It's Complicated

by blackgoldmentality

Summary

He had never quite felt more frustrated.

On hiatus!

If you're interested in keeping up with the story while I work on some major edits, follow me on Tumblr @blackgoldmentality! I'm also posting chapter previews!

Notes

This is my story, which I originally wrote on fanfiction.net (FFN) some years back, and am now uploading here as this is my new, primary fan-fiction account. So if you've seen it before and are worried about if this is plagiarism, please check the original FFN account which I've linked in my bio, to confirm that in this case it's not. I've of course edited the original format just a bit, to be more concise with my new work on here. The chapter notes included are also as they originally were.

Extended Summary: He had never quite felt more frustrated. All that he wanted was to feel safe and validated — to stop hurting. He had never quite felt more frustrated. He wished that he would just understand and see for himself that not everything leads to a painful outcome.

Disclaimer: I do not own the original Ed, Edd n’ Eddy characters. I only own my interpretation and usage of this plot, and whatever miscellaneous characters I may add.

Feedback is always appreciated.

Please enjoy!
His mornings were simple.

He would wake up promptly at 5:59am, just a minute before his alarm would go off. When the ding-a-ling-ling of his cell-phone began but a minute later when he was finished rubbing some signs of sleep from his eyes, he dismissed the sound almost immediately. He thought for a second as to why he even had alarms, as his body had already been conditioned to wake up without it — but the extra security never hurt, he told himself. With a quick check at today’s weather presented on his lock-screen, he finally stood from his bed.

He stretched. He awoke his drowsy, sleep-hazed muscles with his every move; bending back enough to create a bridge with his body, even, and holding that position for a few moments before dropping down fully onto the ground. Then he stood up, touched his toes, and did some T-stretches with his arms while rotating his waist.

Morning warm-ups done, promptly at 6:20am, he headed into his bathroom for a few moments to brush his teeth. He did not worry about bathing at that moment, having bathed late last night. It was in his bathroom that he then removed his matching silk top and bottom that formed his sleep-ware, put them in the clothing hamper, and replaced them with his morning “uniform” — dark gray jersey shorts and a white tank — before he headed back into his bedroom. His hair, long and black which he usually tied into a low ponytail when he slept, was briefly taken out of the tie only to be redone into a loose bun of sorts; just enough to get it all under his black beanie comfortably. He then put on a fresh pair of socks, slipped his socked feet into his most-used slippers, and then grabbed his phone and pulled his earbuds from inside his drawer, and connected them. At the same time from the drawer he pulled out his fitbit fitness tracker and strapped the digital device to his wrist, turning it on.

He headed downstairs. It was dark, not a single light on and none of the curtains were pulled back enough to let in the sunlight. He didn’t mind, though. He moved easily in the darkness of his house; he knew exactly how many paces it took him to get everything he needed. He could fully navigate his two-story home in the dark if he wanted, which he often did when he came home late.

At his front door, he swapped his slippers for his striped, fairly-worn running shoes. His earbuds were already in, and his running track playing. He grabbed his keys, exited his home, locked the door, and broke out into a jog.

He always started off his jogs light. Just enough to warm up his muscles even though he had just stretched. As he rounded the cul-de-sac and was headed onto a new street, he began to speed up. His running track was perfectly timed to put on more fast-paced music by the time he felt his muscles warmed.
As he increased his pace, his long legs moving faster, he made sure to adjust his breathing. In through the nose, out through the mouth. He kept internal count. He would glance at the tracker every now and then, watching the number rise — making sure it was not too high or too low.

When he neared the park he slowly increased his speed. It was not long before he reached the off-sidewalk path that led into a set of woods nearby. That was where his speed was its maximum; so much so that he tended to forget to breathe just before he reached the path, in anticipation of it.

The wood and rocky dirt path were the most challenging to run. The obstacles alone made it a hardly traversed path, but it was his favorite. It seemed like every time he ran it, something had changed, making it unpredictable and challenging — the type of stimulation that he enjoyed, both mental and physical as he had to stay alert of whatever may arise in front of him while trusting his feet to navigate what was below him.

The path led to a set of hills that were tough to run up; especially in the morning when the dew made the grass slippery. He pushed through, though, and enjoyed the small burst in speed as he went down; making sure to not get over zealous and send himself rolling down the hill, like he had done a few times in the past.

He eventually approached the creek. He could see it from the distance and sped up. The river was a few meters wide, and about 3-meters deep. Despite a bridge having been built there for easy crossing after an incident occurred a few years back, he always attempted to jump it; always learning from his mistakes and creating new calculations to make it work. He always thought, If I adjust the speed like so, or If I angled my body similarly to — in an attempt to make the necessary changes to jump the river.

When his foot reached the farthest edge of the river’s bank, he jumped.

One foot, his right foot, which was positioned forward, reached the opposite bank, and he immediately tried to use the ground as leverage to help him move his body forward and clear the river — except, he ended up slipping at the last second and began to fall into the river. He grabbed at the ground with his trimmed and polished fingernails, and used his upper body strength to pull himself up and out of the awkward position that almost had him in a full split.

He sighed deeply.

His left leg was fully wet, some of his butt and shorts, too. Yet he was used to it by now; as every other time that he attempted the jump, he failed then, too. He took pride, though, in how little of him had gotten wet — and with his latest failure sorted in his mind as a reference — a new variable to be changed — he continued on the beaten path like nothing had happened.

His running came to a stop sometime later — around 7:10am, the time on his cellphone told him. He stopped only because he had reached his destination: the house of his friend, Marie Kanker.

When he rang the doorbell, though, it was not Marie who opened the door, but Lee. Her long, overgrown curly red hair covered her eyes, as always, and a toothbrush was in her mouth. For a moment he felt the need to be bashful when he noticed that all she wore were her polka-dotted panties and a thin tank over her noticeable black bra, but, having succumbed to this many times before, he felt himself immune to — expecting, even — the situation.
“Salutations, Lee.” He said; his voice sturdy and deep.

“Marie!” Lee immediately called out in the same shrill voice as always. “Ya boyfriend’s here!” He sighed hearing her call him Marie’s partner; but she had already walked off (most likely headed back to the bathroom to finish brushing) and in her place was not Marie, but May.

“Hey Edd!” May, unlike her sister Lee, tended to be cheerier in the mornings — and fully dressed in her white midriff and blue jeans. Although she had typically been seen as the less intelligent of the three sisters, she proved herself in being a knack at cooking and cleaning and doing almost all the chores of the house, which she was meticulous at, and he happily submitted himself to when she asked, “I made breakfast — wanna come in and have a bite?”

“I would be my pleasure, Lady May.” He said, earning one of her infamous giggles. Stepping into the trailer, he made sure to wipe his feet on the welcome mat outside so as not to get any mess on the floors that he was certain May slaved over to clean. He even left his shoes at the door.

“You know, I always like it when you call me that.” May said as she put herself back in front of the stove. He smelled her signature May’s Monday Morning buttermilk pancakes. “It’s the guaranteed cure to the Monday morning blues!” She marketed them to her friends and family as. Which, to an extent, they were — often times he found himself more eager to eat those pancakes than to see Marie. Continuing, though, she said, “It makes me feel like a princess.”

“Thou art far more beautiful than any woman of high blood Ic’s eyes have beheld in all of eternity, Lady May.” He stated as he sat down at the circular table in the kitchen. It was already laid out with mats and cups and plates and truly, ever truly, all that was missing were the pancakes.

May giggled happily at his words.

Waiting in the kitchen, he watched May work. She was attentive to the heat and had three burners going, all with different types of pancakes. Blueberry for Marie, raspberry for Lee, and banana for her; she knew that he never preferred one type over another, and so always just provided him a three-stack of one each. Despite this, her attention was pinpoint on ensuring that nothing burned — which it never did; including her long blonde hair, which almost went down to her knees and she currently had tied back into a high tail.

She flipped the cakes onto a separate holding plate and then distributed them on the main plates at the table.

He graciously accepted his three different pancakes and began to slather them in syrup — it was as he was doing this that Marie finally showed up. “Pancakes and Edd — yes!” She exclaimed as she skated over to the table on her rollerblades and plopped down in the seat with the plate of blue pancakes. She grabbed the syrup from his hands and nearly drowned her stack in them.

“Marie! Save some for me and Lee!” Cried May as she turned off all the burners of the stove and went to grab the bottle from her sister’s hands.

“It’s fine, it’s fine!” Marie waved with a heavily bracelet-decorated hand. “There’s more in the fridge, isn’t there?”

“That’s… not the point!” May said.

“So anyways, good morning Edd.” Marie said after a mouthful of pancakes as she turned her head to him. “You look gorgeous as always — just finished your run?” She asked him.

“Affirmative.”
“Attempted the jump?”

“Affirmative.”

“Failed?”

“…On the affirmative, again.”

She laughed.

“I don’t know why you’re obsessed with that jump, Edd.” She said to him.

“What jump?” May asked as she finished cleaning off the stove.

“The one near the river. You know, where that little girl almost drowned.”

“Ooooooh, right, right.” May said; she took off the pretty and frilly apron she always wore over her clothes when she cooked, and finally went to take her seat at the table before beginning to add a (reasonable) amount of syrup to her pancakes. “That river’s pretty big — can someone really jump that?”

“Edd almost has.” Marie stated. “Which of course isn’t good enough.” She teased. He was about to say something when she added, “He’s gotten better at it, but it doesn’t seem like he’ll be able to do it anytime soon.”

“Allow me to kindly disprove your argument, dearest Marie.” He stated, a small smile on his lips. “I believe that by the end of this month I will have jumped that river. It is a matter of statistics. The right day at the right time with the right calculations can guarantee that I jump it — and I have already had so many trials.”

“And that day’s coming when, exactly?” She asked as she waved her fork around at him; a piece of pancake attached.

“Soon.”

“Right.”

Lee joined the table near the end of their meal. Out of all of them, Lee was the one who took the most amount of time in her appearance. She wore lipstick and probably concealer, although it was so masterfully blended into her skin tone that it was always hard to tell; and while he could never see her eyes, he was certain that they were done-up as well and looked spectacular. She always went out wearing appealing perfumes, and dressed in flouncy skirts and high heels and seemed to have a purse to go with every outfit; and always seemed to be the most visually and olfactory stimulating of the three, despite all of the sisters being attractive in their own right.

She chugged the pancakes down like they were nothing; eating them in less than half the time the rest of them did, and without a single drop of syrup.

May was still in the middle of cleaning the dishes when Lee added her plate.

“Like a garbage disposal…” Marie said to him under her breath after Lee left the room for a moment. While he found the comment witty (and very true to the sense of what just happened), he did not laugh, but he did smirk. “Anyways, Edd,” Marie said as she crossed her legs; on them wore multicolored Band-Aids from various falls and scrapes, visible due to the thigh-length black shorts that she wore. There were matching Band-Aids on her arms. “Are you coming to my derby tonight?”
He left the Kanker household fifteen minutes before it was 8am. The girls piled into Lee’s restored pink T-bird; backpacks in the trunk among other things there, Lee driving, Marie in the passenger’s seat, and May sitting on top of Marie’s lap. (She used to sit between the two, on top of the car, but stopped after Lee got a pricey ticket for it.)

“When are you getting to school?” Marie asked him.

“I do not have to be in class until a quarter after ten — although I will arrive earlier to use the chemistry lab. I may see you then.”

“Lucky.” Marie said. “I’ll see you then, then, no?”

“Perhaps.” He remarked; she rolled her eyes at him. Yet, because she always did it, and had grown into a habit — a daily ritual, even — of theirs, he gave her a quick kiss goodbye on her lips.

Lee took off.

Thus he jogged back to his home. He opened the door, took off his shoes and switched to his slippers, and headed up the stairs and straight into the bathroom — where his towels and other toiletries were already kept.

He stripped and put his sweaty workout clothes in the hamper. He took off his beanie, and then untied his hair from the bun and let it flow down to just above his waist, where it ended.

Running his hands through it, he could feel the slight build-up of dirt and grime ingrained into his scalp, and was glad that he had about an hour to get ready so that he could properly dry his hair instead of letting it sit nearly wet under his beanie all day and hoping it would dry somewhat.

Getting into his shower, he turned on the water and dispensed himself a healthy dose of body-wash on his loofah (he abhorred soap), and scrubbed away; getting his back and under his feet and paying meticulous attention to his elbows — in a few weeks the winter air would hit and he would be more prone to alligator elbow, of which he would simply not let happen. Finally, when his body was rinsed down, he grabbed his daily-use shampoo and squeezed the bottle from the top of his head down to the tips of his long hair, and then from there, up, he began to scrub. The shampoo was sulfate-free, meaning it did not exactly create bubbles, but the natural oils in it (he was key on
ingredients) helped his hair more and he did not quite care for the bubbles, anyhow. They were obtrusive.

Obviously it took a tad more shampoo to fully wash his hair and make him feel clean, but in the end, he felt refreshed with it all and stopped the water. It was easy to step onto the bathroom mat and reach for his towel, which faithfully hung on a rack to the side. He dried himself as much as he could in the bathroom with his body towel, and used a smaller one, for his hair, to initially pat dry and then wrap it up, and keep it in place inside the towel for the next few minutes while he put on clothes.

Brushing his teeth took but five minutes, as he was meticulous about dental hygiene. He brushed, rinsed, rinsed with mouthwash, and then flossed and did a final rinse. He grinned, inspecting his work; he was happy to have gotten his braces off last year, as that made it much, much easier to clean every little groove in his mouth.

As he always kept his body towel in the bathroom, he walked to his bedroom, which was next door to the bathroom, naked in but the towel his hair was wrapped up in, and his fuzzy slippers.

He reached his room and went in, and immediately dressed himself; silk boxers since that was easier to move in and he found more resistant to moisture and odor, a white tank for an undershirt, black, non-form-fitting jeans on top, a checkered blue shirt, and a black-strapped watch that he got as a birthday present from his parents some time back. Of course, he had made sure to put on plenty of lotion before his clothes. Then finally, it came down to doing his hair.

It was around 9am when he started on his hair. He removed the towel gently and shook out his hair, which was now slightly wavy from being dryer. He hung the towel for a moment on a separate hook in his room, and then went through his hair with his fingers; gently detangling it. He used to use combs and brushes for it when his hair was shorter, believing that to be the only way, but combs and brushes pulled out hair and his fingers were more flexible and could easily adjust to knots and other forms of friction.

