe’s despite Wendy’s darkening blush.

“Why would you tell me this?” Bebe half-joked in horror, “why would you tell anyone this?!”

“I know! I know, ok, it’s completely unexpected, believe me, nobody is more shocked than myself —”

“Doubtful.” Bebe joked with a laugh. Wendy didn’t find it very funny. “I’m sorry,” Bebe apologized lightheartedly, “but… I mean I thought you hated him?”

“I did… I think…” Wendy closed her eyes and rubbed circles around her temples as she explained. “I don’t know Bebe, all I know is that first he was that jerk who hung around Stan, and now… I don’t know… you’re not gonna believe me, but I swear there are moments where I would classify him… as sweet.”

Bebe guffawed, doubling over in shock as she tried to picture Eric Cartman being anything but an annoying asshole.

“I’m serious!” Wendy insisted, before chuckling herself, and covering her hands with her face. “Ugh, why is this so embarrassing?”

“Because it is Eric. Cartman.” Bebe explained humorously. Wendy sighed and stared off at the mountains in the distance. “Wendy,” Bebe stood up straight and stared at her friend in the eye, “I just… I just don’t understand, why him?” Wendy rolled her eyes, “No, seriously, if you had just waited a little bit longer, you could have had any guy you wanted. I mean… did you even go after him? Or…”

“I didn’t set out to start seeing Eric Cartman, if that’s what you’re asking.” Wendy mumbled quietly under her breath as she checked her nails for any imperfections. “We just sort of… kept running into each other, I don’t know…”
And repeatedly running into Cartman was, what, different from all the other times you’ve run into him over the course of literally your entire life?”

Wendy shrugged in agitation, beginning to grow flustered.

“I don’t know, yeah, Bebe, it kinda was,” Wendy responded defensively, “I just… I don’t know…”

Bebe tried to imagine seeing the relationship form Wendy’s perspective (as best as she could without wanting to hurl). Can you really just change your mind about someone like that so quickly? Then again, this was Wendy we’re talking about: she probably loves the fight just as much (if not more) as she loves when they get along.

Bebe thought back to when she started dating Red. When this girl who she had been classmates with forever just kept inviting her over to play Harry Potter video games and go on long drives to the lake in the summer. When Red kept making corny joke after corny joke until Bebe's ribs hurt from laughing, and the only way to silence the bubbly blonde's incessant giggling was to kiss her, gently. When Red confessed her feelings — dorkily lopsided grin plastered on her face the whole time — and Bebe couldn't help but feel a sweet and sudden attachment to this person...

Wendy was confused by that sudden pairing...

I guess you never really know what a relationship really looks like from the inside.

Bebe sighed. “Ok. I get it.” Wendy looked at her confusedly. “I mean I don’t get it, like from your perspective — and I probably never will — but… sometimes you’re just drawn to someone, and you can’t always explain why.” Bebe smiled, thinking of her dorky, adorable girlfriend Red.

“Yeah well…” Wendy responded, pretending to be preoccupied with an imaginary hangnail on her perfect manicure. “Why do you care so much anyway?”

“Because I’m you’re friend,” Bebe shot Wendy a serious look, “and I want to make sure you’re not just settling for the first guy to say he’s into you since the breakup, and calling that ‘sweet’.”

“That’s not what this is…” Wendy insisted.

“I just want to make sure you’re not rushing into things. I want to make sure he’s not manipulating you into thinking he’s something he’s not… I don’t want to watch him break your heart in the end —”

Wendy interrupted, “Look, I promise, I wouldn’t keep seeing him if I wasn’t… interested, you know?”

Bebe watched her friend squirm under her analytical gaze until a realization crossed Bebe’s mind. She gasped.

“What?” Wendy shifted her weight and looked away uncomfortably.

“You had sex with him.” Bebe accused, only half sure she was right.

Wendy’s nervous smile practically confirmed it.

“No…” Wendy chuckled, unconvincingly.

“Wendy…” Bebe jokingly scolded with a laugh.
“I never admitted that!” Wendy insisted with blushing cheeks.

“Mhm…” Bebe rolled her eyes, checking her phone once more to see where the hell Craig and Clyde were.

“Bebe, don’t judge me, ok? You’re no virgin Mary.” Wendy snapped, lightheartedly.

Bebe only shrugged, uncomfortable with where this conversation was headed. She had to ask just one more question, though.

After a short silent pause, she quipped offhandedly, using air quotes, “So you ‘took his virginity’ then?”

“Oh yeah, big time.” Wendy nodded in quick admission.

“Ha! That bad, huh?” Bebe chuckled, as Craig’s car pulled up in front of Bebe’s house.

“No, actually…” Wendy responded with enamored smile, lost in thought.

“Gross.” Bebe grumbled, before climbing into the back of Craig’s car.

“Hey guys!” Clyde called over his shoulder from the front seat, as Craig never looked up from his phone.

Both girls greeted him politely, then waited patiently for Craig to send his text.

“Alright,” he exclaimed monotonously as he pressed the go button on the GPS with a flourish, “who wants to stop for breakfast?”

Like it or not, Craig’s ‘offer’ to pick up breakfast was less of a suggestion, and more like a declaration of what was definitely going to happen, whether Wendy protested or not.

Within minutes, the group pulled up to the curb in front of Tweek Bros.

“Hey why isn’t Tweek coming with us today?” Bebe wondered as she and Clyde stepped into the cafe, with Wendy trailing behind annoyedly, and Craig sauntering his way up to the counter with a swaggering strut.

"He couldn’t get off work. He wished Craig luck over the phone this morning but Craig said Tweek is his good luck charm, so…” Clyde explained with a shrug.

Bebe watched in amusement as Craig slammed his hands on the counter (effectively making Tweek jump, despite the fact that he already knew Craig was there), and asked the now-glaring blond, coyly:

“One coffee-thing to go, please.”

“You could at least pretend-order a drink you know,” Tweek rolled his eyes, throwing down the rag and picking up a to-go cup, already writing as he asked, “hot chocolate?”

“Yes, please.” Craig whispered flirtatiously.

“Anybody else want anything?” Tweek’s eyes rapidly scanned the room, “You guys don’t have to pay—”
“You do,” Craig spun around to glare at the other teens threateningly.

“Can I have a donut?” Clyde asked excitedly.

“Strawberry jelly or raspberry?” Tweek asked, already walking over to the pastry case.

Clyde tilted his head like he was thinking very hard about this decision.

“Which one did I have last time?”

“Strawberry.”

“Then raspberry, please,” Clyde smiled brightly.

“Bebe? Wendy?” Tweek gestured towards them with the pen in his shaky hands.

Bebe was about to speak when Wendy interrupted loudly, “I just want to get going, we should have been on the road fifteen minutes ago, so…”

“Sheesh, Wendy, I’ll make your drink if it would stop your complaining,” Craig drawled in a low voice, stepping behind the counter with a lazy stroll before being demanded out by a stressed-out Tweek.

“No thanks, I’m good.” Wendy folded her arms, offended by Craig’s honest observation of her crappy mood.

“I’ll just have a croissant,” Bebe smiled at Tweek apologetically, irrationally embarrassed by her friend’s rude outburst.

“I make drinks really fast,” he offered one last time, kind of twitching at the end of his rapid sentence.

“Ok then,” Bebe grinned warmly, “whatever you recommend.

Tweek’s right eye twitched, but just slightly. “Ok… what do you like?” He asked, visibly trying to keep himself calm with the pressure of having to choose something for someone else.

“I like everything, I promise.” Bebe insisted with a smile. “Just make me whatever you’d make yourself.”

“Are you sure?” Tweek picked up the rag again, if only just to wring his hands around it nervously.

Bebe nodded. “Mhm. I trust you.”

“Okay.” Tweek laughed excitedly as he rapidly pressed buttons on the register and gave everyone their totals (he gave everyone the employee discount, despite Craig’s obnoxious protests). Tweek picked up a blank cup and began writing very quickly, inventing Bebe’s drink as he went and nodding approvingly at his creation with a proud smile on his face. “Ohhh, you are gonna like this,” the caffeinated blond muttered under his breath as he got to work on the drinks.

