Look, in all honesty, it wasn’t Rich’s fault. Life had been going pretty shitty for him lately, and he was stressed. His mom was pressuring him about colleges and applying for scholarships, her shaking hands often reaching out to remind him that she would be okay while he was away at school. His dad couldn’t give less of a fuck, shoving Rich whenever they passed each other in the narrow halls of their shitty apartment. Not to mention how fucked his friends were. The tight knit group had divided, Brooke preferred to spend time with a couple of losers and Jake suddenly had a change of heart and felt serious about a someone. As if that would last. Lately, it seemed like he was only spending time with Chloe and he couldn’t handle her for a prolonged period of time, suddenly finding more time to spend at the gym. Even when they did all hang out, it was usually because Chloe wanted to go the diner that Brooke worked in and Jake wanted to flirt with Michael Mell. He hadn’t felt lonely since he met them, but now… Maybe they were just growing apart. His
mom had told him that she had grown out of some of her closest friendships when he was younger, but he had always believed their friendship was different. Now that he thought about it, his mom had probably thought the same thing.

But things felt like they were going back to normal. Jake had met Rich at his locker, given him the Signature Jake Dillinger Smile, and reminded Rich that his Halloween party was coming up the next weekend and that he needed his main man to show up. Rich hadn’t thought he would feel so alone until he was standing there with his best friend assuring him that he needed him there, yet his eyes followed Michael Mell. Whatever. Rich understood how Jake acted whenever he had a new interest. Ugh… He was starting to sound like Chloe.

When he showed up at the party, half an hour before the rest of the people would arrive (per tradition), he was pleasantly surprised to see Brooke was there, too. She was wearing a black skirt and white button up with a tie, holding a yellow vest on her arm and a yellow scrunchie on her wrist. Rich squinted, unable to recognize where her costume was from. She sat uncomfortably on the loveseat next to Chloe, who surprisingly, wasn’t giving her shit about who she was hanging out with lately. Chloe was dressed as something… he didn’t really know. All he knew was that it was tight and short and it was exactly what he expected Chloe to wear. She was turned around, calling out to Jake, who he assumed was in the kitchen, to bring her a drink. He took a seat on the couch across from the loveseat and tried to start up conversation with Brooke. She was still the same Brooke, just more outgoing, more willing to talk out, more of her own personality showing through. Even if they didn’t hang out as much as they used to, it still brought him happiness to see her coming out from Chloe’s shadow. His dislike of her hanging out with losers was overshadowed by his pride in her growth.

The happiness lasted a few hours, the house filling up with all kinds of people, from the most well known students in class to random people who had been approached by Jake in the hallway. It was how he became so popular, with a mixture of flashing his perfect smile and handing out invitations to his parties and making people feel included. Maybe that’s why he kept running into people he didn’t know. He made his way to get a drink and caught sight of Brooke laughing with Christine, Jeremy, and one of the new siblings at school. He stifled a laugh from the image of Chloe finding out that Brooke got to the new girl before she could even have the chance. He bumped into people he had forgotten existed, pushing past a pretty black girl with braids who just smiled at him as he passed. He somehow made his way to the bar, and rolled his eyes as Jake leaned over to pour a drink to Michael, winking as Michael flushed red as he brought the cup to his lips. He stood next to Michael, waiting for Jake’s attention, shifting his weight between his feet as Jake continued to just flirt with Michael. After a few minutes, he started getting frustrated and tried to get Jake’s attention by calling out his name. Jake turned to him, glaring as he excused himself to Michael. Rich felt his heart pound heavily in his chest. He knew it before Jake said it, hearing it from him on nights when Jake got too drunk and bothered by Chloe leaning on him, but hearing can this wait rich? i thought it was pretty obvious that i’m fucking busy, can’t you understand that i don’t have the time right now?

It was definitely better than what he said to Chloe, but Jake always seemed to make time for him, and hearing him say that he just… didn’t have the time hurt him more than he thought. Maybe he was overthinking the situation, but it just kept echoing in his mind. Jake was busy, with sports, clubs, girls, boys, family… He didn’t know where he fit into the equation, didn’t know if the cracks that he had forced himself into to make himself a part of Jake’s life were still there, or whether he was starting to break from pressing himself into a mold of who he thought he should be. He forced a smile onto his face and punched Jake’s arm, sure thing, bud i’ll catch you later, winking over Jake’s shoulder at Michael. Jake’s eyes softened and he patted Rich before going
back to Michael. Rich stood there, staring at his best friend and wondering if he felt the same way towards Rich as he felt when Chloe got too clingy and shoved her off of him. Fuck, he was starting to get emotional. He really needed a drink. As soon as the thought crossed his mind, someone grabbed his arm and pulled him towards the other side of the bar. It was the pretty girl from before, a smile still on her face as she spoke quietly to him.