When that was done, he got his blow-dryer, plugged it in, and set it to cool (because heat damaged hair) and bent over as he moved the dryer from the top of his head, down to the tips of his hair. He dried as much as he could; enough to feel safe about tying it up and letting it sit in his beanie — which was exactly what he did after he put his blow-dryer away.

As a final touch, he grabbed his trusty tube of Chapstick with marketed 8-hours of hydration, and made sure his lips were nice and covered. He also popped in a mint or two.

At 9:16am, he was fully prepared for school, and headed out of the house. He grabbed his usual (cell-phone, earbuds, and keys), and switched to a different set of sneakers downstairs; he brought the sneakers down from his room after putting on his socks, but did not put them on until he reached the tiled floor at the end of all the carpet in his home. After the sneakers were on, he left his house, locking the door behind him.

For a gift, some time ago, his parents had bought him a car; saying that it was a reward for keeping his GPA above the standard 4.0 (it tended to fluctuate between 4.3 and 4.2, but over all, it never sunk down to 4.1 or 4.0, which was what mattered most to his parents). They had wired some money directly to his bank account and told him to get himself a car (with certain specifications, of course) and he did as such; an eco-friendly, “safe” car just like they wanted sat in his garage driveway — a bright silver in color with white leather seats in order to attract as little sunshine as possible.

Unlocking it, he sat down and put on his seatbelt, and then hit the push-to-start button. With the car on, so did his favorite radio podcast boom from the speakers, and he was well on his way to class.
Walking into the school, the hallway was empty. As expected, however, since it was the end of second period / start of third when he got there at 9:30am. He took his time walking to his locker, and from within retrieved one of the three things in there — his backpack. It was a habit of his to finish all of his homework before he left the school, and since he owned PDF versions of all the textbooks he physically had for the in-person classes, there was no need to take his backpack with him home, at all. Yet at school he walked around with his backpack and took with him the textbook needed for the class he would be attending; but both of his textbook-needing classes were after lunch, which would not be for a while.

He made his way to the chemistry lab, then. It was empty but the door unlocked, and he went in and turned on the lights. He then sat at his favorite spot; near the window that never fully closed and would allow him to lift open more, near the back of the classroom, a small distance away from the wall of cabinets where all the chemistry materials were held.

He sat and took out a notebook from his backpack, and flipped to the latest page. On it was his latest, balanced chemical reaction. He was aiming to create a spectacular effect — a pet project of his for a few weeks now, that struck him in the dead of night (when “genius” tended to happen) and he immediately got down to writing the basics of.

For the past few weeks he had found that the reaction in his dream which he got from mixing the chemicals together, was not so easily done in his real life — but he was determined to make it happen.

He spent the remainder of third period re-measuring ingredients and re-testing. Failures, all of them, just like the jump over the river had been that morning.

He gave a deep sigh at the sound of the bell signaling fourth period — it came after he finished cleaning up his usual mess and was scrubbing his workstation down with disinfectant. He would have another go at it later on. He exited the lab and made his way to his AP World History class.

Despite the fact that he already knew the material for the day, he simply could not be late. He's had perfect attendance for quite a while and the only reason he did not show up until the time he did was because it was not requested of him, nor would it reflect badly on his attendance. There was no point to being there promptly at 8am — not for him, with his official class schedule.

In his history class, he took his usual seat next to Lee. Lee had proven herself to be quite academically gifted some time back, and placed high enough in exams to be put into some AP classes for certain subjects. While she was not the only person that he personally knew that was in the class (Nazz and Johnny, and some folks from the academic clubs that he had joined in past years, were there too), she was the one he enjoyed sitting next to, most; and even though she would not admit it, she enjoyed him most in the class since her other options were simply not the most desirable in her opinion — as she had said, they did not know how to have fun, while at least he would crack a smile at her jokes every now and then.

Plus, it helped that they already socialized on a friend-level nearly every day.

The teacher came in sometime later and began discussing issues of immigration for the topic that day. Mass immigrations have taken course throughout history in various regions of the world — it was nothing new, and the causes were always similar. There was something to learn from that, he supposed.
During class, though, since he already knew the material, he focused on Lee — specifically, her handwriting. Her big, calloused hands wrote the prettiest script that looked almost like an art form to him — it was calligraphy in his opinion, rather than the standard form of writing. He always enjoyed watching the loops, and in the back of his mind, continuously debated how such a girl like Lee could develop such beautiful handwriting. She did not seem like the type, especially during their childhood. Yet she, like him, had changed much over the years.

“My ass is killing me…” He heard her mumble under her breath, to no one in particular. “These seats are shit.”

He held himself back from grinning; the contrast that Lee provided was always nice.

His next class was actually a gym period.

He, in all truthfulness, loathed gym. Not for the physical exertion, which he truly did manage to enjoy now that he was older and grown, and able to push himself to new limits. No. What he hated about gym was the filthiness of it all. He was not fond of reused materials unless they were properly recycled, and since he knew little of the personal hygiene of others, he was not too keen on touching anything that others may have touched or put their feet on, without some sort of barrier and insurance. Then, there was the sweat. He wished that gym was one of the classes he could have been exempted from; but the Board of Education required four years for graduation, no exceptions unless a physical restraint was the cause.

Yet as much as he loathed the gym floor and equipment, the locker room was his most hated spot. The bodies were suddenly closer and in a tighter-packed area — it was why he always rushed to get there quickly and change as fast as he possibly could, before the bodies came in waves.

He was changed into his gym uniform (with his beanie still on, of course) and out of the locker room in a matter of minutes. He then went to join the line of stretching students. It was the third week of classes, and today they were to do physical assessments for their first major grade. Quite frankly, he found it ridiculous that a class that should be pass or fail now had letter grades, and that a student could be deemed a “failure” if their personal physical performance did not reach the course standards. Health was a very personal matter, after all.

When the rest of the coed class was present, the assessments began.

He had no issue with the five minutes of jogging (it was like crawling to him), until he found himself getting competitive with the other members of the class that were at the front of the pack. He had never been much of a physically competitive person before, but in his latest years of life, he found he could not deny the thrill of going up against another physical person on a different platform — a different set of skills and muscles.

He had kept his pace relatively slow to what he usually preferred, but stepped it up when he found some members of his class to be pulling ahead of him; he was not secure in himself until he had passed them all and leading until the very end.

After jogging came pushups, of which he completed over 50; he could go longer, of course, but felt it not to overdo himself just yet. There was more. After pushups came burpees, which certainly got his blood pumping with a combination of upper and lower body resistance. Finally, to whine down, there was a stretching assessment; a ruler was attached to a cardboard box, and the box put against
the wall, and the student rested one foot against the front of the box and got three tries with their hands put together, to reach as far as they could and hold the position for three seconds. He did well on that, as well, reaching just past twelve, quite comfortably, on both feet. It left him feeling confident.

They were dismissed and he hurried to claim his clothing from within his gym locker, and rushed into one of the only stalls in the room that were private. Besides being shy about his body in the presence of others, he did not enjoy seeing so much nakedness in one sitting — not to mention the topics of interest tended to be deplorable and nothing that he found stimulating.

“So I heard—”

He snorted at the unintelligent conversation; gossip was always a favorite pastime of the males in the locker room, and he quickly tuned it out as he focused on quickly washing his body down with some of his travelling body-wash — ever careful to not get anything above his neck wet and to use a smaller washcloth when it came to cleaning his face and the tighter spots — and then drying in a separate towel that he would later take to his car and spread out from within, to fully dry.

He dressed in his choice outfit for the day, and exited the stall. He put the items that were not wet like his towel into the locker, sealed it, and then headed out of the locker room.

He enjoyed breathing the fresh air when he went out to his car to set the towel; that room was always so stifling.

“Hey sock-head, wait up.”

The next class he shared with his best friends Eddy and Ed. Rather than an AP class, it was an elective, and the “Eds”, as many people had taken to calling them at one point, had all decided before entering high school that they would make sure to keep their electives the same. They all knew — well, at least he and Eddy knew — that with high school came some drifting, so small things like sharing electives and going to one of their houses over the weekend to binge watch something on Netflix, played a big role in keeping them together.

“Salutations, Eddy.” He said to the shorter male. “Greetings to you as well, Ed.” He said to the tallest of the three of them.

“Hi Double-D!” Ed said enthusiastically.

While there was no denying that he had not just physically grown out of his childhood phase, the old nicknames that were tossed around quite often in reference towards him had seemed to be lost with the times, too — yet Ed and Eddy still called him by those old nicknames. Coming from them, it felt like assurance of their lasting friendship; how even though they have all changed in some way, shape or form, they remained friends.

“How have you two been today, so far?” He asked as they came into step with him.

“Meh. The usual.” Eddy said as he crossed his arms behind his head.

“So then is it is safe to assume that you have been called to the Main Office at least once? Did they find out that you were already making bases for report cards?”
“Ssshhhhhh sock-head!” Eddy said as he turned to glare at him, with a finger come up to his lips. “You ain’t gotta say it so loudly — and no. Not that. Ed here brought a chicken to school again and dumped it on me while he went to get it food or whatever.”

Ed agreed that that was what he did. “Eddy was real nice Double-D. He held onto Chikita for me and protected her from the principal.” He said with a grin.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah.” Eddy said, waving it off. “Next time just bring that thing food pellets or whatever, because I ain’t running with a chicken under my shirt again.”

“Eddy, chickens eat special chicken food. Not food pellets.”

“Actually Ed, they do. Chickens tend to have a steady diet of hen pellets and water — among some other nutritional foods, of course. That is, when they are raised properly; nowadays most chickens are fed hormones to fatten them up. Typically, the hormones cause them to lay eggs in greater frequencies both time-wise and count-wise, and the larger chickens are then able to be sold for more money when it comes time to kill them—”

“Ah, Double-D! Don’t talk about that!” Ed screamed as he placed his hands over his ears. Eddward let out a brief laugh.

“Sorry, Ed.”

They reached their class. Eddward was the one to open the door for the three of them, and Eddy gave a nod of appreciation while Ed thanked him verbally. The Eds then took their seats at the front of the class; despite it usually being a habit of Eddy’s to sit in the back where he could not be seen, for this particular class, he had chosen for them one of the tables in the front row for their self-assigned seats — specifically, in the very front-center of the room, for the clearest view of the board and teacher.

The Eds were very careful not to touch any of the equipment that was self-integrated into the tables. The saw, especially, had proven to be quite the piece of work that had almost chewed up the left hand of their teacher in the first week of class, last year, when they started the elective. Unbeknownst to them at the time, their teacher’s hand was a specially-made prosthetic — lost to an accident many years ago. It had caused quite the fright, but with the mini-lesson, the teacher succeeded in teaching them the importance of safety around the equipment. (Albeit, also got across the point that he was maybe a few screws missing of a toolkit.)

Their backpacks were placed under their desks, in a hollowed-in spot specifically for backpacks and such. Ed took off the dark-green hoodie he was wearing and placed it around his waist. He, Eddward, took off his watch and placed it in his pocket. Eddy did not have any loose items or long-sleeved articles of clothing on him, so he sat in the middle of them waiting for the teacher.

Some five minutes later, the teacher finally arrived. Although, it was not their regular professor, with a comb-over and flannel shirt and work boots, but a substitute: a brown-haired woman dressed very similarly to their regular teacher, but with a tighter look than him, and her hair up in a tight bun. She had on special gloves and some makeup, and gave off an air that he felt was very similar to that of Lee: beautiful and strong.

“Good morning class.” She said in a gentle voice. “My name is Alexis Makers — you can call me Miss Makers — and I will be your substitute for the next week for your woodshop teacher, Mr. Truman.” She gave them all a smile. “I have your lesson plan for the week so let’s already get started — go to the back and get your projects.”
“I’ll get it, I’ll get it!” Ed exclaimed as he stood from his seat and went to get the three different projects for the three boys. Eddward wanted to help him, but before he could offer, Ed was already back to the table and distributing the projects.

A chicken coop for Ed, a catapult for Eddy, and a locker organizer for himself.

“Thank you, Ed.” He said.

“Yeah, thanks.” Eddy replied.

“You’re welcome, guys.”

When everyone in the class had gotten their projects, Miss Makers said, “Obviously I want you guys to continue working on them. This class is pretty self-sufficient after all. In that time, though, I will be coming around to see how you’re doing. Looking around, a lot of these look good… but they can always be better. Attendance will be taken through that.”

After she said that, the room was abuzz with movement and the noises that came with chopping, cutting, and nailing wood.

During this class time, the three Eds were on the same level of skill, pinpoint accuracy, and dedication; after so many years of building different contraptions for Eddy’s schemes when they were younger, they all found that they had a knack for building things with their hands; and when the opportunity arose to choose an elective for their junior year, it was Eddy that suggested woodshop. Since then, the Eds have become fans of the classroom and would look forward to it each day — it was a piece of their childhood brought into their modernity, and elevated to more than just scams.

“I can’t wait to finish this.” Eddy said as he began sanding down the wood of his catapult. It was rather simple and worked as basically as it could, but it was still impressive craftsmanship. “When I’m done, I’m gonna hook it up to my room and use it to toss myself snacks when I’m on my bed.” He said with a grin.

Eddward laughed. “There are quite the number of calculations that properly go into that, Eddy. I hope you can see that.”

“Well duh — but it’s not like physics is so hard egghead.” Eddy had surprisingly become good in the sciences, too; specifically, physics, with his biology and chemistry understanding increasing just a bit thanks to their tutoring sessions from time-to-time. It certainly stemmed from all the building and calculating they had to do as children.

“I’m gonna use mine to give Chikita a home at school.” Ed said.

“Good.” Eddy replied. “I swear there’s a feather in my underwear and I can’t find it…”

“What are you gonna use yours for Double-D?” Ed asked him.

“I will put it into my locker. Despite only having my backpack and textbooks in there, it could still be neater. Right now I am just tossing my backpack in, after all — I cringe every time.”

“I still don’t know how after all these years you’ve stayed a neat-freak.” Eddy commented. “At least you stopped labeling everything in your house, though. That was annoying.”