As Tweek buzzed around behind the counter like a busy bee, Wendy asked with a disgruntled clearing of her throat, “Is this gonna take long? Because we’ve gotta get going.” Wendy checked her watch again.

“Wendy,” Bebe scolded her friend in a hushed voice, “stop.”
Wendy just pouted and sunk down in a nearby booth to sulk.

It was only about five minutes later when Tweek (who actually had made the drinks ‘really fast’) finally stopped flurrying around the kitchen like the Tasmanian devil, and handed everyone their drinks and food with an adorably proud smile, only slightly out of breath.

“Wow, that was almost your best time.” Craig praised with a monotonous drone, checking an invisible stopwatch.

“I’ll beat it next time,” Tweek winked, smiling at Craig with twinkling eyes.

“OHMYGODYUM” Clyde groaned with a mouthful of donut, closing his eyes as he savored the pastry that was definitely more dessert than it was breakfast. Wendy and Bebe raised their eyebrows uncomfortably at Clyde as he continued to moan excitedly over food, “wow, ok, remind me that I want this exact donut again next time, WOW.”

“Oh, Clyde,” Tweek laughed amusedly.

“We’ll get you and the donut a room next time too,” Craig muttered flatly.

“Well, then…” Wendy gestured towards the door, her sentence trailing off implicitly, not wanting to be accused of complaining yet again.

“Bye, Tweek, thanks!” Bebe grabbed her croissant and her drink and followed Wendy and Clyde out the door.

“Alright, thanks for breakfast, babe.” Craig tapped his fingers on the counter to get Tweek’s attention before quickly turning and leaving, with a wave over his turned back.

“Good luck, everyone!” Tweek called shyly, before glancing down and noticing something they had left behind.

“I think you forgot your phone,” Bebe pointed out as they crossed the threshold into the chilly October morning. She motioned behind her towards Tweek, who was now stepping out from behind the counter and jogging across the cafe towards the swinging front door, phone in hand.

“I know.” Craig responded, opening up the car door and stepping inside as fast as possible. He sat still, without turning the car on for a few seconds, eyes facing front through the windshield.

“Can we go?” Wendy called from the back seat.

“Nope,” Craig quipped, just as Tweek stormed out of the coffee shop and walked around the car to Craig’s already open window with an adorably grumpy look on his face.

“You did that on purpose,” Tweek accused, handing over the cell phone with a light smirk.

“Oh did I leave that?” Craig flirted, furrowing his brow sarcastically.

“Yeah.” Tweek folded his arms across the open window.

“Well if I forgot that, I must’ve also forgotten to say goodbye then, huh?” Craig leaned in towards Tweek with a grin as he spoke.

“Maybe…” Tweek tilted his head to the side like a puppy.
“Disgusting.” Wendy criticized the sappy interaction under her breath from the backseat.

“Bye.” Tweek leaned in and kissed Craig briefly on the lips. Bebe watched as Craig’s eyes followed Tweek until the door to the cafe swung open. His hand fumbled for the keys distractedly as he watched Tweek jog back up to the counter through the large cafe windows.

Bebe almost thought that if Wendy hadn’t been so impatient to get going, Craig wouldn’t have dragged it out so much, under the guise of flirting with Tweek. But even as Craig threw the van in drive and pulled away from the curb, a little smile remained present on his lips.

Soon enough, the van full of teens pulled into the parking lot of North Park High.

The old buildings loomed intimidatingly through the view of the windshield as they drove deeper into the unfamiliar campus.

They approached the massive auditorium and were greeted with the giant letters ‘T. PARKER HALL’ embossed across the entrance, with a small paper banner that read ‘Welcome South Park Debaters :’ adorning the outside of the brick building.

As soon as the car was parked, Wendy practically ran inside — heels clutched in her hands as her sneakers smacked against the pavement — complaining that they were already late (though what she really meant was that they were late for being comfortably early).

Bebe stepped out of the car and felt her heart start to race in her chest. She tried to tell herself that it was irrational. She had no reason to be nervous. It was just debate, she’d done this many times before, and these were just the pre-public-speaking jitters — it was normal.

“You ok?” Craig locked his car and patted her on the back swiftly as he passed her, effectively leaving her behind.

“Yeah,” she responded breathlessly (though everyone was too far ahead to hear her anyway). She plastered on a smile and walked towards T. Parker Hall.

“No, no, no, no,” Wendy was already in a tirade the second she stepped into the South Park waiting room.

“I know, I’m handling it,” Token promised, already on the phone, and rolling his eyes.

“Do we not have uniforms for a reason, Firkle?” Wendy whined.

“I… yes?… no?… ‘do we not’…”

“The answer is ‘yes’, we have them for a reason!” Wendy snapped.

“Wouldn’t the answer be ‘no, we do not, not have them for a reason?’” Craig interjected amusedly.

“No, it would not.” Wendy hissed with a snarl. “Where is your collared shirt?” Wendy questioned the wide eyes freshman.

“Didn’t buy one,” he answered honestly.
“Why not?” Wendy shrieked.

“Because I already had this one,” Firkle deadpanned, pulling up on his black shirt collar, much to Wendy’s annoyance, and Craig’s entertainment.

“That’s not white, all the other boys are in white, TOKEN!”

“Relax, Wendy! Kyle will be here with a white shirt any second!” Token promised, already rubbing his head like he felt a headache coming on.

The debate team’s faculty advisor continued to sit in the corner, completely ignoring the kids, and reading a gossip magazine.

“God… Wendy is scary…” Clyde chuckled as he sat down next to Bebe. Hm. Maybe she and Cartman really were made for each other…

“She’ll make a terrifying CEO one day,” Bebe laughed in agreement.

Just then, the door to the waiting room creaked open tentatively, and in walked a lanky redhead, holding a white collared shirt.

“Thank god, there, Wendy, happy?” Token sighed and gently took the shirt away from Kyle, “thanks man, sorry you had to drive all the way out here.”

“It’s ok, I… didn’t have anything else going on today…” Kyle nodded politely and smiled sadly.

Token turned his attention away from Kyle for just a second while Wendy snatched the shirt from his hands impatiently, and handed it to Firkle to change into.

In that short moment when Kyle thought there were no eyes on him, Bebe saw his face fall completely, before smiling bravely once again as Token turned back towards him.

“Well, hey, since you’re here, why don’t you stay and watch the debate?” Token offered brightly, turning a blinding smile on the slouching redhead.

“No, that’s ok… I should really get going…” Kyle’s eyes darted towards Wendy briefly.

“Oh,” Token’s smile faltered sympathetically, “well, maybe next time,” he offered politely.


But as he bid everyone good luck and turned to walk away, Bebe saw a mist settle in his stormy green eyes.

Ten minutes later, and it was like Wendy was an entirely different person.

“Whoo!” She exhaled a calming breath and approached Bebe and Clyde with a smile. “Well. Glad everything’s in order now.”

“Yeah, me too.” Clyde muttered humorously under his breath. Bebe repressed a laugh. If Wendy heard his comment, she didn’t react to it.

Wendy exhaled a second calming breath and clapped her hands into a folded position in front of her.

In the uncomfortably serene silence, Bebe pulled out her phone.
She heard Wendy scoff lightheartedly, before pulling one of Bebe’s hands towards her.

“Jeez, Bebe, I know that you’re a lesbian now, but you couldn’t have at least painted your nails for this event if you’re gonna also keep them so short?” She ‘joked’, in what Bebe was sure was meant to be a loving jab, knowing Wendy. It didn’t feel that way, though. Not even close...

“Wait, I’m not a lesbian—” Bebe corrected.

“Wendy, we’ve got about 15 minutes before we have to get into the auditorium, do you wanna lead warmups?” Token asked, checking his watch as he walked over to the small group, unaware of any previous conversation.

“Sure!” Wendy agreed happily, bouncing over to the front of the room and clapping her hands to get everybody’s attention.

“I’m… not a lesbian…” Bebe muttered dejectedly under her breath as she walked over to participate in the warmups.

The team did stretches, breathing exercises, and lip trills.

“Boots and shoes lose newness soon.” Wendy droned loudly, massaging her face while she spoke.