“Sorry, that was kind of sudden, but I saw what happened, and I figured, hey, I can kind of prepare drinks and he really looks like he could use something strong right now and an excuse to walk away, right?” She continued rambling after he had nodded and continued to drag him until they arrived in the kitchen. He protested slightly at the lack of alcohol, but then she pulled out some bottles from the cabinets. It would have concerned him that she knew where things were when it wasn’t her home, but he was too relieved about getting a drink to care. She turned around and started preparing a drink, still rambling.

“He invited me a few days ago, he said he remembered that I was in a few of the clubs he used to be involved in. I was really flattered, but I don’t really know anyone here, well not anyone I can talk to.” He found that her endless chatter brought his mood up, his shoulders relaxing as she set the glass in front of him. She hopped onto the counter next to him and leaned back against the cabinets. He looked down at the drink and took it in two gulps. She laughed and took a sip from her own glass.

“Worse night than I thought. I thought you would take it slower…” Rich felt his stomach twist as his throat began to burn. He hunched over as vomit began rising up. The girl slid off the counter and placed her hand on Rich’s shoulder. “Hey, are you okay?” He shook his head and covered his mouth with the back of his hand as his stomach lurched. The girl caught him before he fell and muttered oh shit we should get you to the bathroom.

Through his hazy vision, the girl was able to push past through the crowd to get him into a bathroom. She dropped him gently next to the toilet and assured him that she would be waiting for him outside with some water. He nodded lazily before starting to gag.

He threw up a few time, heart pounding in his ears. He rested his head on the toilet seat and dry heaved. There was a knock and he closed his eyes.

“Sorry, too busy in here.” The door opened and someone different stepped inside.

“Alana let me, don’t worry. Are you feeling okay?” Rich opened an eye and reached out weakly for the water bottle that was being offered to him. When he looked up, due to the bad lighting, all he could make out was tan skin, wavy dark hair, and glowing electric blue eyes.

“Who are you?” He wheezed out, bringing the bottle to his lips. The guy leaned against the sink.

“My friends call me Squip. Alana told me that you were having a bad night. You wanna talk about it?” Rich did his best to sneer, even if it wasn’t convincing.

“Why would I talk about it to you?” Squip laughed softly and shook his head.

“I don’t know, I’ve been told I’m a good listener. If you don’t want to talk, then I can just let Alana back in here and she’ll help.” Rich watched him wait for a minute, then shrug. “That’s fine. I’ll see you around.” As he turned towards the door and pushed himself off the sink, Rich felt his resolve weaken.

“Wait- ugh… Fine. I could use someone who listens right now… Not that it means we’re friends or anything.” Squip nodded, obviously holding back a smile as he jumped up onto the sink counter,
gesturing Rich to go on. Rich sat back and leaned against the wall, throat feeling better after drinking half the bottle. He didn’t know what it was about Squip, which was still a dumb nickname despite the bonus points for creativity, but it was easy to open up to him, easy to tell him that he was scared of losing his friends, he was scared of his dad’s alcoholism was in his blood, that he was going to change into someone he wouldn’t recognize. He shut his eyes as the words flooded from him, telling Squip that he was worried about his mom, how she deserved better than what she got, a better husband, a better son, a better life. Squip spoke in a soft voice, encouraging him to keep going. When he felt the weight lifted completely off his shoulders, he let out a sigh of relief.

“Thanks for hearing me out.” The words felt fuller, more emotional than he had intended. Squip leaned forward and rested his elbows on his thighs.

“Rich… I have an offer for you.” He met the glowing eyes and nodded. Squip smiled.

“I’ve been listening and I think… I think I have a solution. I have a dream of helping as many people as I can. We all help each other, my friends and I. I have the resources and the will to fix problems, any type of problem. All I ask of them, is that they do occasional favors for me. Just coming over and hanging out, most of the time.”

Rich narrowed his eyes.

“Uh, sounds sketch, dude.” Squip nodded.

“Yeah, I get it. I’m just offering you an opportunity to fix your problems. I can help you. Your dad’s alcoholism? Don’t worry about that. I can find your mom a better job and that’ll definitely trickle down and help her live a better life. I can… provide you better friends.” Rich blinked and felt a pang of anger.

“I’m happy with my friends.”