He, Eddward, laughed at the reminder of one of his old habits. He remembered very fondly the day he woke-up, and found all the labels in his house to be a tad too much. Taking them down, and
keeping his labels centered on only essentials that needed labeling, had seemed to make his house less like a hospital room, and more like a home. He would not deny that he had also considered changing up all the white carpeting and wall colors, but went against it, knowing very well that his parents would not enjoy that. After all, despite having lived in the house by himself for many years, it still belonged to his mother and father.

“And you got a nice car too, Double-D.” Ed said as he began putting on a base coat of color on the small, one-chicken coop.

“To be quite honest, even I had found that… gift from my mother and father rather surprising.” He admitted. “It seemed to come out of the blue — I was incredibly shocked when I spoke with them about it.”

“Che.” Eddy said. “My van’s more kick-ass. At least it’s got a waterbed in the back.” Eddy had modeled his van after the one they found in the junkyard some years back; he drove himself and Ed to school in it almost every day. “You know, for the ladies.” He said with a smirk and wiggle of his eyebrows.

“I am going to pretend I did not hear that.” Miss Makers said as she went over to the table. Almost immediately Eddward could see Eddy become a tad flustered at his comment have been heard by her. Miss Makers, doing as she had said, took a glance at the work on the table, “Now, what are your names? I’m eager to know — these projects look superb.”

“Eddward.”

“Ed.”

“Eddy.”

“Eddward, Ed and Eddy… I am going to assume that is a coincidence more or less... Are the three of you brothers, though?”

“Friends since childhood.” Eddward said.

“I see, I see. That certainly is interesting.” She said with a laugh. “Now tell me about your projects. Eddward, you go first.”

“It is a locker organizer.” He said as he turned it around for her to better see. “The measurements leave about a half-inch of space on all sides in my locker. It has been measured for the top vertical compartments to hold my backpack in one, and whatever coat or jacket I may need to wear, in another. The bottom, which I am finishing up now, is a drawer for textbooks.” He said as he pulled at the handle on the bottom and opened the small drawer. “It has also been measured.”

“Very good. From the looks of it, you’ve taken meticulous care to make it as functional as possible.” He smiled at her commentary. “I would say that as a future note, you should push yourself some more. This has very good smooth lines and the drawer rolls flawlessly.” She stated as she pulled and pushed the drawer. “I think you can make some even more amazing things. Go big. If you’re comfortable with that, that is.”

He nodded. “Thank you.”

“And now… Eddy, right?” She asked.

“Yeah.”
“Tell me about your project.”

“It’s a food catapult.”

She raised an eyebrow at that. “Hopefully not for mischief. You don’t look like the type but… looks can be surprising.”

The Eds held themselves back from bringing up the more mischievous side of Eddy. “Not at all. I’m gonna use it to feed myself from my bed — that way I don’t have to walk to my room door when my mom brings me something.” Miss Makers laughed at that.

“I see, I see. Well, it certainly looks good. Is it functional?”

“Not yet.” Eddy said. “I haven’t added the spring mechanism. I’m still trying to figure that out — but it does move.” He showed how the “arm” of the catapult was able to move up and down like a seesaw.

“You just need the tension.”

“Exactly.”

“Hm… is there anything you can use for that, in here?” She placed one arm over her waist and rested the other on it, with her hand near her face and her finger tapping her cheek. She was glancing around the room as though looking for something he could use.

“Not at all. I checked.” Eddy said. “But I was thinking to use some rubber bands and attach it to the top, and then have this hook thing that can somehow be removed from the back when I pull a string, and be reset, and that’ll cause the catapult to launch.”

“You’d need some pretty thick rubber bands and some more days of work, but… I think it can be done. Do that.” She said.

Eddy nodded, and Miss Makers went to speak to Ed. In size, while she was able to look forward to make eye-contact with Eddward and a bit down to look at Eddy; for Ed, she had to raise her chin.

“Well hello there, big fella.” She said.

“Hello.” Ed said with his signature large smile.

“It’s been a while since I’ve looked up at someone.” She said, almost matching his smile.

“Ed’s probably the tallest guy in the whole school.” Eddy said. “But he’s gentler than the smallest girl.”

“I can see that. Your little house is spectacular down to the smallest detail. All the corners rounded — it looks like the inside has some texture to it which looks pretty necessary I’m gonna assume.” She put her hand in to touch it; it wasn’t rough, but grooved — sculpted, almost. “Very nice.”

“It’s for Chikita.”

“Chikita?”

“His chicken.” Eddy added.

“Ah! Okay. I see. Well from the looks of it, Chikita is going to be very happy inside here. It’s all tight and sealed — very good. All that’s left is color and you’re already doing that. Honestly, there’s
not much else I can say. Good job — all three of you. Keep it up.” She then gave them a thumbs-up and left the table.

Inside, the Eds felt proud.

The next period was lunch.

The table he sat at was located near the back of the cafeteria, close to the large windows that gave a good view of the school’s athletics field; where some members of the various sports teams the school sponsored could be seen running and exercising and training. The patrons of the table were not only himself and his fellow “Eds”, but also the Kanker sisters, and Jimmy and Sarah. Lunch was always catered by May.

“Hey guys!” She said. “I have your food.” She pulled out one large plastic bag with three plastic containers inside. On top were written their individual names on tape, and she passed them out as such. Everyone else at the table had similar containers and were already munching away at May’s cooking; there was variation in the meals when it came to small details and extras to the base sandwiches that May provided.

They each thanked her.

His base sandwich was healthier than Eddy and Ed’s, who each had a good amount of meat and cheese stacked; his was just a simple bacon, egg and cheese with some leftover fries from Sunday (when he had gone to help the sisters with their homework) adorning them. The fries were dressed in cheddar cheese and bacon bits — not the healthiest meal, but it was certainly better tasting than the food the cafeteria regularly served. He could always burn off the calories, later.

“Ah, Edd!” May said over her salad. “I wanted to ask you if you could help me study in the library this afternoon. I have a big test tomorrow and I’m not... feeling too confident about it.” She said with a blush. May was very conscious of how people viewed her intelligence; the blonde hair and buck-teeth (which she had grown into more since her childhood, but still tended to stand out when she smiled) did not help her in this field.

“Oh, oh! Me too!” Marie said. “I have the same test. Math II, right?”

May nodded.

“It would be my pleasure to help you both.” He said smiling at them.

“Hey! Jimmy and I need help too!” Sarah piped in. The second redhead at the table had the same shrewd voice as her elder version, but sported a much different look with her straight hair pulled back by a headband and currently wearing her soccer uniform — her best friend wearing the school’s male version for the cheerleading uniform. “N-not for Math II, but Trigonometry.”

“Although that would have to come after our practices today.” Jimmy said in his rather squeaky voice. “There’s a game coming up and both practices end at 5 — are you still gonna be here, Edd?”

“The library runs independently from school hours, so it closes at around 9 — I can stay here until then if you want me to. I normally do.”

“You can’t!” Said Marie. “Edd, you promised me to come attend my roller derby competition
tonight! It starts at 5.”

“Oh. That is correct — I do remember now. Forgive me, Marie.” He said to her, before turning his head to both Sarah and Jimmy. “Unfortunately, I will not be able to help the two of you study. You do have my best wishes at your exams tomorrow, however.”

Sarah began to pout. Her eyes landed on Marie, who was happily munching away at a cookie that she stole from Lee’s lunch. Lee had threatened to stab her with the fork if she dared touch the cookie, but Marie was quick to get the cookie and give her sister a kiss on the cheek to pacify her; Lee had been of course flustered and sputtered quite a few curses, but May calmed her down like she always did, and the sisters had been chatting by themselves until May had brought up the request to help her study.

Jimmy noticed Sarah’s stare and put a hand on her shoulder. He smiled at her, perfectly showing off his white, retainer-less teeth as he did this. Eddward caught this as he bit into his sandwich.

He would not lie: a part of him was aware of Sarah’s persistent crush on him. He had even tried to mediate it when he started to date Marie, to ensure that Sarah felt no hard feelings at the development. He did these things as her friend, not wanting her to know that his frequent study of others and their body language had led to his conclusion of her — when she wanted to tell him, she would tell him, and he would speak with her candidly, then.

Until that moment, he would do as much as he could to accommodate Sarah and her feelings into his life, such as, “If you are keen on still studying, Sarah, I can gladly offer my humble abode as a meeting place. Or would you prefer me to visit your home instead? I am certain your parents would be more comfortable with that.”

“You would do that Double-D?” Sarah asked, surprised.

“Of course. I am capable of staying into the later hours of the night. Although, out of propriety, I will leave at 10 — I can be there by 7. Do three hours seem of use to you?”

On her face, Sarah’s lips pulled back into a grin. A Cheshire grin. She looked at Eddward with eyes sparkly and said, “Of course, Double-D.” in a sweet, almost gloatong voice. Eddward nodded at her answer, and turned back to his sandwich — he missed the grin exuding a sense of pride and accomplishment as Sarah’s eyes landed on Marie.

When school was finally over, he made his way to May’s locker. The young blonde came fresh from home-economics and was juggling a plate of cookies along with her books as she tried to get everything into her locker.

“Allow me to be of service to you, May.” He said as he went and grabbed the books with a plate of cookies piled on top, from her hands.

“Oh thank you, Edd.” May said when she was relieved of the load. “I was scared they were about to fall — I baked those for us to study to.” She said with a smile.

“Unfortunately the library does not allow the usage of food or drink.” He told her. “However, I am certain we can feast on them in secret, somehow.” She grinned up at him and put the two unnecessary textbooks into her locker before going to reach for the remaining book and cookies from Eddward. Eddward used his height advantage over her to lift the items above his head, where May
could not reach.

“Oh no, no. I would not be a proper gentleman if I allowed a princess to carry such a cumbersome load.” He said, earning another one of her infamous giggles.

“Hey lovebirds, how’s it going?” Marie said as she skated over to the couple. She had not taken the rollerblades off of her feet for the full day — a ritual of hers on the day leading up to a big roller derby game. “You guys ready for our threesome? Studying, that is.”

Both Eddward and May blushed at Marie’s comments, but nodded their heads. The trio then made their way over to the library, with a healthy dose of conversation floating between them. It was not long before they were out of the school and across the land it was on, at the school’s library that functioned, too, as the town’s public library. Going in, the receptionists took notice of Marie being on skates and seemed ready to confront her on it.

“I will ensure that she not scuff the floors.” Eddward told them; and they seemed to take his word because it was him.

When they found a table, close to both the windows and the books, they settled, and a more serious air seemed to form around them.

“I can only be here for about an hour — Lee’s driving me to my match, then.” Marie said.

“Then we will cover the topics you are having trouble with, first, Marie. Is that alright with you, May?”

May consented, and that was what the group did.

When it came time for Marie to leave, she gave kisses to both her sister and her ex-boyfriend, and then skated away with three of the ten cookies May had made. Alone, the two studied with one another until a half-hour before Marie’s match.

“We should get going.” Eddward said as he looked at his watch. “That is, if you feel comfortable with what we have covered so far.” He was eager to get to Marie’s match, but at the same time, did not want to cut into his promise with May.

“I’m fine with it Edd.” May said happily. “You’ve helped me out a lot — and a lot of the stuff Marie was having trouble with, I did, too. I’m sure to do well tomorrow.”

“I am glad you feel that way.”

They packed up their items and headed to their separate lockers, together, to put away their unnecessary items, and then to his car; with Lee having driven Marie, May was left without a ride to the match, but Eddward was more than happy to oblige. She sat beside him in the passenger’s seat, and he drove them to the venue.

The roller derby match had been quite the spectacle. Between the two Kanker sisters who were loud and proud as they cheered on their final member, and watching Marie’s aggressiveness as she skated with her teammates, the match — the night — was more than eventful. He was certain he would have some trouble hearing later on, though.
In the end, Marie’s team had tied with the other — a date for a tie-breaker was set for that Saturday, and Marie approached them fuming and complaining about a black-haired girl who had kneed her from behind and caused her to hit her chin on the floor. She was almost pulling out the dyed blue hair of her fauxhawk. She made several death threats against the girl, and was only calmed down when May shoved one of the remaining cookies that she had, into her sister’s mouth; with the promise of a special almost-victory cupcake when they got home — and a full cake if they overcome the tie on Saturday.

He parted with the sisters, then, giving Marie their hello-goodbye kiss, and then driving over to his house to park his car before heading to Sarah’s house for their study session. It was 7pm when he got there — right on time.

Jimmy was the one to greet him at the door. He was told that they had already set up snacks and such in the living room for them to study; Sarah was sitting on the couch in her pajamas, with her red hair loose, when he entered, and got up to greet him and then take a seat beside him on the coffee table in the room. They were shoulder-to-shoulder nearly the whole time.

When he left the house at 10pm, Sarah gave him a tight “thank you” hug and Jimmy did the same, albeit softer. He left the duo around the time Sarah’s mom came home, and greeted the elder woman on the way out. He had not seen Ed at the house during his visit.

Outside, it was incredibly dark and the only thing lighting his way were the streetlights. Yet he felt comfortable in the darkness, and a part of him wished that his solitary time in the dark would not come to an end — the silence, the stars, everything, *everything*, put him at ease as he was finally able to breathe for the first time that entire day.

The moment only came to an end at the sound of a motorcycle pulling into the cul-de-sac. He recognized it immediately and could not help but watch as it pulled into the driveway of one of the houses, and the owner hopped off. When he killed the engine and hopped off his bike, Kevin and he locked eyes.

Eddward raised a hand in acknowledgment of him, and Kevin gave a nod before heading into his house.

Eddward then headed into his own.

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter was an exposition on my Eddward and his life. Trust me, I know. I also know that while I wanted a 5k word limit for each chapter for this story, that this baby was only 500 or so words from 10k (minus the before-and-after author's notes). I heavily apologize for that. I will try to keep the word count down in future chapters.

As a side note: This entire fan-fiction has been planned out from chapter-to-chapter. It will have 46 total chapters, and be updated Mondays and Fridays — a chapter each day. Also, currently 15 chapters 21 chapters of this are already fully written. (Yeah. Not kidding. I have really bad fan-fiction habits from the past, and truly want to finish this one after updating on a consistent basis and then finish up all my unfinished works.) So... have no fear on updates and look forward to Friday for the second chapter!