“Boots and shoes lose newness soon,” the room repeated, all except Firkle, who ended up pulling out his phone in protest of this silly exercise, that is until Wendy practically smacked it out of his hand (without missing a beat, of course).

With each tongue twister and speech exercise, Bebe could feel a dark and insidious chill begin to spread like a thin shadow down her back.

Bebe was nearly getting blinded by the excessive amount of stage lights on this well-funded school’s auditorium stage. She could feel herself begin to sweat underneath the heat of the intense lamps. Bebe vaguely wondered if this is what it would feel like in a police interrogation room.

“I heard there’s a pretty big audience out there.” Wendy made small talk as she surveyed the empty auditorium. “Hey, some of these North Park kids are pretty cute, huh?” Wendy attempted to have a good laugh with her friend. Instead the words made Bebe feel sick.

Wendy picked up on her energy, and pulled Bebe aside. “Hey, are you ok?” Bebe didn’t know how to answer that, “Look, I’m sorry for what I said, I was just trying to joke around, but I heard it as it came out, and… well, I mean, look at your nails, Bebe, you should have at least wiped all the chipped polish off—” Bebe shot her friend a glare and Wendy instantly shut up “I’m doing it again,” she admitted sadly, “I’m sorry… are your feelings hurt?”

Wendy asked that question so feebly, that that’s what actually broke Bebe’s heart.

“A little,” she answered honestly. “And I’m not a lesbian just because I’m dating Red now.”

“Ok.” Wendy responded in gentle agreement, wholeheartedly.

Wendy held her arms out for a hug. Bebe rolled her eyes with a smile and hugged her best friend.

“I forgive you.” Bebe declared in a whisper.

Wendy chuckled in response. When she pulled back to look at Bebe, she had a worried look on her
“Are you really ok? I mean even before I kinda blew up at everyone you seemed a little… off…”

Wendy didn’t mean it any other way but nice; she was just trying to be a good, concerned friend. But the question seemed to tighten the muscles in Bebe’s chest and prick at her eyes in a torturous way.

*Flashes of a drunken night, dancing wildly, waking up in an unfamiliar room—*

“Bebe?” Wendy checked worriedly, pulling Bebe out of her thoughts and back to reality.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Bebe lied, “just nervous for the first debate of the year.”

“…are you sure?” Wendy asked again.

Bebe turned around and saw a brown haired boy in a North Park uniform. Then another. Then another. They all looked the same. Their faces all blurred together into contorted shapes until Bebe could hardly tell them apart from one another. Then she could no longer tell them apart from her friends. She looked around and found herself surrounded by blurry shapes of monsters with counterfeit smiles, and then the room was spinning.

Bebe’s breath hitched as she grunted an unintelligible sound and pushed past Wendy. She ran down the backstage stairs so quickly she almost fell down them. She could hear Wendy calling after her, but Bebe assured her she was fine and slowed her pace to a casual stroll, claiming she was just going to the bathroom and would be back in a minute (‘stomach troubles’ she claimed — Bebe hoped Wendy wouldn’t follow her to the bathroom if she thought Bebe needed the privacy to deal with a sudden bout of diarrhea). Wendy seemed to accept the lie, though she folded her arms skeptically and watched as Bebe threw open the auditorium doors.

Bebe stormed out into the hallway and doubled over, gripping her knees for support.

“Bebe.” Craig came striding out of the bathrooms and caught up to her. “Are you ok? We’re about to go—”

“What if he’s here.” Bebe whispered brokenly.

Craig’s expression emptied as the wheels turned in his head. “He’s not here.” He promised.

“How can you know that? This is *his* school!” Bebe hissed, taking note of eavesdropping passerby’s. “I don’t even remember what he looks like even if I wanted to, and he probably didn’t even bother to look at my face when…” Bebe’s words were strangled in her throat. She fanned her hands in front of her face.

“Bebe, what’s wrong?”

“I can’t breathe.”

“Um… ok.”

“What do I do?”

“Ok, I know this, this kind of thing happens to Tweek all the time — not that I’ve ever actually seen it, if I can just remember what he says about it…”

“Craig!”
“Ok come sit down!” Craig led Bebe over to a padded bench in the lobby and sat her down on its plush cushions. “Breathe.” He encouraged. Bebe resisted the urge to shoot him a glaring look. “It’s ok…”

The gentle way he said it — it hurt more because it always hurts more to be loved when you don’t feel deserving of it.

Bebe didn’t want him to see her cry.

She crossed her arms across her knees and fell forward against her arms. She felt Craig rest a calming hand tentatively against her shoulder and leave it there, half-hovering, but there nonetheless. The auditorium doors creaked open again, but Bebe kept her head down.

“Hey guys!” She heard Clyde’s cheery voice — she could practically hear his smile and envision it as she kept her head down and breathed. “Whoa, Bebe, are you ok?”

Bebe sighed into her hands, then she put on a brave face and sat up rigidly. “Fine,” she smiled.

“No, you’re crying,” Clyde pointed out gently, noticing the faint glimmer of wet tears shining against her cheek. He sunk down into the seat next to her and began rubbing her back to comfort her — a stark contrast from Craig’s timid condolences. It was super uncomfortable. He meant well.

“Clyde?” Craig placed a hand over Clyde’s restless hand in a silent command to just be chill.

Clyde nodded apologetically and squeezed his hands together in his lap. Bebe was silently grateful.

“What happened, Bebe?” Clyde asked gently. His hand twitched slightly, but he caught himself, and his instinct to smother like a mama bear.

That was too big a question to answer right now.

Bebe’s phone buzzed, and she saw it was a text from Wendy.

From Wendy: are you ok in there? We’re a minute away from starting.

From Wendy: I can have Token cover for me, I can bring you a tampon or something if you need it? You’ve been in there a while…

Bebe put her phone away and began to collect herself, preparing to walk back in that auditorium, on time, in 45 seconds or less.

Bebe wiped her eyes and tucked her hair behind her ears. “Nothing. It’s nothing.”

“…It didn’t seem like nothing…” Clyde murmured softly.

“Bebe’s not feeling well, so we were just leaving.” Craig announced definitively, standing up and raising his eyebrows in invitation.

Bebe laughed dryly. “Uh, that’s not gonna happen.” She stood up too, folding her arms defiantly.
“Why?” Craig frowned, “You don’t wanna be here, so let’s go.”

Bebe shook her head in resistance, “That’s not how life works, I made a commitment, I have to be here for the team.”

“The team can go screw itself,” Craig tossed his hand in the air flippantly, “you don’t owe them anything.”

“I made a promise, we have to go out there!”

“You’re in no condition to compete with these jerks.”

“Condition?” Bebe scoffed with a defensive chuckle, “I’m not in any kind of ‘condition’!”

“Uh, guys?” Clyde attempted to interject politely.

“Situation then.” Craig corrected dryly, “This situation sucks, so you might as well go home.”

“You know, it’s not like I’m dying of some horrible disease,” Bebe snarled quietly, much to Clyde’s further panic and confusion, “it’s just something that happened to me, it’s a part of my life and I’m just gonna have to learn to get over it one day.”

Craig scoffed incredulously, “Bebe, that’s so callous I almost thought it came out of my mouth.”

“CAN SOMEONE PLEASE TELL ME WHAT’S GOING ON!?”

Clyde’s anxious outburst settled uncomfortably between Craig and Bebe. He looked between the two of them frantically, awaiting an explanation that neither was about to give.

The mostly empty hallway erupted with a quiet roar as the faint echo of polite clapping (signaling the start of the debate) taunted Bebe from behind a double layer of auditorium doors.

“We have to go in there, they’re starting…” Bebe muttered breathlessly. Her heart pounded in her chest.

Clyde took a step closer “Bebe, if something is wrong I want to help…” He looked so sad and so worried…

Bebe turned to Craig pleadingly.

Craig looked at Clyde, then back at Bebe with a conflicted look on his face. He finally shrugged helplessly, holding his hands up in innocent surrender, “I won’t tell him,” he whispered shakily.

The three of them walked outside to a deserted seating area around the corner, and sat down at what was probably normally a lunch table. It took a while for the brain fog to lift enough for Bebe to tell an entirely coherent story (one that wasn’t entirely littered with ‘ums’ and confessions of losing her train of thought), but eventually she told Clyde everything. By the end of it all, he was more upset than she was.