“I’m not saying that you’ll have to drop them. You’ll just have more of them. More people who understand what you’re going through. Alana, for example. Hold on.” He slid off the counter and opened the door, bringing in the pretty girl who had brought him here. She handed Rich another water bottle and he took it, suspiciously now. She smiled, still as confident and bubbly as before.

“Sorry about the bad mixing. I thought you would drink it slower. I needed to get you alone without drawing too much attention to us.” Rich was about to protest, but Squip started speaking before he could say anything.

“Alana doesn’t have any powers. She’s been overlooked all her life, always being second best because she lacks powers.” Alana looked down and messed with her fingers. “She’s tried to be the best, always doing whatever she can to be useful, but no one ever gave her the recognition she deserves. She does twice as much, works twice as hard, but just because someone can do it without trying, then she’s considered useless.”

“Squip helped me. He’s really given me a lot of opportunities to prove my worth to the right people. He can do anything, really. A lot of my friends have gotten financial help, or jobs, or internships. A few people can get help developing their powers if they need it. I know someone who got out of an abusive household because of Squip.” Rich felt his heart drop at the last sentence.

“Alana can help you, she’s my best… friend. I can count on her for everything, and I highly encourage you to talk to her if you have any questions. I just want you to think about it.”
“Rich, I know it’s a weird offer, but honestly, you don’t really have to do anything in return. Squip has everything he needs, he just wants you to be there when he needs you. I go over and we just hang out. Sometimes, I just go over and take naps and eat food. That’s all he wants from you. Plus, you get a bunch of new friends. I’ve met some incredible people because of this.” He was sure that she would’ve kept rambling if Squip hadn’t touched her arm.

“Just talk to Alana if you decide to join me. If not, then there’s no hard feelings. I just wouldn’t feel good if I hadn’t offered you the opportunity.” He tilted his head towards the door and Alana nodded, starting to move towards the door. Rich felt his hands tingle and wondered if this is what people meant by **too good to be true**. He reached out, feeling childlike as he gripped the sleeve of Squip’s sweater in his fist. When he looked up, he felt his heart rise as Alana beamed at him, her hands clasped together as Squip’s eyes glowed brighter.

“I… I’m really interested in this.” Alana pulled out a card from her pocket, smile so big that he began feeling excited about this. She handed it to Rich, and noticed it had a few numbers with names on it.

“That’s a few of the local people. I’m the second number on the list, Squip is obviously the first. Squip answers most of the time, but in the rare case he doesn’t, then you can shoot him a text and he’ll call you back or you can call me. I’ll definitely tell you anything you need to know. Squip will keep in regular contact. Actually, most of us have a group chat, I’ll add you later. Oh! Some of them have a discord and you can find some people with common interests! I hope you’ll stay in touch with me, too! I’m the one who interacts with the rest of us when Squip is busy-” Squip laughed and touched Alana’s arm again. He gave Rich a smile.

“She does tend to ramble, but I trust her more than anyone. I hope you guys will get along. I’ll call you later and ask if you need anything. It’s better if you have a list prepared. We can plan something after you see I’m legit.” He checked his watch and swore softly, looking apologetically at Rich. “I have to go, I have a meeting for someone’s internship and I can’t miss it. Alana will show you around and introduce you to people. I’ll talk to you both later.” Alana nodded, her smile dropping slightly. Squip gave Rich a half-shoulder hug and patted Alana’s cheeks, taking out his phone and accepting a call that was coming in. He excused himself and Alana’s attention returned to Rich. She clasped her hands together again and held out her hand.

“Should we start?”

When everyone had left the party and Jake was walking him to his car, Rich could tell that he was about to bring up a serious topic.

“Rich, about earlier, sorry if it came off insensitive-” Rich shook his head.

“No worries, man. It’s all okay.” Jake raised an eyebrow.

“You sure?” Rich thought over it, thinking about Alana introducing him to a few people and how excited they all seemed to meet him, how his phone was filling up with numbers and notifications from the group chat and Discord server that Alana had added him into, how his mom had texted him with a screenshot of a big company offering her a job at their local location, mentioning that *it isn’t a big step, but the pay is better, rich! I wonder what god thinks he owes me to give me this job offer LOL!,* and how Squip had asked him what his dad would think of a job transfer to a different state, while his mom could support herself and Rich with her new job.

“Yeah, dude. Never been better.” And for the first time in forever, he didn’t feel like he was lying.
End Notes

i know its been MONTHS but i AM making progress on pt 2 i promise i should be done so on
im also vvv excited about this, even if its not good
i hope yall like it and show it a lot of love <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!