Next Chapter: Kevin had a really small part in this chapter, don't you think?
His mornings were really quite simple.

He woke-up to the combined nuisances of his favorite song in use as the alarm ringtone for his cellphone, and the nudging and licking and barking that came from his two Pit Bulls.

“Alright, alright — I get it!” He shouted, although not necessarily in an angry tone. While he had a 20-lb Pit Bull on his abdomen licking his face and a 30-lb-er at his side nudging at his arm, he could not be angry; part of the reason why he loved his dogs and felt better in the mornings was because of their excitement at his awakening.

Sitting up on his bed, the 20-lb tan-colored Pit Bull, named Lacey, moved aside to let him get up without any sort of hindrance. He immediately went to wipe at the saliva that was left on his cheek from her morning kisses. The 30-lb Pit Bull, Trix, was sitting at the side of the bed and watching him — waiting for him in anticipation, really. When he had the saliva cleaned off as best as he could, he stood and briefly stretched his arms above his head.

Lacey was now next to Trix, and the two just watched him.

When he put his arms down, he took a moment and registered that his alarm was still ringing. When he dismissed that, he yawned. He stood perfectly still for about a minute, just looking at his two dogs.

Then he chuckled. “Alright, let’s get this day started.”

The two female Pit Bulls began to bark happily, and followed him on his way out of his room and into the bathroom. As the girls had a habit of following him into the shower, he entered and closed the door some; leaving just a small gap so they could see his face and hand.

“Stay…” He said. If he had to dry both Pit Bulls before taking them on their morning walks, there was no way he would get to school on time. He already had a deal with his dad going in regards to his attendance — he could not mess it up now that he was three weeks into school without any lateness or absences. The two girls listened to him, and he fully went into the bathroom, and closed the door wholly.

Standing in front of his bathroom mirror, he looked at himself. His red hair was disheveled; there were a couple of eye-boogers just waiting to be picked; and his muscles could not help but feel sore from all the work he did yesterday. As he only ever slept in his boxers, the red mark on his shoulder from when he had been hit by one of his co-workers accidentally yesterday, was very visible; even though he had put on an ice-pack for a few hours last night before he fell asleep, he still felt the soreness and could not help but look forward to today. He hoped his shoulder would not act out on him.
Ah, fuck it, he thought. It was not the first time he had to go through a full day semi-injured. He had been through worse; a little shoulder pain was nothing.

Before he bathed, he washed his hands and face. He always brushed his teeth first before entering the shower, and there was no way he was going to grab onto his toothbrush and brush his teeth with Lacey’s saliva still on his hands and face. After he was done, he grabbed his toothbrush and made quick work of his dental hygiene. He smiled into the mirror after he brushed, checking his teeth.

Sexy, he thought; never one to shy away from a healthy dose of narcissism.

With that done, he took off his boxers and left them on the floor, and headed into the shower. He washed with warm water, letting some water hit his red shoulder for a few seconds, in hopes that that it will help it some. He bathed with soap and a bath-sponge that he had gotten a while back, and used that same soap to wash his hair — he had run out of shampoo the other day and had meant to get it yesterday, but got distracted by the sudden injury.

Whatever. He would try to get it today before he headed to work.

Finished, he stepped out of the shower — it was then that he realized that he had left his towel in his bedroom. He heaved a deep sigh. Heading towards the door, wet and leaving soppy footprints on the tile, he gave a peek. He flinched when he saw Lacey and Trix sitting right in front of the door, loyally.

“Jesus shit—!” He said when he noticed the two dogs. He quickly calmed himself, however. As he was not about to walk naked in front of his dogs, he told them “Go get the leashes, go, go!” so they would head down the stairs in a rush at the sound of the familiar words. When they did just that, he rushed into his bedroom and closed and locked the doors.

He breathed.

“I gotta remember to take my towel with me…” He mumbled as he fished it from a pile of clothes that were on his bed and he was meaning to get to. Besides the clothing pile, his room was rather neat and tidy with everything in its place and more-than-easy to find. He had not been much of a slob during his childhood, and even now, the only reason those clothes were not in his closet was because he had run out of hangers — yet another thing he meant to buy.

He dried himself and changed into his choice outfit for the day; deciding on something simple, as he was not in the mood for anything too extravagant or time-consuming. He put on a fresh pair of underwear, and a white beater, on top of which he put on some blue jeans that were not too loose nor too tight, and his work shirt. His work shirt was a standard, old-school mechanic’s shirt; it was light blue in color, long-sleeved, and had “Kev” stitched onto the area that fell over his left breast. He rolled up the sleeves of the shirt just before putting on some socks and tying a pair of boots over them.

He then went to the dresser with the mirror on top in his bedroom, and grabbed his brush as he fixed his hair. It was still slightly wet, but he did not mind it too much. He brushed it out and then slapped his hat on backwards before maneuvering his bangs through the front gap. His signature style, which did more than enough to secure his hat on his head for the day.

He finished everything off with some lotion and cologne.

Nice, nice, he thought. He was ready for the day, and it was only 7 o’clock. That gave him enough time to walk both Lacey and Trix, and drive by McDonald’s to get himself some breakfast on the way to school. He got excited about that.
Stepping out of the room, he was none-too-surprised seeing the two female dogs with their separate leashes in their mouths. He smiled and bent down to grab the leashes and attach them to the dogs’ collars; he rubbed their heads saying “good girl, good girl,” when he did this.

“Alright, let’s go.” With the two dogs secured, he made his way down the stairs and exited his house.

Walking Lacey and Trix was always quite the adventure. The two dogs were energetic in the mornings and strong in their own rights, and more than once, he found himself stretched out as he tried to control them both. However, for the most part, they were obedient and stayed moving forward — and fast, allowing him to also get a morning jog in.

They went around the circumference of the park near his house, and stopped at the water fountains there for the two girls to get a drink. Even though he could last until he got home, there was no guarantee that they could. He was just glad there were not any people around the park to scrutinize them; dogs drinking directly from the fountains were not allowed, and he had already gotten many looks from previous park patrons and a warning from a cop that just happened to be around when he did that, some time ago.

With the girls rehydrated, then, they resumed the walk and continued their run-over of the park. As they were on the last leg of their morning walks, they picked-up speed — wanting to finish their pseudo walks strong.

Under his skin, his muscles pleasantly — painfully — worked themselves to keep up with the animals’ speeds. He had to stretch his legs more and take strides that were significantly longer than what he was accustomed to; he had to bring his knees up higher and more quickly; he had to bring his feet down harsher, yet be fast and light enough to position his body for the next set of steps. Truly, walking his dogs in the morning was the best workout he could get — he had often considered bringing them to his practices with him. (If only the school did not have a “No Pets” rule.)

When the three of them reached their home, he was quick to remove their leashes and set them loose. The two dogs ran into the kitchen, where food and water were already waiting for them, courtesy of his father.

“You’re running water like a leaky faucet.” His dad said. The man was eating his breakfast on the kitchen island; briefly he stopped to tear a perforated sheet from the paper towels on the table, and handed it to his son.

“Thanks, pops.” Kevin said as he kindly accepted it and began to wipe the sweat off of his face.

“Staying for breakfast?” His father asked as he gestured towards the fridge. “I think that some waffles are still left in the freezer.”

“Nah, I gotta go.” Kevin said as he glanced at the clock; it was almost 7:45am, and he had to be school by 8:00am if he wanted to keep the bet with his dad going. “But I’ll try and stop by McDonald’s and get something to eat.”

“Need money?”

“Nah. I still have some leftover from my paycheck. It’ll hold until Friday.”

“Tell me if you do. You have a job, yes, but it’s only $6 an hour. That’s not a lot given how independent you wanna be.” His father said to him. He, Kevin, gave a laugh as he tossed out the
“Calm down, old man. It’s enough. I promise.”

“Hey, watch it.” His dad said as he rose from the island and went to put his dish and cup in the sink. “I’m only in my late 40s — got tons of years ahead of me ya hooligan.”

“Hooligan? Are you gonna smack me with your cane now?” He teased.

His dad looked at him in mock-irritation before his face melted in a smile. The two men gave a laugh before Kevin went over to his father and, like he did every morning, gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“Don’t work yourself too hard, Kevin.” His dad said. “And watch that shoulder.”

“I will, I will. Thanks. Bye.” He said to his dad; and because the two girls seemed to recognize his words and were now barking at him — saying goodbye, really — he rubbed their heads at the same time saying, “Bye Lacey. Bye Trix. You girls be good.”

“Don’t forget your backpack!” His dad called out.

He snapped his fingers. ‘Right.” He rushed up the stairs and quickly headed into his room, where the red backpack sat on the floor next to his studying desk. As he headed back down, he said, “Thanks, pops!” He always seemed to forget to take his backpack with him; it was such a miniscule detail compared to almost everything else that was on his mind.

He then left his house and locked the door behind him, and headed to his motorcycle — his pride and joy. When he had first gotten a job back at age 14, the minimum age to get a working permit, he saved up all of his money for three-and-a-half years with the hope of upgrading from his bicycle, to a motorcycle in the coming years. He remembered the day he first saw the beat-up Harley; he had been pining for that very model but everything new was way out of his price-range; but he had faith in his refurbishing skills as a mechanic, and was excited to see that the motorcycle that his father had dug up for him through his network, needed minimal repairs.

He sat down on the Harley and, as it had only been a few weeks since he was finally able to ride it on the streets, reveled yet again in the fact that it was his.

*Hell yeah,* he thought.

“Hey Kevin!”

From across the street, he could spot his friends Nazz and Johnny. Nazz was waving at him while the pair was walking to her a car; a convertible that she received as a birthday present two years ago on her sixteenth.

“Headed to school?!?” She called out.

“Yeah!” He called back.

“Cool! We’ll go together!” She and Johnny then entered the car and started to pull away from the driveway.

He did the same on his motorcycle and turned it on before moving out of his driveway. Leaving the cul-de-sac, he was at the front with Nazz and Johnny following behind him; Nazz had her favorite radio station on and bopped her head to the beats of the songs that played, while Johnny’s attention
was focused on his cellphone with the custom, “Plank” phone case. They came side-by-side when they streets were no longer narrow. At a red-light, though, he saw the McDonald’s and remembered his promise to get himself some breakfast.

“You guys go ahead.” He told them. “I gotta get me something to eat.”

“We’ll see you at school, then.” Nazz said.

“Yeah — later, Kevin.” Johnny said.

“Later.”

The light turned green and as Nazz and Johnny continued on their way to school, he pulled into the McDonald’s drive-thru. He briefly glanced at the time on the receiver; it was ten minutes until 8:00 — he still had plenty of time.

At school, Kevin had his red bag slung over his shoulder and was munching on hash-browns when he walked into his first period class. He got to the Math II class three minutes before the bell, and sat at his assigned table — with the only other person who sat at the table being May Kanker. The blonde girl was known in the class for getting more questions wrong than right, but Kevin knew that she probably worked harder than anyone else to get those few questions right.

She nodded up at him in greeting; focused more on the notes in front of her as she began to copy down the objective and warm-up lesson that were present on the board. He nodded back before taking his seat next to her; every morning she always smelled like food, and today he could smell syrup and bacon on her. He gave a pleasant hum — what he would not give for some **pink candy**.

The teacher, Mr. Ahn, was already in the classroom and took quick notice of the fact that he was eating in class, when he turned around after writing the homework on the right side of the board — it was to study for the unit test tomorrow. “Kevin, food away.” He said.

“Right, right.” He replied back. “Just let me finish.” He scarfed the rest of the hash-browns down and then got up from his seat to throw away the paper bag and wrappers it came in. When he sat back down, he was quick to get his materials out.

“Before class starts, is there anyone that needs a graphing calculator?” Mr. Ahn asked. Five students raised their hands, and he went to his desk where old versions of the *Texas Instruments* graphing calculators rested. He passed them out to the unprepared students — one of which being Kevin, who discovered to have left his (a TI-89), on his studying desk in his bedroom. He had been in such a rush to sleep last night once it passed 12, that he had not been paying much attention as he put away his materials and just shoved all the papers he could find, in, and whatever was caught between them. Apparently his calculator was not one of those things.

“Be prepared next time, Mr. Barr.” Mr. Ahn said; as he had done to all the other students whom he had given those calculators to.

“Right. I know. Sorry.” Kevin said.

With the materials situation settled, Mr. Ahn officially started the class and gave them five minutes to solve the warm-up problem on the board; a stopwatch magnetically clasped onto the whiteboard timing them. The students who were there early-enough had either already finished solving the
problem or were well on their way to it; May was one of these students, and Kevin watched as she checked to see if her final answer was correct — it was not.

Her face contorted into a confused expression as she began to go over the problem again to see what was missing. As Kevin had been writing that very problem, he was able to see immediately where it was that she had gone wrong.

The three on the board had been morphed into an eight.

“This isn’t a three,” he said as he pointed to that exact spot in the problem. “It’s an eight — and this is a seven, not a one.” He told her as he spotted another issue.

“Ah! Thank you, Kevin!” She exclaimed as high as she possibly could in the hushed-tones of the room. “I really appreciate that.” She gave him the giggle that she had also become well known for.

“You’re welcome.”

When the five minutes were up, Mr. Ahn went to his teacher’s desk and grabbed a cup full of popsicle sticks with Kevin’s grade and class period marked on the side of a Styrofoam cup using black Sharpie. There was a noticeable sense of anxiousness as Mr. Ahn moved the popsicle sticks around to shuffle them; they always hated when he cold-called in the mornings using those sticks. Finally, the shaking came to a stop, and he lifted one popsicle stick; the student’s name was facing him, and written on it in Sharpie as well.

“May Kanker.” He said as he put the stick back. “Go up and solve the warm-up on the board.”

“O-okay.” May said nervously. She had finished re-writing and solving the problem on the notebook after receiving Kevin’s suggestions, and grabbed it as she headed up to the board.

Kevin knew May always got nervous when she was called up. The eyes were always on her from a combination of people wanting to see whether she would get this question correct or incorrect (betting, most likely, that she would fail in answering correctly), and from them staring at her body. It was commonly said that the reason why May Kanker had trouble using her brain was because the nutrients that were meant for it were soaked up in her hips and thighs, making her very bottom-heavy and eye-candy for when her back was to people.