He was doing his very best to hide it, but Clyde was never good about concealing his emotions.

“Bebe,” he whispered, shaking his head with his mouth open like he didn’t know what to say next. He glanced at Craig, who was running his hand down his face wearily, tears brimming in his eyes. Bebe had no doubt that he could still hear her horrified screams in his head. Her stomach lurched
sickeningly at the thought.

She couldn’t stop picturing the humiliating aftermath: stumbling out of bed, half naked and embarrassed; almost falling over trying to grab her shirt off the floor, while Craig attempted to help, despite still covering his eyes in at effort to protect her modesty; walking with two protective hands on her shoulders, guiding her through the entire party like she was being paraded to the gallows on their way out the door…

Bebe slumped over and leaned her elbows on the picnic table, trying to breathe, and trying to wipe horrible images from her head. She instinctually wrapped her green sweater tightly around her unexposed chest.

“So do you want a hug?” Clyde offered gently, fidgeting in his seat, clearly fighting his initial instinct to immediately and enthusiastically console any person who seemed even slightly down in his direct vicinity.

Bebe thought about it.

“Yeah,” she answered with a tearful laugh. Clyde was out of his seat immediately, and gave Bebe an awkward side hug from her right, despite her head still being slumped against her forearms over the table.

She felt a strong and heavy hand to her left fall to rest against her shoulder, squeezing gently.

Bebe’s phone buzzed again for about the 11th time, so she finally decided to check it.

It was all messages from Wendy.

Asking if she was ok, asking if Wendy should excuse herself and come check on her, Wendy saying she’d checked the bathroom and Bebe wasn’t there, Wendy getting worried, asking where Bebe was and if she was still alive…

Bebe groaned and slouched against a pang of guilt in her chest.

“That Wendy?” Craig mumbled with a frown. She had probably been texting him too.

“Yeah, I’m just gonna tell her I had to leave,” Bebe typed flurried apologies and excuses as quickly as her fingers would allow her.

“Alright,” Craig tapped his palms against the table twice before standing up, looming over everybody exceptionally, “let’s go then.”

“What?” Bebe muttered distractedly as she pressed send, rereading her message for the third time as it sat newly delivered in the chat.

“You said you wanted to go, so let’s go.” Craig shrugged easily, “get ice cream or something.”

Bebe didn’t think he was serious. She thought they were all going to go inside, and then have an incredibly awkward ride home after the debate was over.

“Shouldn’t we at least wait for Wendy?” Bebe pointed out.

Craig shook his head, “she’ll get a ride from Toke. I don’t think you want her probing you for questions the entire ride, anyway,” he pointed out. Well, he was not wrong about that...

“Whatever you wanna do, Bebe.” Clyde declared supportively.
Bebe’s stomach growled, and she realized she’d only had a croissant all day long.

“Ok, but just let her know you’re leaving so she knows to get a ride.” Bebe requested.

Craig had pulled out his phone before Bebe had even finished talking, “Done.” He declared. That must’ve been some short and bluntly worded text….

Bebe stood and Craig took that as an invitation to turn around and begin walking towards the car.

“Um, Bebe,” Clyde stopped her, pulling her aside for a second to talk while Craig turned the car on, “I just wanted to say… you’re only half right: at this point it is something you’re gonna have to live with, but ‘getting over it’ is not the same as moving on. And Bebe, you’re strong enough to move on, I hope you know that,” Clyde nodded at her encouragingly, “confront it until it doesn’t hurt so bad anymore. Confide in friends, talk to me, talk to Craig. You don’t have to go through hurt alone. Grief can be handled until it gets easier,” Clyde shrugged and murmured quietly, with a nervous chuckle and a sad grin, “I would know.”

And with that Clyde happily turned and walked with Bebe the rest of the way to Craig’s car.

Clyde and Bebe sat at a little picnic table outside a North Park ice cream shop, while Craig stood off to the side — rolling his eyes as he was berated over the phone by a shrill voice whose muffled screams could be heard even from where Bebe sat, distortedly, though the tiny earpiece of Craig’s phone.

“She’s really mad.” Bebe noted, mostly to herself, though the observation didn’t escape Clyde’s attention.

“She just doesn’t understand yet. Ready to switch?”

Bebe passed her Cows’ Creamery cup to Clyde, and he passed his to her.

“You hardly left me any chocolate-brownie.” Bebe complained as she dug into what was left of his pistachio scoop.

“Sorry.” He apologized with a smile. “Do you want some of your cookie-dough back instead?”

“No, it’s ok.” Bebe muttered flatly. She realized she’d forgotten to smile.

Clyde looked at her for a second too long. It made Bebe squirm when people looked at her for too long.

“What?” She sighed.

“Nothing, just… she’ll understand. I know she will. When you’re ready to explain it to her…” Clyde smiled warmly, but it did little to stop the spread of ice in Bebe’s chest.

“Can we please just stop talking about it?” She snapped half-heartedly, “It’s really not that big of a deal…”

Clyde’s smile melted off his face. “Yeah, ok, sorry.”

Bebe really needed a hug.

She changed the subject.
“So what’s new with you? Anything interesting going on in the life of Clyde?” Bebe smiled easily and convincingly. At least she hoped so.

“Not really,” he shook his head, digging around in his ice cream cup as he thought about it.

“No new hobbies or interesting facts? No new relationships in your life?”

“None that’s lasted longer than the relationship with my first girlfriend,” Clyde joked and raised his eyebrows implicitly, just knowing that the memory of their unbearably shy ‘relationship’ was too embarrassing (and hilarious) for Bebe to handle.

“That was like fourth grade!” Bebe scoffed lightheartedly. “And we barely spoke or saw one another the whole time!” It wasn’t even real, just little kid politics (after Wendy fake-dated Token for a few months to get back at Stan, and they needed a double date). In Clyde’s defense theirs did last a whole year...

“I’m still counting it.” Clyde shrugged unashamedly, mid-bite.

Just then Craig came over and sat back down at the table, running his hands through his hair and sighing out of his mouth like he’d finally crossed the finish line at a 5k.

“That bad, huh?” Bebe drawled darkly, pretending to be preoccupied with her dessert.

“She’s more mad at me than she is at you.” Craig promised dryly. Bebe only hoped that was true.

Craig picked up his now mostly melted and untouched ice cream cup and frowned at it. He turned it around in his hands before setting it back down and diving at Clyde’s precious reserves.

“Craig, no!” He protested childishly, pulling his cup of ice cream away from Craig, leaving it out in the open in the middle of the table.

Bebe smiled mischievously and dug her spoon into the chocolate-chip-cookie-dough scoop in front of Clyde.

“Hey!” He protested sheltering the cup with his arm on all sides, blocking invading spoons over and over like a little plastic sword-fight, as the three teens giggled airily. Bebe took a heaping spoonful of the red-velvet flavor left unguarded in Craig’s cup instead.

For a quick second, Bebe felt light.
POV - Stan

Stan lay stretched out diagonally across his bed, one leg dangling off the side, and one bottle of blackberry brandy in his hand.

He had been lying here since Friday, only getting up to eat meals and take a piss. Stan had *technically* been drinking all weekend, but considering his secret stash was running low, he’d mostly convinced himself to drink water in an attempt to trick his brain — but the end result yielded only a bloated stomach, a headache, and healthy, clear piss, so Stan decided to switch back to the bottle that tasted like sweet medicine and regret.

He took a sip.

‘I hope that our few remaining friends give up on trying to save us. I hope we come up with a failsafe plot to piss off the dumb few that forgave us.’

The alcohol stung Stan’s throat in just the right way to send him off in a coughing fit, drowning out The Mountain Goats’ as it blared on in the background.

Stan heard three loud bangs on his door.

“Turn that shit down!” Shelly bellowed from behind the closed door.

Stan just rolled over, curled up against the wall, bottle of Brandy hidden tightly in his arms.

Shelly burst through the door and unplugged his speakers.

“I was listening to that.” Stan argued, noncommittally.

“Whatever you’re moping about, do it quietly, turd!”

Shelly slammed the door and Stan was alone again.