He caught himself slipping the few times his eyes lowered to land on the shape of her butt in the jeans she wore that day, but otherwise, he focused entirely on her writing as she solved the problem. In the middle of this, he noticed that she had again confused the three and eight, and seven and one. He wished he could point it out to her, but was happy he did not have to when she reread her work and matched it to her notebook, and noticed the mistakes, herself.

“Is that your final answer?” Mr. Ahn asked when May turned around with her back to the board.

“Um…. Y-yeah.” She said, none-too-confident. She had caught the mistake on the board, but there was still the chance that she had gotten the calculations wrong in her notebook to begin with. Kevin knew this, and noticed the grip on her notebook had tightened.

“You are correct. Good work.”

She beamed, giggling; not her infamous giggle, but a more toned-down version of it that was just enough to express her happiness and release her nerves.

“Thanks.”
“Sit down, now. Or would you care to explain your work?”

“I’ll just sit down.” She did not want to push her luck.

When she sat back down at the table, May turned to look at him and said, “Thank you so much for earlier. You saved me.”

Kevin grinned. “It was nothing. You’re welcome.”

During second and third period, he found himself wearing his gym uniform and running laps on the school’s athletics field. He had run into his football coach on his way to second period, who told him that there would be an impromptu training session as punishment for misconduct.

He had originally thought, Misconduct for what? when he heard this. He did not remember any of him or his teammates doing anything noticeably bad in the past couple of days— but his confusion was quickly resolved after he had gotten changed and was on the field among the rest of the team members. Turns out, last night, a number of them — identified through the team jackets that they had been wearing — had vandalized the local candy shop for reasons unknown. As the coach did not know who personally did it, and did not have the patience to play Sherlock, he decided to punish them as a group in the hopes the wrongdoers would get the message — vandalizing the candy shop had not only been morally wrong, but looked bad on the team.

Thus they were forced to complete 10-laps and 100-pushups. One water break.

The laps were easy for him. He was able to complete them well near the record time, and was one of the first to move onto the pushups — which he dreaded. His shoulder still was not at its best from yesterday, and he had been happy at the fact that there was no football practice on Monday, because that meant there would not be any extra physical strain on his arm besides what he would have to do for work that afternoon. Now this discipline session had ruined that as, by the 70th pushup, he found himself under uncomfortable strain on his shoulder.

Crap, he thought. He took a moment to breathe and sat on his knees as he lifted up his shirt at the base of his neck, and saw the red spot burning brighter. He groaned.

“Barr! This ain’t the time to be slacking on your teammates! Or do you wanna give them more punishment?!”

“No, sir!” He screamed back.

For now, he had to bite down on his lip and suck up the pain; despite him feeling the grind of his muscles as he got to the 80th pushup; despite the spot getting redder and redder by the 90th pushup; and despite the extreme ache he was now feeling by the 100th pushup.

He groaned when he completed the last pushup. His shoulder felt absolutely morbid.

“Finished, Barr?” The coach asked him as he came up to him.

“Yes, coach.” He responded; trying to not let the excruciating pain he felt from his shoulder, show through. So far, he had a good reputation with the coach, and he was not ready to ruin that just because of some little injury.
“Shower up, then and get back to class — fourth period should be starting soon.”

“Right.”

He got up from the ground, his legs aching, yet not as much as his shoulder was. He hurried himself off to the locker room inside the school, and cringed when he lifted his shirt above his head and his shoulder decided to act up.

“Fuck!” He screamed when the pain came near-close to unbearable.

“What the hell, Kevin?” A teammate asked. He had finished a few minutes before Kevin and was putting on his clothes after showering. “Something the matter?” When his teammate looked over at where he stood near his open locker, his eyes spotted the angry red mark. “Shit. Your shoulder’s fucked up.”

“No shit, Sherlock.” Kevin responded.

“Go to the nurse, man. It’d suck not being able to play during Homecoming in a few weeks.”

“I know. I’m gonna — just gotta shower first.”

“Want me to help?”

Kevin looked at the blond male; he had a harlequin-like grin on him that Kevin snorted at. He knew the male was not serious and just wanted to get a rise out of him; this was confirmed when he let out a laugh at Kevin’s reaction.

“Beat it.” Kevin said.

“Alright already, damn.” He closed his locker door and slung his backpack on his shoulder. “Just don’t fuck it up more than it already is.” On his way out, he slapped Kevin directly on his injured shoulder; he hissed.

“Asshole!”

“Thank you, man. Thank you.”

When the nuisance had left the locker room, Kevin pushed through and straightened himself up, and continued putting his clothes away in his locker; he threw in his gym shirt and got out his towel and regular clothes; he closed the door and locked it once again. He then headed to one of the three private stalls in the locker room and made sure that the door was secure, before setting up all his clothing items on the inside and finishing undressing.

It was not that he was self-conscious about his body; he could hold himself against the best of them in terms of muscle and shape and confidence, but he would not allow anyone else to see him struggling with his shoulder. The extra element of eyes on him and whatever commentary that may arise from that, was not necessary.

In the closed shower stall he removed the rest of his clothing and underwear and hung it with the rest on two hooks, and then turned on the water. He did all of these things with his one good arm and hand; he was keen on not moving the other as much as he possibly could, in the hopes that that would help it recover without the need for extensive medical attention.

He showered, having some difficulty without the use of his other arm. Drying was easier, but at one point it had felt as though he would slip, and he was forced to reach out with his injured arm and
hold onto the shower handle. He regretted it almost immediately; he would much rather have preferred the fall on his opposite arm.

_Dumbass_, he thought, berating himself.

With his injury feeling worse and worse, he tried to put on his clothing on as fast as possible — this meant cutting corners, such as ignoring his wet hair and body entirely and just focusing on getting clothed. His socks got wet when he put them on and stood in them while putting on his boots one at a time. He was certain his white beater was inside out, and he skipped out entirely on putting his work shirt on over because that would require messing with his injured arm more than he would have liked to. When he was decent, however, he collected the rest of his things and exited the stall.

The locker room was now filled with more members of the team; those capable of completing the disciplinary workout at an average time rate, flocked in one after another. He went immediately to his locker and put his towel away, and quickly dabbed on some deodorant before closing the door and slinging his backpack on his one good shoulder, and heading out.

“Um, hey, can I get some help here?” He asked, walking into the nurse’s office.

The nurse, a woman by the name of Florence — Flo, for short — who seemed rather young for her age and yet held wisdom far beyond her years (or at least, constantly showed herself as having such), turned around to look at him after putting a thermometer in the mouth of another student. “Hold that for a few seconds under your tongue,” she told the young child, who looked worse-for-wear than he currently did.

“How can I help you?” She asked him. Before he could answer, however, she scrunched up her face as she tried to piece together the information in front of her, and said, “Kevin Barr, right? Twelfth grade. Football team.”

“Right.” He responded.

“Your hair’s wet and— shit.” She said, her eyes landing on his red shoulder. “Ah. Sorry. I was told not to curse around students, but… gosh darn it. Your shoulder looks awful. Come, have a seat here.” She gestured to the empty bed next to the sick-looking student. Briefly she turned her attention to them as she took out the thermometer and checked their temperature — 102.8 degrees Fahrenheit. A definitive sign of a fever. “Lay down Rosanne. I’m gonna have to call your parents and have them pick you up. Give me a second, Kevin. Let me take care of her first.”

The girl next to him, Rosanne, looked a bit mortified that her parents were being called home. He could hear her mumbling something under her breath; about a big test she had to take next period, and how she had just come in here for some medication to get her through it — but now she was going to have to go home, and obviously could not take the exam anymore. She was frustrated.

He could hear nurse Flo talking to the girl’s parents and seeing if they could pick her up. It looked as though they simply were not capable of fitting time into doing that, as she came back into the area where the two of them sat and said, “Looks like you’re just gonna have to stay here for the rest of the day.”

“P-please, is there… is there any way I can go take my exam and then… come back?” The young girl looked at nurse Flo with eyes drowning in disparity. She was chewing on her bottom lips, her
fingers clenched and body tensed as though to brace herself for battle — or disappointment.

Nurse Flo looked at the girl; her lips wiggling a bit as she seemed to physically chew over what the girl was asking of her.

“How important is this exam that it’s worth risking your health and that of your classmates?” She asked. The young girl looked at her with wide eyes framed by her messy brown bangs. She seemed to understand that no test was worth the risk of health— especially not those of her classmates and teachers. She frowned and bowed her head in shame, and nurse Flo sighed. “Relax. Sit back. I’ll give you some Tylenol and you try to get some sleep between now and the time school ends — and write down your name and your class and teacher for that test of yours. I’ll talk to them about a make-up.”

The girl nodded and while Flo went to get a bottle of Tylenol and a small plastic measuring cup for her to drink from, she, the girl, Rosanne, got out a pen and paper and with a shaking hand and some visible difficulty (she must have been incredibly sick — too sick, even, to take the test at all if she could barely hold a pencil), she wrote down the information nurse Flo requested from her. She handed said slip of paper to her when she came to give her the Tylenol, and then settled back on the bed. Nurse Flo made sure to fully pull the covers that helped to separate the bedding sections, to give the girl maximum privacy.

“Now,” she said as she went to stand in front of him; her eyes immediately fixated on the burning red spot that had become of his shoulder. “Tell me how this happened.”

“I had work yesterday at the garage place downtown, and I was inspecting the engine of this really nice car—” (Flo rolled her eyes at his emphasis on the quality of the car) “—when my co-worker accidentally removed the hood pole that held it up, and it slammed down on my shoulder. It was sore but fine, until it got aggravated with an… impromptu football drill a few minutes ago — 100-pushups. I was dying by the 50th.”

“I see.” She said. “Would you mind if I touched it some?”

He shook his head, and nurse Flo put her hands on his shoulder. Her hands were cold, and she gently moved her thumbs along the redness. He flinched when she kneaded a particularly bad area.

“Sorry,” she said, taking her hands off of him. “Good news is that it doesn’t look like a fracture of any sort — which I doubted in the first place, but it never hurts to check. But there’s definitely some unnecessary grinding going on. To stop that, you need a sling — but first, some ice.”

“I can’t get a sling.” He said when she went over to a wall of one long counter with cupboards both above and below it; the cupboards above had glass windows that let her see the medications and other items that were inside. There was a sink in the counter as well, nice and deep. She had gone to that very area to grab the Tylenol and small cup for the now-sleeping girl, and now sought after a compressed ice-pack in a small refrigerated section of the cupboards below the counter.

“Why?” She asked as she found the ice-pack and went to place it on his shoulder. He hissed a bit when the cold pack came against his shoulder, but a few seconds later, he rejoiced in it being there. He had desperately needed that.

“I just came for some meds. I have too many other things to do today and I can’t have a sling holding me back.”

“Well it’s either a sling or amputation. Your choice.”
He looked up at her with mild shock. “Are… are you serious?”

“Of course not.” She responded, removing her hand from the ice-pack. He immediately replaced it with his good hand, and added more pressure onto the blaring red spot. “I told you there aren’t any fractures, didn’t I? However, that doesn’t mean that you can just choose to not get a sling. You need one regardless. I think there are some left here— hold on.”

“I said I can’t get one.” He said again. “I have work almost all this week. And the days where I don’t have it, I have football practice. And I have to practice — Homecoming isn’t that far away and we can’t mess up. I can’t mess up. The team would chew me out for it.”

Nurse Flo snorted quite audibly. For a moment he contemplated her age and wondered if she was really as young or old as she looked. She seemed to switch between mid-20s and mid-30s at his separate glances of her; and when she had been very close earlier, she looked more into her 40s, almost, from the crow’s feet prominently decorating her eyes. Yet there was no denying her youthful demeanor; from her black, red-tipped hair to her large square “hipster” glasses and converse sneakers.

“Don’t be an idiot, boy,” she said, suddenly displaying signs of her being much older than he felt she was. “If you do anything with your shoulder like that, it’ll likely be the last time your shoulder will ever work like it originally did. You’re looking at future ligament troubles and mobility issues if you keep this up.”

“I know, but—”

“No buts. You’re getting a sling.” She went to the wall of cupboards once again and found what she had been looking for. She grabbed hold of a blue sling that looked like it would fit perfectly on him, and then went over to him stating, “Lower the ice-pack and your shirt strap. I gotta apply some medication cream first to help with the swelling.”

Kevin did as such. He no longer felt as though he could argue against her. He let her apply the medication and then put his arm up in the sling. Once it was secure, he felt bitterness inside of him. This was surely going to set him back for the rest of the day — nay, the entire week.

“There. Now that wasn’t so bad, was it?” She said as she finished cleaning up and went to wash her hands of the cream she had applied on his shoulder. “Just keep it in there for… I’m gonna say, up to two weeks from now. It could get better before then. But make sure to come see me when you feel like you should remove it — the school only has so many slings. As for care, well, simply, take it off when you’re bathing and sleeping. Otherwise, it is on at all times. Understood?”

He nodded.

“Good. Now get out of here.” She said with a grin.

He nodded and wordlessly hopped off of the bed and slung his backpack on his good shoulder, and exited the room. His arm was secured pretty tightly in the sling, and he could already feel some relief from it being inside of there — but he could not go around wearing this all day. At home, maybe, but only after he had done everything he needed to do — at the end of his days. Not at school, though, and certainly not at work.

On his way to class, he detoured into the closest boys’ bathroom and, when inside, wasted no time in taking his arm out of the sling, in front of the mirror. When the sling was off of his body, he shoved it into his backpack. He put on his work shirt slowly, then, and tried to make himself look as normal as possible.
He told himself that because she had applied some creams, he would still get the same effects on his shoulder as if his arm was in the sling (he knew he was likely lying to himself, but hoped desperately that this was the case in the end). He would wear it at home after he did all of his chores, after all. He would even wear it to bed if that helped offset the time he spent not wearing it during his working days. He will wear it at all other times of the day, he promised, just not when he had to be around others who could be perturbed by his condition.

He noticed, then, when he was finishing fixing himself up, that his signature red snapback had been left in the locker room. He had been in such a rush to get out of there, after all, that the small detail had slipped past his eyes.

He went back to get it; being very careful about his sling-less arm.

After school came to an end, he hopped onto his motorcycle and headed to downtown Peach Creek to Mo and Tasha’s Garage. It was the only auto-body repair shop in all of Peach Creek, and also where his father had brought him to see his Harley back when it was not his and beat-up.