He decided to unplug his phone from the speakers and plug in his headphones instead. As soon as the cable popped into place, a bright light lit up his home screen: a picture of Sparky from when he was a much younger puppy, laying on his back and looking extremely cute with his tongue hanging out of his smiling mouth, tail wagging so fast it photographed as a fluffy blur, and one small hand scratching Sparky’s little belly with a green Super Best Friends bracelet tied tightly around the wrist with string. Stan’s stomach turned slightly. He shoved the bottle of alcohol back in his drawer and shut off his lamp.
Maybe he’d try and get some sleep instead.

He pressed play on the phone with his squeezed eyes shut tightly and shoved the phone under his pillow.

‘And I hope when you think of me years down the line you can’t find one good thing to say,
And I’d hope that if I found the strength to walk out you’d stay the hell out of my way.
I am drowning. There is no sign of land…’

Stan wallowed in the rest of the depressing song until it came to a feeble conclusion.

By the end, his eyebrows had softened, and his lips had parted in limp relaxation.

He was about to start drifting off, when his “Favorites” playlist decided to punch him in the gut and kick out his fucking teeth.

“No, no, no, not this song,” Stan pleaded, bolting up straight in bed and pulling the phone out from under the pillow, pressing pause as fast as he could.

He sat there, sort of panting for a second, but he could still hear echoes of the song in his head.

Stan ripped the headphones out of his ears and sat quietly in the contrasting stillness.

He ran his fingers through his unwashed hair and exhaled a labored sigh. He tried to clear his mind, but Stan was too exhausted to fight the intrusion of memories that had once been happy, but were now tainted with complications of current circumstance.

Right at the beginning of eighth grade, Kyle had this idea to do (as he called it), a “Brotherhood of the Traveling Playlist”: a traveling USB, to be filled with music by each of the four boys until they had a collaborative playlist, inspired by the 2001 book and 2005 movie, ‘The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants’. Cartman really swung into him for that one.

The rules were, each boy would pick 4 songs and add it to the list, until they had 16, and then the cycle would start over, that way nobody could hog all the storage space (namely Cartman), plus Kyle always said four was their lucky number.

Because it was his idea, he decided he wanted to go last — really tie a bow on the end of it, which of course Cartman made fun of him for.

Sadly, The USB never came to be — lost forever at Kenny’s house, with a bunch of 70s rock and shitty acoustic music stashed onto it.

However, Kyle was not going to miss out… he had waited his turn after all.

One day at lunch, Kyle came in with a huge smile on his face, and headphones in his hands.

He announced that just because Kenny can’t take care of an inanimate object, doesn’t mean he’s not going to participate in what was originally his idea, and he had chosen his four songs very carefully: because each one represented one of them.

Stan couldn’t remember which songs were chosen for Kenny or Cartman, only that Kenny highly approved of his high-energy selection, and Cartman was somehow offended by his (which kind of served him right, given how much he picked on Kyle for this ‘gay’ idea that meant so much to him).
Kenny was causing a scene, teasing Cartman for having a better song than him when Kyle gently placed the headphones in Stan’s ears and pressed play.

‘Why did you pick this song?’ Stan chuckled awkwardly, noticing the somber vibe and strangely sad feeling he got from listening to it.

Kyle shrugged self-consciously, ‘I thought it sounded cool, and I thought you’d like it. It seemed like something you’d listen to…’

Stan nodded, listening further, ‘this is dope, dude!’

Kyle smiled, relieved. ‘Plus it was the only song with the word ‘blue’ in it that I knew... you know, ‘cause that’s your favorite color’, he chuckled in that half-snort way he does when he’s nervous.

The minute Stan got home, he went on his computer and added the cool new song to the playlist he had made of his four songs.

Stan had liked his song so much, that it was the first song he thought of to add to his ‘Favorites’ playlist as soon as he got a Spotify account.

And now it was sitting in his lap — the title flashing across the screen as his phone stared up at him expectantly.

Stan bit his lip nervously.

He reluctantly placed the headphones back in his ears and held his breath.

He closed his eyes and pressed play.

Warm guitar and gentle tambourine reverberated like gentle weeping and pounding heartbeats.

Stan leaned back stiffly against his pillow, before he squeezed his eyes shut tightly and curled up against his side on the bed.

‘Sometimes I feel so happy
Sometimes I feel so sad
Sometimes I feel so happy
But mostly you just make me mad
Baby you just make me mad’

Stan laughed, but it came out more like a sob.

‘Linger on, your pale blue eyes
Linger on, your pale blue eyes’

Tears flowed steadily down the bridge of his nose, each note stinging like a sharp pain as Stan listened to lyrics he’d heard a million times, but never really understood.

‘Thought of you as my mountain top
Thought of you as my peak
Stan felt a white hot burn rising in his throat. He rolled over so his face was buried in his pillow, and pounded his fist into the mattress, repeatedly.

‘I’ve had but couldn’t keep’

Stan exhaled jaggedly.

‘Linger on, your pale blue eyes’

Stan sat up slowly and unlocked his phone.

‘Linger on, your pale blue eyes’

His finger hovered undecidedly above the touch screen for just a second, before he pressed a familiar name in his call log, and the song’s life was cut short — replaced by a shrill ring.

The phone rang several times, so many in fact that Stan was starting to worry the person on the other end wouldn’t pick up.

He was almost more worried when the receiver finally clicked at the end of the very last ring.

“Hello? I’m here, hello?” Kyle’s voice rushed its greeting, anxiously.

Kyle’s voice sounded weird, kind of stuffy and nasal. Like he’d been crying…

“Hi.” Stan croaked, not at all surprised that the tone of his voice matched Kyle’s exactly. He cleared his throat and tried again. “What are you doing?” He attempted weakly.

“I’m watching The Office… for, like, the millionth time.” Kyle chuckled emptily. Stan could practically hear him biting his lip in the silence. “… it’s a little annoying because Kenny is watching on my account too, but we’re on different episodes so—”

“Can you meet me at the pond?” Stan rasped.

Kyle froze on the other end of the call.

“Hello?” Stan pulled the phone away from his ear to make sure the call hadn’t dropped. He heard a small voice respond through the speakers of the receiver.

“Ok.” Kyle answered robotically.

“…Ok….” Stan agreed.

“…Now?” Kyle asked for clarification.

“As soon as you can.” Stan answered.

And that was it.

Stan ended the call and grabbed his jacket, Kyle’s song starting up in his headphones right where it had left off.
Stan had made it to Stark’s Pond.

The public park halfway between their houses had always served as a sort of secret meeting spot for the two boys. Whenever one of them had exciting news, or something to vent about, or if they ever just wanted to get out of the house and see their best friend, they met here — especially since it was within walking distance from either of their houses’ in either direction. Meeting here was sort of a tradition.

Stan was waiting near the edge of the water, looking out towards the parking lot.

He saw Kyle from far away, and the two waved at each other stiffly, before Stan finally picked up his phone and pretended to check his notifications. At least that way he wouldn’t just be standing there, watching Kyle walk up silently, or worse: say hello too early before they were really in hearing distance of each other, and having to deal with asking the other one to repeat themselves.

It was weird, Stan and Kyle were never usually awkward in any situation. But now their friendship was uneasy, tense and on edge with apologies unsaid; severed. Stan hated it.

When Kyle finally finished half-walking-half-jogging up to where Stan was waiting for him, Stan looked up from his phone.

“Hey. So. I’m here.” Kyle shrugged with his hands in his pockets.

Stan jumped off of the fence he was sitting on and landed right in front of Kyle. Before Kyle could say anything else, Stan reached up and placed a headphone in his ear.

One of Kyle’s stubborn curls got stuck in the way of the wire, so Stan brushed it out of the way.

Kyle’s eyes widened immediately in realization.

‘If I could make the world as pure’

‘and strange as what I see’

The redhead nodded his head and laughed embarrassedly under his breath.

‘I’d put you in the mirror I put in front of me’

‘I put in front of me’

“Sentimental Sap.” Kyle teased, despondently.

Stan nodded.

The raven-haired boy paused the song and pulled the headphones out of both of their ears. His hands trembled in the cold as he wrapped up the wires and stuffed the phone in his pocket.

Stan was half expecting Kyle to speak — Kyle always seemed to know what to say even at the most difficult of times — but although Stan could see a billion words race behind his eyes, he never opened his mouth.

“So what episode of The Office are you on?” Stan blurted out, ungracefully breaking the silence.

“Oh.” Kyle seemed almost startled by the monotony of the question, “uh, Pam’s pregnant. The episode when she starts going into labor.”

“Oh, that’s a good one,” Stan laughed hollowly.
“Yeah,” Kyle agreed with an identically empty chuckle.

Stan scuffed his shoes against the ground, kicking up dirt and frost that had already begun to sparkle in the chilly hours just before dusk.

Still, Kyle remained uncharacteristically quiet.

Stan suspected that — like himself — he was just worried about saying the wrong thing.

Stan inhaled a stabilizing breath and spoke up.

“Listen,” Stan’s voice kind of trailed off. Kyle stood up straighter as he waited for Stan to continue, “I’m sorry,” Stan whispered. Kyle felt miles away from him. He stepped closer. “I blew up, on Friday… I think I was just freaked out about Wendy, and then I thought that this would change more things… which then, of course, it did, because of the way I reacted…”

Kyle nodded in stern acknowledgement, but said nothing.

Stan gestured towards the phone in his pocket. “Guess things can’t really change if that’s the way they’ve always been…” Stan muttered almost silently.

“Guess so.” Kyle whispered delicately.

“…It really has been all this time, huh?”

Kyle didn’t verbally answer at first. Stan watched his entire jaw tighten as he swallowed tensely and looked off into the distance. His eyebrows stitched together over the stern expression in his green eyes.

“I don’t even know how long it’s been…” Kyle answered honestly, only looking at Stan when his voiced trailed off thoughtfully.

“You know, I feel like — deep down — I already kind of knew.”

“Oh, I know you’re trying to be helpful right now but that actually makes it worse.” Kyle replied quickly, his eyes squeezed shut tightly with embarrassment.

“Sorry,” Stan apologized, before continuing as gently as possible. “And you know that I don’t… feel exactly the same way you do, but,”

“Please stop saying it,” Kyle whispered pleadingly under his breath.

“I mean, dude,” Stan placed a hand on Kyle’s shoulder, “you know I still love you right?”

Kyle opened his eyes and looked at Stan with an even expression. He nodded calculatingly, his voice soft with vulnerability. “Yeah.”

“Just… not in that way…” Stan elaborated redundantly.

Kyle’s voice fell, “Yeah.”

“Yeah…” Stan mumbled flatly. His hand clumsily fell off of Kyle’s shoulder and landed back down at his side.

Stan didn’t know what to say next. He looked around at their surroundings dumbly, blowing air through his lips as he surveyed the ducks waddling through the grass.
Eventually, both boys attempted to restart the conversation — but unfortunately they tried to do so at the same time: talking over one another as they politely offered to let the other one go first.

“Stan—”

“—So when did—”

“Oh, sorry.”

“No, you go.”

“Go ahead.”

“No, mine’s stupid.”

“Go ahead.”

“No, you go.”

“Stan, go ahead.”

“Ok, but…. No, it’s stupid, just…um… ok, so, like, what did you know you were gay?— I’m sorry, no, oh my god, that’s…” Stan’s voice trailed off into uncomfortable chuckles as an entertained smile spread across Kyle’s face.

“Stupid?” The redhead guessed amusedly.

“Yeah,” Stan chuckled nervously.

“It is.” Kyle agreed, laughing.

“I know.” Stan bit his lip ashamedly.

“Could you really not think of anything else to say?” Kyle broke out into musical laughter.

“It just felt like the conversation needed to move forward with questions, and that was the only one I could think of, I don’t know…” Stan responded, chuckling, before covering his red face with his hands and shaking his head embarrassedly at himself.

“You dufus.” Kyle teased.

“Yeah.” Stan smiled apologetically.

Kyle shrugged, responding to the original question, “kinda always, I guess.”

Stan nodded in understanding.

Kyle looked down at his shuffling feet.

“Were you ever gonna tell me? On your own time?” Stan asked gently.

“Of course.” Kyle’s eyes burned with honest intensity, “I just…” He shrugged, and the fire went out inside of him, “wanted to wait a little longer.”

“You ever gonna forgive Kenny?” Stan chuckled with a lopsided smile. He felt it melt of his face quickly.
“Yeah.” Kyle nodded, “I just wanna make him sweat a little bit longer. Maybe I’ll forgive him next week or somethin’.” The redhead smirked mischievously.

Stan laughed emptily in response.

Light was beginning to fade behind the trees, and the two teens turned to watch the setting sun shimmer against the still, glassy water.

Stan saw Kyle’s expression fall in his peripheral vision.

“That was fucked up, what I said about you leading me on,” Kyle mumbled out towards the water, “I don’t want you to think I ever actually believed that, it was more just… hopeful…”

Kyle locked eyes with Stan for a total of 5 seconds before his intense gaze melted into something distant and formal.

“Well I gotta get going, my dad is probably making dinner.” Kyle pointed towards the general direction of his house.

“Yeah, I gotta do some homework, actually. I kinda got nothing done this weekend…” Stan admitted, laughing with an embarrassed exhale.

Kyle smiled half-heartedly. Stan imagined if he weren’t so drained he would be rolling his eyes as well.

Kyle’s gaze fell to the ground as he squinted his eyes and asked carefully, “So we’re friends again?”

Stan shook his head and smiled warmly, “We never weren’t friends.”

Kyle’s eyes brimmed with tears as he smiled weakly and nodded.

Stan approached him with an awkward step forward before wrapping his arms around Kyle for hug goodbye. He felt Kyle’s muscles tense underneath him, before his timid arms wrapped tentatively around Stan.

‘Linger on, your pale blue eyes’

Stan could feel Kyle’s grip strengthen as he held onto him tightly.

‘Linger on, your pale blue eyes’

“I’ll see you Monday.” Stan grunted gracelessly, gritting his teeth and squeezing his eyes shut tightly as they prickled behind his eyelids.

“Yeah. See you tomorrow.” Kyle rasped over his shoulder.

“...I’m sorry for everything I said!” Stan blurted out loudly, tensing his muscles anxiously, with no sign of letting go of Kyle.

Kyle readjusted his flimsy grip on Stan, and whispered against his ear, “It’s ok.”

After a moment, Stan pulled away and took a few too many steps back from Kyle.

“Goodnight.” He waved from a distance that felt like miles compared to feet.
“‘Night.’ Kyle waved, and began walking away.

“I don’t really feel used, by the way.” Stan called at Kyle’s retreating back. The redhead turned around slowly, his eyebrow raised amusedly, “Just, you know.. for the record.”

Kyle smiled brightly and laughed, “Let the record show that Stan Marsh is a ‘dufus’.”

The two waved goodbye one last time and went their separate ways, as the sun painted the sky golden above Stark's Pond.

As Stan was getting ready for bed, he pulled out his phone with the intention of playing music.

He had almost completely forgotten which song would be dutifully waiting for him as he opened the app and saw Kyle’s song, half finished, flash across the screen.

He pressed play.

'Skip a life completely, stuff it in a cup'
'She said money is like us in time'
'It lies but can't stand up'
'Down for you is up'

Stan turned off his bathroom light,

'Linger on, your pale blue eyes'

and crawled into bed in his dark room.

'Linger on, your pale blue eyes'

Stan opened his phone and scrolled through instagram a little bit as he was falling asleep.

'It was good what we did yesterday'
'And I'd do it once again'
'The fact that you are married'
'Only proves you're my best friend'

Stan froze mid-scroll as Kyle’s smiling face lit up his screen (courtesy of a picture series Ike had posted of the family pasta-and-board-games-dinner tonight).

'But it's truly, truly a sin'

Stan closed his eyes and fell asleep as the song drew to a close.

'Linger on, your pale blue eyes'
'Linger on, your pale blue eyes'
Chapter Summary

Bebe goes back to school on Monday, and runs into her best friend...

TW: memories of sexual assault

POV - Bebe

When Bebe woke up and felt like she had been hit by a metaphorical truck. Usually, if Bebe was sick, she could still manage to drag herself out of bed, weighing the pros and cons of skipping lectures vs. getting more sleep, but she would always ultimately decide that she would rather not make up the work later.