The owner, Mo, was an old friend of his dad’s and a greasy mechanic constantly in a red jumpsuit with oil on him like lotion. He had dark brown eyes and balding red hair, and was quite the absent-minded character; but an overall nice guy who had found the Harley and sold it to him cheap, and then constantly checked up on him to see its progress. When he saw his skill in mechanical repair, he offered him a job as a crew member — starting off small with minor repairs like flat tires and some work on bicycles — and he immediately took it.

It was then that he was introduced to Mo’s wife, Tasha; a short Asian woman whose hair seemed to be dyed blacker than black by the oil, as she always said that it was naturally a visibly dark brown. Tasha always wore red lipstick as her staple, along with a green jumpsuit matching her husband’s in style, and her hair constantly pulled up into a messy bun through the use of pencils or pens. She did not have the old type of mechanic knowledge that Mo did, but she was key on everything new and modern and used that to her advantage to help with the new “breed” of car that constantly came in. Tasha had seemed to make a pet project out of his Harley, though, and always gave him pointers on how to improve it, and even did some hands-on work. She had a motorcycle herself.

He would not lie. It was from the stuff he learned working at Mo’s that he was even able to repair his Harley to its current exemplary state; and for that, he was extremely grateful and did not want to disappoint.

When he rolled into the employee parking lot, he was greeted by Tasha, who was pulling up herself, in Mo’s red pickup truck with what looked to be spare parts for auto repairs in the back.

“Hello, Kevin.” She said as she killed the engine and hopped out. “Right on time as always.”

“Of course.” He said to her, putting his motorcycle keys in his pocket. “I would not dream of being late — I love working here, after all.”

“Well that’s good to hear. Hey listen, how’s that shoulder of yours? I hope that oaf didn’t mess it up too bad.” She said, referring to the employee who had somehow missed an entire body being hunched over and inspecting a car’s engine and removed the hood holder without a thought.

“Nah, I’m fine.” He said, grinning; trying his best to not let anything be a dead giveaway to his lie.
“Some sleep helped me brush everything off. It doesn’t hurt at all, anymore.”

“That’s good to hear.” Tasha said. “I was so worried. Well, since you say you’re fine, go in and put your backpack away then come help me out with these parts. I got a huge haul from the junkyard today, as you can see.” She said smiling proudly as she tapped the top of what looked to be a bumper that rested atop a pile of other various metal car parts.

“Right. I’ll be right back.”

“Hop to it.”

He went inside the large garage facility and quickly headed to the employee lockers. He got out his keys and pulled out the small locker key and opened the door. His locker was nearly empty except for a water bottle that he kept around for work, and some auto repair magazines that Mo had given to him a while back when he was fixing his Harley. (He had wanted Kevin to make a custom piece of the Harley, but in the end, he had decided against it; having a motorcycle was enough for him, he did not need it custom.)

He put in his backpack and then locked the door. Before exiting the area, he punched in his time card. On his way back outside, he came across Tasha who was hauling in some tire rims.

“Start with the small things first. We’ll tackle the big stuff together.”

He nodded.

The hauling-out process took about a good thirty minutes. It had been relatively easy work until he got to the large bumpers. There were four of them and while Tasha had told him that they would tackle them together, he went in thinking that he could handle them just fine, and immediately regretted it when one slipped and pulled his injured shoulder down with it when he tried to grasp at it.

He had never bitten onto the inside of his cheek so hard, before.

Fuck, fuck! He inwardly screamed. That’s gonna leave more than a mark. Fuck.

“Kevin, are you alright?” Tasha asked him when she came back outside. She saw the bumper on the floor and Kevin hunched over and clutching his shoulder, and her facial expression immediately took into one of curiosity and concern.

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” Kevin said. He forced himself to straighten up and bite back the exploding pain that emitted from his shoulder. He was barely a half-hour into his 6-hour shift, and could not let his messed up shoulder get the best of him so soon.

“Mmmmm…” Tasha did not look convinced, so he put on a show of fully straightening himself out and grabbing hold of the bumper. He lifted it to rest on his good shoulder.

“See? See? I’m fine, Tasha. No need to worry.”

“If you say so, then. But didn’t I tell you we would handle the big stuff together? Honestly…”

He chuckled. “It’s fine. We’ll do the next one together. Lemme just bring this one in first.” He then moved to walk into the garage and headed to where he and Tasha had been stockpiling the junkyard-treasures next to Mo’s office. He flinched at the movement it took to bring the bumper from atop his “good” shoulder, and down onto the ground. In the end, he was happy to have the pressure alleviated, but hesitant to go back out and help Tasha with the rest.
Just suck it up. It’ll be over soon.

At the end of his shift, he had never felt more excited to leave and go home. Normally, he was content with his shift finishing, having felt that he pulled in a good day and earned his hours — a feeling he prided himself on. However, he had never quite been anxious to leave, as he did now. He had never stared at the clock as much as he did that day; wishing that somehow time would speed up and he would blink and be in his bed and no longer putting more pressure on his more-than-jacked-up shoulder.

Driving home, he had visions of a warm bath and tension releasing from his muscles; a warm meal and cold drink; finishing his homework as quickly as possible; and finally, falling into a deep sleep on his bed.

He was eager to get home.

Pulling into his driveway, the front light of the garage that he knew his father turned on specifically for him around the time he was set to get home from work, and the faint light of the streetlamps, were his only source of illumination. Everyone was already in their houses, and the majority of them had their lights completely off.

Getting off of his motorcycle, though, he noticed that he was not the only one out on the street at this time; across from him, he could spot a person staring in his direction. Upon closer inspection, he recognized the person to be Eddward.

Eddward raised a hand in greeting; He gave a nod in Eddward’s direction, back.

With that, he went into his home with his backpack still hanging on his good shoulder, and could not help the smile that came across his face as Lacey and Trix greeted him with hugs and wet doggy kisses.

Chapter End Notes

So I managed to keep the word count down for this chapter (yay!) but it’s still not quite 5k... mmm... I'm gonna have to figure that out. However, that is not important. What is important is this:

Any products mentioned in the past, present, or future of this story that you are familiar with, are obviously not my own and only included for realism. These babies all belong to their respective trademarks.

The characters Mo and Tasha in name and appearance belong to the Delicious! series game creators. If you haven’t heard of it before, it’s this amazing series of time-management games that can be found on GameHouse (gaming site, Google if you wish). Honestly, I highly recommend the series because it’s one of my absolute favorites.

Next Chapter: Eddward and rain.
Chapter Notes

My word count is getting better. :) Anyways, this chapter is the official start of the plot. So no more long introductions— just straight(ish) Kevedd from now on. I hope you like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Eddward awoke the following morning, it was raining outside; a downpour; not just raining cats and dogs, but likely drowning them as well with the massive quantities of water that fell from the sky, at such a high rate, too.

While he pleasantly enjoyed the white noise that rain created when it was time for him to fall asleep, in the mornings, it greatly dampened his mood — no pun intended. This would make it incredibly difficult to make his way over to the Kanker household to taste the goodness that was May’s cooking early on, and have another rush of witty banter with Marie. Then there was always Lee, and what she had to offer to the situation. It would be difficult, yes, to run while holding an umbrella above his head, but he would do it regardless for the pleasant company that came from the trio of friends.

(For a moment he mused on his present and past. He remembered back to a time when he had feared the Kanker sisters — Marie especially, who had what he determined to be an unhealthy crush on him, at the time. Now, however, he very much enjoyed the Kankers’ company — and Marie was one of his most important people, whom he felt he would go to any cost to protect.

Ah, how embarrassingly fondly he looked back at all those times he ran away from her. Even back then, she had her hair dyed blue, but never let its natural black color show like she was doing now with the sides of her fauxhawk. She had come off to him as obsessive and rude, and with some mental dysfunction — but oh how wrong he had been in the judge of her character. When he finally stopped running away from her advances and made an effort to be her friend, at least, Marie Kanker turned out to be someone he was able to connect to on a spiritual level. There were so many more layers to her than he had been allowed to see — her sisters, as well, turned out to be much more mature and exciting than they let on. Candid. Hard-working. Nice.

He could hardly imagine what he may have deprived himself from if he had not stopped physically running from Marie when she and her sisters were chasing him and Ed and Eddy, and held out the white flag of surrender, and the hand of friendship.)

However, this plan quickly fell apart as he, looking out his bedroom window, found his vision nearly entirely blocked by the heavy rain. He would be unable to run, at all. He heaved a sigh and went to his cellphone. On days like these, he always sent a text to Marie to let her know that he would be unable to come over for breakfast that day (he would still go to pick them up for school, but not to eat). The results of which were usually the sisters breaking into his locker at school — as in, cracking the combination lock through whatever means they used that left no signs of tampering (he assumed they used the old-fashioned stethoscope trick) — and leaving his food there for him to eat during his initial free periods. It was always a nice treat, even though he was expecting it.

He had not sent the message but a minute before he got a reply back from Marie. In her usual, emoticon-hieroglyphic way, which he felt he should get a Master’s Degree for being able to debunk
the series of emojis, she communicated to him, “Boooooooooooo!!!!!” Followed by, “We gotchu.”

He laughed, almost hearing her voice and seeing her face as she sent him these things. He imagined the look of displeasure turning into a smug, pouty look as she nodded her head at her sisters, who would somehow know exactly what she meant. He held back the escalation threatening in his laughter as he spent more cognitive skills on this one thought.

With his morning situation taken care of, he put his phone aside and went to bathe. As usual, his towel and other toiletries were waiting for him in there, and he made quick work of his hygienic process. When he was finished, he wrapped his hair up and went into his bedroom, naked as usual. Inside, he dried and dressed, and then finished up setting his hair.

It was incredibly early by the time he finished — not even 8am. It was still early enough, however, to go to Marie’s house and transport her and her sisters to school with him; and still manage to get them to their class on time.

At his foyer, he grabbed his plastic bubble umbrella from the umbrella rack next to the door, and his house keys; his phone already in the internal pocket of the jacket he decided to wear, as extra protection against the wind.

As he stepped out, he was hit by the full-force of the rainstorm; high velocity winds and heavy rainfall got him drenched almost instantly. He regretted not putting on rain boots as well, having felt that he could handle it with his current footwear. He was half ready to go back indoors and change, but opted against it; what good would that do, now that he was already wet? He would just be dragging the filth into the house, which was the last thing he wanted.

He decided on instead heading into his car. The short distance there was harder to traverse than normal, even with his bubble umbrella providing a clear barrier for his eyes to see through — part of the reason why he had purchased it over a regular umbrella. When he got to his car, he was more-than-happy to step in and close his bubble umbrella, before tossing it to the bottom of the back seat. He felt happier than ever, now, that he had opted to get the Weather Tech floor-liners for his vehicle; the seats already had plastic protectors keeping the white, white, and the leather dry, after all, and the use of the floor-liners made cleaning his vehicle during accidental spells and rainy days, much easier.

Pulling out of his driveway, he was about to round out of the cul-de-sac when he spotted Kevin coming out of his household.

He did not have an umbrella with him and was running while holding his red backpack above his head. At the front door, Eddward could see Kevin’s father calling out to him and holding out an umbrella. Kevin was on his motorcycle and braving the heavy rain as he tried to get it started.

Without thinking of it for a moment, he stopped at Kevin’s house and called out, “Kevin!” The drenched male did not hear him, and he motioned towards his father. His father caught on and was able to communicate to Kevin the need to turn around. When he did, he finally said, “It is unsafe to operate a motorized cycling vehicle in these hazardous weather conditions! Please! Allow me to be of service in that respect!”

It seemed to take a moment for Kevin to register what it was that he was saying; but in the end he seemed to get it. Carpool, he wanted to carpool with him today because all Kevin had a license to drive for, was his motorcycle — with a car license being an entirely different exam and set of authoritative processes for him to register and gain — and if he had trouble walking to his car in this weather, there was no telling the difficulty Kevin would have going at 20 — maybe 30 — miles-per-hour with the wind and the rain obstructing his vision and the roads a slippery wet mess.
When he got the message, Kevin ran to the passenger side of his car. He did not bother holding his backpack above his head this time; he was already incredibly soaked and the act would make no significant difference.

When he got there, he hopped in and slammed the door shut. His freckled face was red, and his hair — his whole body — looked like he just came fresh out the shower. Instinctively, he shook his head to get rid of some of the water in his hair, and Eddward had to shield himself with his hands to keep the water from dropping onto him. Kevin went wide-eyed and looked around at the car before looking at him.

“Sorry.” He said. “And after you offered to give me a ride, too. Damn.”

“It is of no worry or concern, Kevin.” Eddward said as he opened the small compartment in between the front seats and pulled out some thick and soft tissues. He grabbed two sheets for himself and gave two to Kevin, who graciously took it. “I was far more concerned over your wellbeing whilst operating your motorcycle in these conditions, than the potential wetness my car may succumb to.”

While saying this, he was scooping up and drying the few water droplets that Kevin had scattered when he shook himself like a dog, but that did not necessarily mean that his words meant any less.

Kevin dried his face and tried to do as much as he could on his hair, but knew that it was useless. He had already created a nice little puddle on Eddward’s floor-liners and seat covers, and on top of that, his backpack was surely creating an even bigger mess in the backseat. He held back the urge to flush from embarrassment; he simply could not let Eddward see him so openly flustered.

“I am relieved that you accepted my offer.” He said as he finally got the car in gear and fully drove out of the cul-de-sac.

“Yeah, well… thanks for offering.” Kevin stated. He leaned against the window of Eddward’s car; head half tilted up to look at the rain pouring down. It was difficult to see through the continuous falls, and surely even more difficult to drive — for even though the windshield wipers pushed the liquid to the side, it quickly came back. Looking at Eddward, he saw the grip on the steering wheel was tight, with his eyes squinting.

“…This is one shit-lord of a storm, ain’t it?” He remarked, trying to make some conversation. While he and Eddward had had their differences in the past, they both did a tremendous amount of growing-up after the situation with Eddy’s elder brother brought the kids of the cul-de-sac into their favor, and a wordless friendship had been formed. Numerous times he had sought tutoring help from Eddward, and when Eddward initially struggled to find a sporting club suitable enough for him to help achieve his parents’ wishes of wanting him to display himself as an exceptionally full-rounded student to colleges by enlisting in activities of the body, it was Kevin who had helped him to scope out the sports clubs at the school, and even showed him his now-favorite jogging path.