Today was different though. Today she was exhausted. She could feel gravity like an increasing resistance around her limbs and against her chest, carving its place into her sternum until at one point she was almost certain that it was going to crush her completely. Bebe lay in bed, just staring at the ceiling. After 45 minutes, she tried to go back to sleep. After 15 minutes of laying in bed with her eyes open, Bebe rolled onto her side, and picked up her phone to watch Netflix. She was already going to be late for her first class, she might as well rest a little longer.

Bebe ended up missing all of her classes before lunch. When she finally arrived at school, five minutes before lunch, she just kind of waited. She hung out in the empty hallway in a trance-like and silent stillness until she was startled by the ringing of the bell, and the halls filled with shuffling kids, all moving quickly from one place to another. They swirled around her in a surreal blur as she stood planted in the middle, watching them go round and round in circles around her, stuck in their daily routines of going from class to locker to cafeteria, on autopilot.

Bebe forced herself to move from her rooted position and made her way over to the classroom where the school newspaper met on Mondays and Thursday during lunch.

She walked through the door and marched towards an empty desk with her dead down.

“You guys won.” The stoic and slightly detached voice of Kyle carried over to Bebe from the seat diagonally behind and over her left shoulder.

“Yeah…” She responded, and turned around to face him. Both teens only held the delicate eye contact for a fleeting moment, before both eventually broke.

“Hey B-b-bebe!” Jimmy greeted her with a bright smile as she sat down next to him, in front of Kyle, “heard the d-deb-b-bate team won yesterday. Congrats!”

“Thanks,” Bebe responded meekly, before admitting, rapidly, “I wasn’t there though.”

Kyle’s ears practically perked up as he turned his head just slightly to listen to Bebe’s story, hand hovering over his notebook, as if mid-sentence.
“Oh.” Jimmy tilted his head sympathetically, waiting for Bebe to elaborate. She was hoping he wouldn’t keep waiting, but he did.

“Yeah, I wasn’t feeling well… I think it was just nerves or something…” She lied, fidgeting with her hands as she spoke.

Kyle turned back to his notebook, resuming business as usual despite his pursed lips and skeptically furrowed brow.

“Yeah those ner-rves can b-be a b-bitch.” Jimmy agreed with a knowing laugh. “The tr-tr-trick is to tr-tr-trick yourself into feeling excited rather than n-n-n-n-n-nervous.”

“Yeah… that’s a good tip.” Bebe tried to smile convincingly. She rested her head against her propped up hand as the faculty advisor began their Monday meeting.

As Bebe made her way to her next class, she saw Wendy in the hall.

And the raven haired girl made a b-line right for her.

Bebe expected attitude. A ‘where were you’ or ‘why did you let me down’ type of question.

Instead Wendy pulled Bebe into the bathroom and locked the door behind them.

Bebe (confused), just watched as Wendy checked underneath all the stalls to make sure that nobody was in there with them.

When she finally stood back up to face her friend, Bebe was taken aback by the worried expression that overshadowed the normally prissy condition of Wendy’s face.

“What is going on with you?” She asked. Not in a rude way. She was genuinely concerned about Bebe.

Bebe, however, was not in the mood. She tried to brush it off. “Nothing. Why, what do you mean?”

“Bebe…” Wendy’s pleading eyes silently begged her friend to be honest with her.

Bebe shrugged, shoving her hands in her pockets as her foot began to tap (anything to try and distract her body from wanting to cry).

“I mean, you left the team yesterday — which was one thing — but then you also didn’t show up to school this morning… I know you Bebe, ok, I know you always try to be really strong and levelheaded, and I love you for that, but… I mean, if something is going on you can’t keep holding everything in and talking only to yourself. That’s a very lonely place to be…”

Bebe nodded and averted her eyes from Wendy, down towards the tile floors.

“I mean… come on, you’re obviously not ok…” Wendy whispered, mostly to herself, in a heartbreakingly shaky voice.

The trembling blonde nodded with a scoff.

“Is it that obvious?” Bebe joked with a lighthearted smile, until she suddenly burst out into tears.
As much as she tried to hold it in, Bebe couldn’t. Her breaths hitched into sobs, and her face reddened and contorted as tears poured down her cheeks. Bebe tried to cover her face with her hands, but she could still see Wendy’s shocked face through her shaking fingers.

“Bebe,” Wendy choked from behind her own hands before crossing the small stretch of room towards her friend.

Bebe sunk against the corner of the room and slid her back down the wall, melting into a curled up heap on the floor.

As Bebe’s eyes were squeezed shut — and her face was hidden in the corner where the door met the graffitied wall — she felt two arms wrap around her so quickly it was almost startling, squeezing her tightly.

She didn’t say anything, she didn’t explain herself, she didn’t have to. Not yet. Wendy was understanding without having completely understood.

The two girls just sat there on the floor, with Wendy making vague promises that it was all going to be ok, absentely rocking them both back and forth as Bebe struggled to breathe, determined to silence her sobs.

The two ditched the rest of the school day after that — something that was completely unheard of for Wendy, though today she didn’t seem to mind in the slightest. Some things are more important.

They drove back to Wendy’s house and went straight up to her room.

Bebe sat at the head of Wendy’s militantly-made bed, clutching a soft sloth pillow pet tightly to her chest. (Why anybody — but especially a sleep deprived teenager — would even bother to make their bed at all, let alone daily, Bebe will never know).

She took another deep breath and closed her eyes.

“You remember that party?” Bebe started. She could hear the weakness in her voice, muffled by a stuffy nose as she breathed heavily through her mouth.

“What party?” Wendy asked. She seemed unsure if this conversation topic was relevant, or just another distraction.

“Last summer. When you were out of town.” She explained, sighing shallowly as she caught her breath between sentences.

Wendy’s face paled. She remembered exactly the party she was speaking about.

“It wasn’t our usual crowd, so you didn’t want me to go alone, and I told you ‘don’t worry, Kenny, Stan, Clyde, and Craig… would be there’...” Bebe had to will her brain to stop moving faster than her confessions. She kept replaying in her head the moment when Craig — having followed the sound of agonized screams — opened a bedroom door in a panic, only to find a helpless weeping girl left alone in the dark on an empty bed. She tried not to picture the tears in his eyes as he listened to her describe what he was just a few moments too late to save her from.
'Breathe', she thought to herself as she let out a shallow breath through her pursed lips.

Wendy’s breath remained held.

Bebe shook her head and continued, “and you said—”

“—boys don’t understand that the world is a different place for us.” Wendy finished. “And they don’t understand the way we need to look out for each other…” Wendy nodded numbly, voice withering down to a shaky sigh, “I remember.”

“You begged me not to let them leave me alone.” Bebe whispered, sniffling through tears.

“But they did.” Wendy inferred, putting the pieces together as horrified tears were already welling in her eyes.

Bebe just nodded.

Wendy’s breath hitched and her eyes darted to the ceiling as two heavy tears fell from her eyes. Without Bebe having to tell her, she knew exactly what must’ve happened next.

“I could kill them for ditching you.” Wendy hissed venomously under her breath.

“It’s not their fault, I ditched them.” Bebe admitted numbly.

“Bebe…” Wendy began harshly, probably about to spew some bullshit about how it wasn’t all her fault or something like that…

Bebe interrupted, “—I followed some guy onto the dance floor, then I followed him upstairs… Or at least he claims I did… I don’t really remember that part…”


Bebe couldn’t speak. She felt like her throat was being strangled and her mind was growing numb. She swallowed thickly and shook her head.

Bebe looked back up at Wendy.

“Everything.”

Bebe told her the whole story, every single little detail. Told her about how helpless she felt, how it hurt, how much it scared her, and how many pieces were just too fuzzy to recall.

How he just didn’t seem to care — ignoring her cries like he couldn’t even hear her despite how loudly she had tried to scream — and how callous and selfish he seemed as his sickeningly wide grin stretched happily across his face while he continued to gain pleasure out of using her like a limp sex doll.

How she prayed to get out, and how she greeted her next blackout like a heavenly miracle, until she was cursed with consciousness — experiencing the vile horror of her reality for an alarming second time.

She told the truth about how she hadn’t been able to feel comfortable or safe enough to get close to another person since: even dorky, adorable, comforting Red.
And her best friend listened.

That was the thing about Wendy:

Sure sometimes Wendy could be blunt, insensitive, and overbearing — maybe even shrill at times, and definitely controlling — but moments like these reminded Bebe of why she had grown such an attachment to the strong-headed-girl who had once challenged Bebe for the role of ‘president’ in a game of playground house in kindergarten. Whether it was calling her on her bullshit, knowing exactly which trashy reality show Bebe was in the mood to watch, or just listening in a calm stillness while she waited for Bebe to gain the courage to voice her pain, they just got each other. Always have, always will.

When Bebe finally finished, she almost felt… weightless… almost.

Like a small weight had been lifted off of her chest (one of many small pieces — but the residual weight of all the rest still lay heavy against her bones like the psychic ache of a phantom limb).

Bebe and Wendy just sat in silence, separately processing all that had been said.

Wendy pulled a few more tissues out of the box and offered half of them to Bebe.

“I’m sorry I ditched the team.” Bebe blurted out, realizing she had still yet to apologize for leaving everybody in the lurch without explanation.

“Don’t.” Wendy held up her hand, before lowering it slowly and grabbing a hold of Bebe’s, “I understand, now.” She explained, eyes trained on their clasped hands, squeezing with gentle reassurance.

Bebe and Wendy locked eyes and exchanged a silent understanding.

“I thought you were going to yell at me today.” Bebe laughed, wiping her cheek on her shoulder.

“Oh, I was planning on it, don’t you worry about that.” Wendy chuckled, wiping her eyes with the tissue as more tears poured down her cheeks.

“Does Red know?” Wendy whispered, sniffling.

Bebe bit her lip nervously and shook her head, “I can’t bring myself to tell her just yet. I mean it happened before we started dating, it’s not like it’s time sensitive or anything like that.”

“Right,” Wendy agreed, nodding.

Neither wanted to admit it, but both knew that telling Red would only make Bebe feel better — one more of those little stones that no longer served to weigh down her chest.

Friday came around and the papers were distributed. The headline of the sports and academics page proudly announced that South Park had defeated North Park in the first debate match of the season last Sunday. Looking at it did not give Bebe the usual feeling of pride it normally would have. Bebe ripped that page out of her copy of the paper, crumpled it up and threw it in the trash.
Quick Kitchen Confession

Chapter Notes

Thanks for everyone who stuck around while I finished this round of updates!

The next few ones will be chapter by chapter, I only do the binge-worthy releases when there’s a big reveal and then a few chapters before the resolution.

***Note: I’m also going to be releasing an 11 chapter backstory tomorrow about the McCormicks’ struggles before the AU (but still within this universe). Be on the lookout for that!

(Also, I know Bebe’s chapter jumped to Friday by the end, but for this one we’re back to the Monday right after Stan and Kyle met at Stark’s Pond).

POV - Sheila

Sheila was in the kitchen, scrubbing dishes from Sunday night’s dinner — a chore that Gerald was supposed to do before bed, but apparently wasn’t able to for some facacta reason. Sheila swears, if she wasn’t here to do every little thing her whole house would fall apart—

“Mom?”

Sheila snapped out of her inner monologue and spun around to face her eldest son — Kyle, her beautiful bubbeleh — hovering in the kitchen doorway.

“Yes, bubbie?”

Sheila put down her scrub brush when she saw the look on Kyle’s face. “What is it. Kyle??” Her tone jumped to accusatory, as if to subtly question ‘what did you do’ — without jumping to conclusions right away, of course.

“Can I tell you something?”

Kyle looked so small. His skinny frame caved in on himself, one arm draped across his middle self-consciously, the other dangling limply at his side. The worry on his face only deepened the worry in her chest.

“Anything.” Sheila promised. And it was true: as long as he came to her with the truth, Kyle could tell her anything. That doesn’t mean she wasn’t gearing up to chew him out for whatever he broke, or lost, or got in trouble for.

Kyle stared down at his shifting feet.

Sheila was beginning to lose her patience. “Kyle, what is it, because I have a lot to do—”

“I’m gay.” He blurted out timidly, before his eyes widened at the shock of hearing his own
confession uttered out loud. “Um. Yep.” He nodded his head curtly, jaw tight, tears beginning to well in his eyes. “I’m… gay… pretty sure… definitely sure… I am… yeah.”

“Oh…” Shiela leaned against the sink. *This is shocking.* “You are?” She questioned, gently. Not because she was disappointed, but just because she needed a moment to process this new information…

“Mhm.” Kyle narrowed his eyes and folded his arms across his chest defensively.

“Oh… I didn’t know that… Ok… well, what do you want for dinner, bubbie? I’m not gonna feel like cooking after cleaning your father’s crusty pasta pots from last night.” Shiela picked up her scrub brush and went back to cleaning her dishes.

“Wha— uh… I don’t know… pizza, I guess…” Kyle muttered in a shocked stillness.

Sheila could still feel him hovering in the room behind her, so she turned around.

Kyle remained frozen as his watery eyes remained locked idly on the crusty dishes.

“Oh,” Shiela walked over to her trembling teenage son, as he began to cry, “it’s ok.”

Sheila was not one for affection in the serious moments, where it counted. Despite her constant bombardment of stern yet overwhelming affection for her family in all other moments of life, it always made her feel awkward and uncomfortable to comfort someone for real — but she knew when a well placed forehead kiss or loving pat on the cheek was needed to make her kids feel better. “Go tell your brother dinner will be ready in about an hour, ok?”

“Ok.” Kyle nodded fiercely, eyebrows knit together tightly.

“Ok.” Shiela cooed, cupping his chin before turning back to her chores.

Sheila was right in the middle of scrubbing again, when she felt her child’s body hit her full force, and felt his arms wrap tightly around her waist.

“Thank you.” Kyle mumbled into her shoulder.

Sheila stood in shock for a moment before she put down the dishes and turned around to hug her son, rubbing the back of his craned neck and wondering when he’d gotten so tall.

“No, my beautiful boy, thank you.” She whispered, burying her face in his curly hair.

She felt his arms squeeze even more tightly around her until his breaths began to shake and sob.

When he finally let go he was sniffling repetitively, and wiping at his wet cheeks with the backs of his hands.

Shiela ran a clean dish towel under cold water and pressed it to her son’s face. “It’s ok.” She assured him, patting down his puffy cheeks as he sucked in shallow breaths, “It’s ok, you can breathe, now.” Those words seemed to both leave him weightless and wounded. He pushed his shoulders back in an almost soldier-like fashion.

Shiela looked at her son, heart like a storm with thunder and lightning behind his eyes.

“It feels good to finally tell the truth doesn’t it?” Shiela encouraged, with a small smile.

Kyle nodded sternly, before breaking down into tears again, covering his mouth and nose with his
forearm as he blinked profusely.

“Oh, Kyle,” she sympathized, wanting desperately to do anything possible to take away the pain of constantly feeling like he needed to hide the most important part of himself for 16 1/2 years — to lift the weight off of her son’s shoulders and release the heavy burden of a secret that he had been harboring his whole life — but she didn’t know how… “…Does anyone else know?” She wondered aloud, blotting his forehead with the damp cloth and pushing his beautiful curls off of his face.

Kyle shook his head, gathering his wits and swallowing a hiccup. “Just… Kenny ‘nd Stan.” Kyle squared his shoulders and took a deep breath.

“Hm… so I’m the first of the family to know, huh?…” Kyle nodded his head “…your father is gonna be so jealous.” Sheila teased, nudging Kyle with her elbow.

Kyle laughed in an exhale.

“Dinner’s in an hour. Tell your brother.” Shiela repeated. Kyle nodded and smiled with tight lips, his shoulders not quite so tense as they were just moments ago.

Before turning back to Gerald’s impossible dishes, Sheila grabbed Kyle’s cheeks with her thumbs. “Shayna Punim,” she praised him.

Sheila didn’t see him walk out of the room.

She had made sure to turn around to the sink just in time to see a singular tear splash into the dishwater.

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