(However, as far as hanging out — spending a day together or tagging along in a group of friends for an outing — the two had never intermingled. They were on a positive basis with one another, but that just made them comfortable acquaintances; not quite friends; friendship was far deeper than that, and Kevin had yet to become to Eddward what Ed and Eddy and the Kankers were, and Eddward had yet to become to Kevin what Nazz and Rolf and even Johnny were.)

“I concur. The weather report both yesterday and today were immensely flawed. From their descriptions of this storm, it was set to be like any other — not worthy of a flood notification.”

Almost at the exact time that he had said that, Kevin could hear his phone buzz in his jacket’s pocket; pulling it out, he came to see that it was a flood notification from the National Weather Service for the Peach Creek area. “The meteorologists must have been… inebriated or, at least, in an incoherent frenzy when they observed and made these reports.”
“Right, right.” Kevin said, nodding along. He fully agreed with Eddward. What idiot saw this storm and felt it was proper to name it a “light shower” both yesterday and today? “It hasn’t rained like this for, like, months.” He paused to take a look back at his backpack in the backseat. “My homework’s probably soaked to Hell and back. God. How am I gonna hand that shit in?”

“Perhaps there would be time to manually reproduce it?” Eddward suggested. “If you were to time your classes down to the last minute and pushed through your current classwork with perfect haste, then you would have enough time to reproduce your assignments and hand them in for the class that they are due in. That is my opinion, at least, stemming from my success rate giving this very suggestion in the past.”

“Oh yeah? To who?”

“It was to Eddy to whom I gave the suggestion.” Eddward said; trying to correct his grammatical error in a way that was not too in-your-face.

“And did it work?”

“Well…” He chewed it over in his mind for a moment. “To an extent, every experiment has a trial-and-error period — outliers as well.”

“I’m guessing he didn’t really listen to you, huh?” At this time, Kevin’s head was turned to fully focus on Eddward. He eyed the young man as he concentrated at driving — not crashing — the car in this godforsaken weather. It was at this time that he noticed the morning talk show that was playing on the radio at a volume that made it barely audible to his ears. He supposed Eddward, the ever-cautious driver, had turned it down to keep from distracting himself as he tried to navigate these shallow black rivers that would be called “streets” on an average day.

“I will admit: he refused to take my advice the first couple of times. Eddy is quite stubborn and believed that he could find another way out of his predicament — a dishonest way, I am sure.” He had let the last part slip out and wanted to retract his statement, but continued to move forward with the conversation in the hopes that Kevin would forget what he had said or not read too much into it, later on. “In the end, after many failures, his last option was my suggestion. He took it. It worked — and it has continued having a high success rate ever since.”

“Mmmm… then I’ll have to try it out.”

They were silent along the ride until they reached downtown Peach Creek, just five minutes away from the Kanker household, and then five back from the school. The shallow black rivers were crowded with cars going in their direction, and had the usual smooth and steady traffic (even for the downtown area), come to a complete halt.

Around them were irate drivers honking if only to get out their frustrations, as it was clear to them all that there would be no guaranteed movement from any sort of miniscule road rage, for quite a long time.

“Oh dear,” Eddward said. “This is not good.”

“No kidding. Class starts in like ten minutes and this traffic ain’t budging.” Kevin replied. He looked around in front and behind him; all his eyes saw were various cars of various models and sizes, all practically parked on the shallow black rivers like he and Eddward were. He groaned as he turned back around and sat properly in his seat. “Ain’t this a bitch.”

“Indeed,” Eddward said; although he did not necessarily agree with the cuss words that Kevin
spewed like it was his native tongue; he especially did not like the derogatory way in which that specific word made the female sex out to be. “However, I must confess to some curiosity as to why. I cannot think of any particular reason for this level of rain to stop downtown traffic altogether. Not unless—”

“Ah don’t tell me. The bridge’s flooded?”

To get from downtown Peach Creek to where the school was, commuters had to go over a bridge that went over a wide section of the river that gave Peach Creek its namesake. The bridge was not like the massive structures found in popular cities, but rather, a simple, low, wood bridge with its base structure enhanced with steel, that allowed commuters passage. As it was incredibly close to the surface of the water (barely five inches above it), in stormy situations such as the one they currently dealt with, the bridge was shut down due to none other than flooding. There had been a few times in the past when cars had been stuck on the bridge while the heavy flow of the water kept them from moving; once, even, when the windows on a car, on the side of the flowing river, had been cracked from the immense water pressure constantly hitting it.

“Most likely.” Eddward said. “I also fear that there is no apparent escape to reverse this situation; not in our position, at least.” In the right lane of the two-lane street, Eddward’s car was on the furthermost right side; with its left blocked by two cars. While they could easily drive to the other lane and head back to the cul-de-sac, they first had to wait for one or both of the cars to their left and front to realize the predicament, and leave initially.

“Jesus shit Christ…” Kevin muttered under his breath; he slunk back into the car seat and crossed his arms over his chest. The clothes were heavy on him, and he felt disgusting being wet from head-to-toe at that current time. He sneezed; a sign of things much worse to come, later.

“Oh goodness — I completely forgot!” Eddward exclaimed. He reached over to the central console of his vehicle and turned on the heated air on Kevin’s side of the car. The warm air blasted through the vents and almost immediately Kevin moved his cold hands in front of it, and began to dry himself properly. “Forgive me, Kevin. I had meant to do that earlier when you first stepped into the passenger’s seat, but the act slipped my mind.”

“S’okay, man.” Kevin said as a small grin played at the edge of his lips as he finally was able to properly dry and warm himself up. “Better late than never.”

Eddward gave a shy smile.

His attention was immediately pulled away from Kevin, however, when his phone rang in the inside of his jacket. He unzipped the front enough for him to reach in and grab it, and saw that he was receiving a call from Marie (among the fact that it was also now well past 8am, and that there were numerous text messages and email indications displayed).

He looked at Kevin for a moment, “Excuse me. I must take this.” When Kevin nodded in response, Eddward accepted the call and put the phone to his ear. “Greetings, Marie.” He said into it.

“Edd, what gives? I texted you like eight times!” Marie screamed at him from the other end of the line; although not in a too-harsh way.

“My mistake — I was too preoccupied with ensuring the lives of both myself and my passenger whilst braving the water-drowned roads to school, to even think about the messages that you may or may not have sent me.”

“Are you getting sassy with me?”
“Not at all. I am wholeheartedly serious.”

“Mmmm…”

“As well as a tad on the jaunty side, yes.” He said with a grin.

Marie snorted. “Oh whatever. Listen, I was watching the news just now and heard that the roads were closed. Is that true?”

“It indeed is. My travels are currently postponed due to it, as we speak.”

“The bridge is out, too.”

“I had come to that conclusion not too long along.”

“Okay Mr. Smarty Pants. Did you know that school has been cancelled for the day, as well? It’s looking like it might be a freak hurricane or something and the mayor is kinda panicked.”

“I see…” He said; and due to his tone of voice and facial expression when he said this, Kevin turned to him to view what was wrong. He did not want to eavesdrop on the conversation, but was curious as to what Marie Kanker had told Eddward on the other end of the line, that had him saying that.

“Yeah. It’s pretty bad, man.”

“I had not heard of these developments. This makes our predicament even more… restless, it seems.” Kevin raised an unseen eyebrow at this; it felt like Eddward was talking to him at that last part.

“Our?” Marie asked.

“Yes. I mentioned before having a passenger with me. Did I not? Or were you too distracted by my earlier taunt to notice?”

“Oh hush you.” Marie said. “I can hear the smirk in your voice.”

“I will now kindly advise you that I am not smirking. Grinning. Smiling. Beaming, even, would be far better descriptive words to describe the upturned form my lips have taken.”

“Hmph. Is this how you repay me for telling you these important details? Being a saucy knave with me?”

“I assure you that I have not lifted the top off of your pot.”

“Oh… whatever! Just get here for a movie marathon today. May is going all out with the snacks.”

“I will try my hardest to do as such, Marie.”

“You better. See ya when you get here.”

“Goodbye.”

“Buh-bye!”

The call ended, and he locked the screen of his phone after checking the notification bar to confirm what he suspected all of the messages were about. The texts were from Marie, nine in total; the
emails from various online markets he was subscribed to, with one being from the Peach Creek High notifying students of school cancellation. Marie’s information had been superb.

“Classes have been cancelled for today.” Eddward said as he turned to Kevin. For a moment, he was caught off-guard by coming to see that Kevin had been facing him; surely it had been for longer than just right now, when he had spoken to him at last. The thought of Kevin having stared at — and heard — him while he was having his conversation with Marie, made him rather nervous. He fought back a blush and nervous stutter. The silent Kevin had quite the intense gaze on his face, as well. “Um… yeah. T-the bridge is also confirmed to be—” He cleared his throat, trying to regain his composure. “Out.”

Kevin heaved a deep sigh. “This sucks.”

“Indeed…” Eddward said tentatively. Now that Kevin was no longer looking intently at him, he could relax. He was always one to get nervous when under the viewfinder of others.

“I suppose you wouldn’t happen to have some breakfast on you, would you? I kinda skipped.” Kevin said as he put his hand on his stomach.

Eddward shook his head.

“I, too, skipped breakfast. However, if you would like… I do have an engagement coming up with the promise of nourishment for the body.”

“I’ll pass. Thanks for the offer, though.” He said.

“Very well, then.”

The two sat back in their car seats; eyes set on the windowpane in front of them as they watched heavily for any signs of moving traffic. They did not know how long it took for the car to move but an inch or two forward, at their surprise. It was not significant progress, but in this case, it was the sign of something happening in front of them, which was more than good enough given what they had been dealing with so far.

The cars to the side of them showed no signs of turning onto the empty road next to them, and heading out — nor did a single car in front of them, for that matter. If but one car made the move, they could all be out of there within a matter of minutes — yet all stayed perfectly still, as though they were content with being stuck in traffic unnecessarily, or too blind to see the way out.

“Goodness, this is dragging on.” Eddward said. He looked at the time displayed on the car’s digital clock and found that they had been stuck in traffic for almost two hours. He had already been dealing with all the text messages Marie was sending to him to hurry up already, and felt himself grow anxious as well for his arrival at the Kanker residence. Marie was tempting his speed with delicious details of what May had cooked and what movies they had chosen, and he was more than eager to get there — fighting back the urge to abandon his car and its other patron and walk to the trailer park, at this point, if he were to truly be honest with himself.

“I’m gonna go knock on that guy’s window.” Kevin said as he gestured to the car to their left, effectively blocking their way out. “I’m gonna see if he at least knows that he can leave at literally any second.”

“I would advise against that.” Eddward said. “There is the chance that they may not take too kindly to your… intrusion. Human patience tends to disintegrate when in situations such as these.”

“Calm down, dork,” Kevin said. “If the guy’s pissed, I can handle myself. Besides, I’ll be as polite as
possible.” He grinned, but Eddward was too distracted by the old, once-faded-now-dug-up, nickname that he used in reference to him, to even notice it. It took him a bit to recover from that. “Can I use your umbrella to walk out there?” Kevin asked, effectively snapping him out of his trance.

“Ah! Y-yes, of course!” He said, ruffled, as he reached into the back seat and pulled up his umbrella from beneath Kevin’s still-soaked red backpack.

“Something the matter?” Kevin asked, noticing his stupor.

“No! Not at all! I mean… forgive me for raising my voice. There is nothing wrong with me at this current time — please, do go on with your plan. Perhaps it will help us.” He handed the closed umbrella over to Kevin, who took it with an appreciative nod of his head.

Kevin then opened the door, and opened up the bubble umbrella. He stepped out as fast as he could, but closed the door as gently as possible that was still deemed effective, to make up for the way that he had slammed it last time. He walked around the front of the car, Eddward’s eyes on him, as he made his way over to the car next to them. He headed to the driver’s side of the vehicle.

Eddward watched, worried, from inside the safety of his own car. He could no longer see Kevin’s form as he hunched himself over to speak with the driver of the car at their upper left. Out of years of conditioning, he chewed at his bottom lip and twiddled with his fingers; while he had certainly changed in the past years both mentally and physically, he was still not one for physical altercations to break loose. It was not that he had no faith in Kevin, but even he recognized that many times things did not go as planned, and there was no telling the type of person the driver behind the wheel in that car, was like.

Finally, his waiting came to an end as he watched as Kevin came into view. He walked, unscathed, in front of his car and then reentered it through the passenger’s side; the bubble umbrella was closed and tossed to the back.

“He’s gonna move,” Kevin told him.

“Really?” Eddward asked out of shock and surprise. “How? Why? I mean… however did you convince him to do such a thing?”

“I mean… the man wants to go home, too.” Kevin said with a shrug. “He was killing time with a crossword puzzle or whatever those things are called, and didn’t even realize he could move. Like, at all. He thought he was permanently stuck, too — I’m guessing that’s how everyone here feels.” Eddward nodded; yes, that made an immense amount of sense. “Look,” Kevin said, pointing with his finger and grasping his attention in that direction. “He’s moving — you get a move on, too.”

“Right.” Eddward said with a grin.

As the black car made its way out of traffic similarly to pulling out of a parallel parking spot, the car behind it followed suit, and next was them. While they could not see it, more cars followed as people saw the way out — the end of their seemingly eternal imprisonment inside of their own vehicles.

It wasn’t long before Eddward reached the cul-de-sac to drop Kevin off. He was happy to come to the street at last — probably more so than Kevin, who’s final stop for the day was likely there. He came to a stop in front of Kevin’s house.

“Thanks for the… almost ride to school, Edd.” Kevin said. (For a moment he took note of the difference that came with Kevin saying his old nickname and his real name; he stored it away for
later.)

“You are very welcome, Kevin. Thank you, however, for getting us out of that traffic jam. I would have never considered your actions as our best choice.” He admitted. It was not to insult him, but to show how grateful he was that Kevin had been there with him. Had it just been him, he would have sat there for long hours waiting for someone else to make the move — letting the “bystander effect” unknowingly take place in a context of cars and traffic jams.

“It was nothing.” Kevin said. He opened the passenger side door, and stepped one foot out of the car. For a moment, he stopped to retrieve his backpack from the back seat.

“Please hold on a moment, Kevin.” Edd said. “Would you care to use my umbrella to get back to your abode?”

“Nah, it’s fine, man. I can just run like last time.”

The rain had not let up from how it had been over two hours ago when he had asked Kevin if he wanted to carpool with him to school, and to hear Kevin say that he would rather be pelted by rain once more than use his umbrella, made him think the young man to be unnecessarily, yet expectedly, stubborn.

“Nonsense…” He said. He grabbed the umbrella from the back seat and opened his door. Before Kevin could do a thing, he had walked over to his side and held the umbrella over them both. “I shall walk with you to more easily return the umbrella. Now come.”

Kevin saw really no reason to argue, and agreed. He stood, and Eddward used his five-inch height advantage over him to better center the bubble umbrella on the both of them. In truth, the umbrella only managed to cover their heads entirely, and left much of their body to the elements, but he felt that that was more than enough. He knew that Kevin could deal with the rest of him getting wet, but the sensitive spot that was the human head was an entirely different matter.

Kevin closed the car door, and Eddward escorted him to his house. The rain-carrying wind made their dry and almost-dry pants soaked, but it was not long at all before they were finally at Kevin’s front door.

“Lemme just get my keys out.” Kevin said.

He moved his backpack to one shoulder to twist it around and make it easier to dig for his keys in its front pockets. Big mistake. The shoulder his bag now blessed its weight on was his injured shoulder, and he hissed and dropped the bag as he felt the prickling, burning sensation that was pain.

“Fuck!”

“Kevin?” Eddward looked down at him. He was crouched near the ground and with his head bent down and left arm resting on his right shoulder. From the looks and sound of it, Kevin was in some sort of pain. He immediately went to help him up; grabbing onto his left bicep and slowly assisting him as he rose to his feet.

Kevin let his head fall on his front door; the cool, soaked wood providing a sturdy structure for him to fully lean against and try to hide his embarrassed face.

Eddward frowned.

“You do not have to tell me what is wrong, but…” He paused. He bent down to Kevin’s backpack and opened the two front pockets — the pockets he had seen Kevin go for before he hunched
himself over in pain — one at a time, first. In one he found Kevin’s house keys. Kevin heard the familiar jingle and instructed him on which key he sought. Kevin had removed his body weight from the front door and stood when Eddward opened the door. Eddward then placed the keys back inside their desired pocket when Kevin stepped in, and brought the backpack inside — he, however, made sure not to fully enter Kevin’s home. They locked eyes. “Please, do take care of yourself on this free day.”

Inside, Kevin felt a tad guilty and bitter over Eddward’s statement, but could recognize the truthfulness and necessity behind it, and nodded his head. He moved his jaw around some in a contemplative gesture.

Then, a weak smirk appeared on Kevin’s face as he said, “What? Are you worried about me or something?”

He had meant it as a joke, yet Eddward’s face grew incredibly serious. His jaw set, his mouth pursed together as his eyes set like steel. “Of course.” He said in an affirmative voice. “I am worried. That is the only proper way to respond when someone falls onto the floor unexpectedly.”

Kevin’s smirk disappeared from his face, and he stared back at Eddward with almost the same level of seriousness on his face. However, he could tell the difference between the two. Eddward was taller and his downward gaze looked more secure than his — who seemed to stare up at him with a hint of wonder in his eyes. Eddward’s seriousness came from his concern, his came from his disbelief. He gulped down the lump suddenly forming in his throat, and looked away.

“Honestly…” He, Kevin, muttered. “You’re always so worried about me…”

“Well of course! By all regards, Kevin, you are not exactly the most—”

Eddward had been unable to finish his sentence. He had meant to say that Kevin was not the most secure of people in both internal and external parts of his world, and that that only brought on his naturally worried nature. However, before he could say this, Kevin had silenced him by pulling onto the collar of his jacket and bringing his head down to make it easier for him to be kissed.

The kiss was not the longest of kisses; it lasted just long enough to wipe away any doubt of it ever having happened. There was no physical intrusion into Eddward’s mouth, either, by Kevin’s tongue. It was a kiss that started and ended at lips — and when his mind was finally catching up with what was happening, Eddward was the one to break it.

He leaped back from Kevin’s porch and wiped at his mouth. His eyes were wide as he stared at Kevin; whose shocked face at the breaking of the kiss had turned into a downcast set of eyes and face when he looked at Eddward’s response.

There was silence.

“Please… just take care of yourself more, Kevin.” Eddward said. “If you did that, I would not have to waste my time worrying about you.”

He left.

Chapter End Notes
...Let the drama begin!

Next Chapter: Trust me when I say that this isn't the first time this has happened.
The proof-reading for this chapter was hard because it has a new perspective-type-thing, and I sometimes slipped out of it. It's told in third-person summary format (as in, someone summarizing another person's thoughts during past events), and several times I went into third-person present (like all the other chapters have been told). So yeah. I rewrote a lot of sentences and changed many verbs and the word count went up. Sigh. Well, whatever...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

About three years ago, his freshman year of high school, he found himself on the verge of dropping out.

He had significantly been slacking in the first half of the semester, and gotten failed marks on the first-quarter finals for that school year. His grades had put him on immediate probation by the guidance counselor at Peach Creek High, and he was informed that if he did not pull his grades up for the second-quarter finals, he would be but one step away from failing the grade without any hope of credit recovery, and being held back. As he did not want to get held back — it was too embarrassing, after all — he decided that if that were to come to be the case, he would instead drop-out of high school.

*After all,* he told himself when he had made this life-altering decision during a soccer game playing on the television in his room, *Tons of people drop-out and still land the big bucks — I'll be fine.*

Needless to say, he had pulled another set of horrible — “deplorable”, “atrocious”, “horrendous” — marks on the second-quarter exam finals for the school year. His father had been furious when the counselor called him and informed him of his grades (which he had kept the details secret for and sugared on white lies to calm his worries), and told him that his son was about to be held back in his first year of high school.

“*Can anything be done?*” He remembered hearing his father say into the phone, the day the call was made. He had been headed down the stairs from his bedroom, worry-free, when he heard his father answer and call out the guidance counselor’s name. At that time, he was against the wall, listening in.

He was unable to hear what the counselor said, but his father responded with, “*Of course. Of course. I'll make sure he does just that... Yes... Thank you for informing me of this... Thank you very much.*”

The call ended.

“*Kevin!*”

His father then screamed.

There were few times in his life when his father had ever physically disciplined him — and never once had he done it with a belt, like he had done on that night. The black leather belt was searing hot against his flesh, leaving behind angry slashes brighter than his hair. At times he had felt that the belt
was breaking his skin and hitting his muscles directly — although he knew that was not the case.

When his father finished, he had heard him say, “First I get word from the neighborhood kids that you’re bullying them and now this.” His father secured his belt back on his pants and looked down at him; a heaping, sobbing pile of anger and frustration huddled in the fetal position on the floor. “Honestly, Kev, I just—” He paused. His glaring up at his father as he spoke did not make the situation any better, either. His father frowned. “You’re getting a tutor. Pull your grades up with that. Yeah, you failed, but thankfully you were high enough in the 60s to where improving your grades from here on out can make a difference.” His father then left the hallway and headed into the kitchen. Kevin could hear him ask, “What do you want for dinner?” However, instead of responding, his younger self had rushed up to his bedroom and locked his door. He wanted nothing to do with his dad that night.

When it finally came time for his first tutoring session, he was accompanied by both his father and the guidance counselor to the school library. They were both well aware of his hatred of their plan to get him a tutor, and as he had threatened to bolt on more than one occasion, they felt it best if they had a handle on him at all times.

His father had a firm grip on his bicep as they walked into the library and were headed to the table where his tutor supposedly sat; his grip was none too hard, though, where it would leave bruises like the belt.

For his tutor, the guidance counselor had introduced him to a “Eddward Vincent — he’s currently in the top percentile of your grade and volunteered to be the one to tutor you after hearing about your… predicament.”

He had snorted then, looking directly at Double-D’s face. “This dork?” He had asked — and almost immediately got a firm slap to the back of his head by his father. He looked up at the elder man, then, with eyes ablaze with many merged, undetectable emotions.

“Be nice, Kevin,” his father had said to him. “Eddward has taken time out of his personal life to help you — the least you can do is show some appreciation.”

Kevin held back the snort that he wanted to let loose. He was silent as the party reached the table where Edd (back then he had not yet asked to consistently be referred to as Eddward), was standing with numerous textbooks around him. From the looks of it, he had been planning to tutor him on all the subjects that he had been failing, which was all of them.

Kevin remembered not being able to take Edd seriously at that time for two reasons: the mountain of textbooks signifying the task that he was out to do, and how goofy he had looked that day; with a ridiculous expression on his face that he supposed was him trying to smile while still hiding the nervousness that he likely felt, the braces on his teeth glinting, and the bow tie and sweater-vest combination that he had on — with his hat still present on his head, mind you, ruining the harmonious look that he attempted to put on.

“Greetings, Kevin,” Edd had said to him with a wide smile. He held out his hand to shake. “I hope that we will be able to come out of this situation in a positive place.”

He had not bothered to shake Edd’s hand. He completely bypassed it, and his cheerful attitude, and sat down on the chair across from him. It was not that he disliked Edd, but rather, that he disliked the
situation that he was in being viewed as something revoltingly negative — and anything to do with that — Edd included — immediately irked him. His father had noticed his “attitude” and tried to get him to properly greet the boy; but Edd had calmed the situation by telling him that it was alright, and that they would just get started.

“Hm… If you think so,” his father had responded at Edd, before turning to look down at his son. “Kevin, no goofing around. This is your last chance.”

“Eddward, do try your best.” The guidance counselor had said.

“I assure you, Miss Haysmith, I shall.”

The two adults had then left, leaving him and Edd alone. Edd sat back down and Kevin could see the nerves visible on his body. While he had put up a good front around the adults, now it was just the two of them, and Edd could no longer fully hide his light shaking and physical stutters with him having been so keen on picking up the dork’s behavior. He was certain that it had not been that Edd feared him at that moment, but rather that he knew how unpredictable the situation was, and was unsure if he could truly deliver the results he had just boasted about a few minutes ago.

“N-now,” Edd said, speaking first, after clearing his throat. “L-let’s get started. Um… which subject would you like to tackle first, Kevin? Which do you find the hardest?” He did not respond; his eyes were locked on Edd, his attention clearly on him, his ears clearly having picked up what he said, but he did not respond. He stayed quiet; mouth shut; eyes almost glaring. Edd gulped. “S-some people find the, um, mathematics-based subjects the most difficult since they are more by-the-book with no way to cut edges. Perhaps we shall start with those? Is Physics okay?” He did not respond, again. He just kept staring at Edd — or rather, that was Edd’s perspective on things.

In truth, he was contemplating what to do. He did not want this tutoring session to occur, and was in no way invested in it. He wanted to get out, but if he left the library so soon, there would be a problem. His father or the guidance counselor might catch him — he had to wait it out for a good hour or so. That, of course, involved just staring at Edd and letting his mind wander. He tried to stare at something else, but quickly got bored; watching Edd fidget was far more entertaining, he had found.

However, Edd had not known this, and surely took it as a sign of him being more intimidating than just bored. He wondered if Edd had thought him to be angry? He had been, at the time, but not with him — Edd had been dragged into this situation, not created it.

For the next hour or so, Edd had gone on trying to cover the subject of Physics. He had listened in on what the other boy was saying, but did not feel himself learning or caring about what was being said. Edd had his head almost nose-deep in the book as he talked and talked about the positives and negatives of the directions in Physics, accounting for movement and resistance. He had tried to get Kevin to do some sample problems to see if he understood anything. He had also stopped at specific intervals to ask him if he was okay and understood him; during these times, Kevin could see the nerves wearing him down and how he could no longer fake being okay with no responses. Edd was incredibly flustered under his gaze, likely feeling under attack in some way with his lack of response.

When it had been passed an hour, he stood. Edd looked up at him, surprised. “Listen,” he had said to him. “I’m not gonna get some tutor. I don’t want or need your help. You can tell Ms. Mayweather I said that.”

“I-it’s Haysmith.”

“Whatever. Point is: I’m out.”
He grabbed his backpack and left the library.

Later on that day, when he got home, his father asked him how the tutoring session had gone, and he completely ignored him and headed up to his room. He threw his backpack on the floor in an act of aggression, and jumped onto his bed with the plan to drown himself in his videogames.

Weeks after that had gone by. Winter break came and went, and they were back in school on the fourth of January. As he had been set to go to the school library to meet Edd to study every day during winter break, when he left the house early in the mornings, he would be back around to the other side of the cul-de-sac and sneak into Nazz’s house while her family was away. They would hang and chat, and once or twice, he had even found himself kissing her — and only kissing her. Doing more, and even kissing her, did not feel quite right.

He had assumed that once he got back to school, he would be called into the guidance counselor’s office to talk about how he had not attended any of his tutoring sessions with Edd. He had even passed Edd on the way to his class, who avoided eye-contact with him at all costs — he took that as a sign that he had told.

However, the day came and went, and nothing happened. The week came and went, and he still had not been called into her office. He was confused. Edd definitely had to have told on him — did the woman just not care anymore and was finally going to stop pestering him? He hoped so.

It was not until he pulled another failing grade from the first major exam of the term, ironically, in his Physics class, that he was given a call.

“Are the tutoring sessions not working?” She asked him in the privacy of her office. “Eddward had said that you were there every day, on time, and seemed to be picking up the material well. I was looking forward to a good result on this exam, Kevin.”

When he had heard that, Kevin could not quite believe it. Edd had lied about his being there? Why on Earth would he do that?

“There are, of course, retakes for this exam since it is not a term final. Be sure to use this as a study guide for your next session with Eddward this afternoon, Kevin. You can’t fail any of your upcoming class assignments if you want to pass.”

Kevin had taken the test from her hands and walked out of her office. He had immediately sought after Edd — but he did not know his class schedule, nor did the two share any classes or even common friends that would know where he was. He supposed he would have to wait until after school, at the library, to see him and get some answers. He stuffed the failed exam into his backpack and headed to his fifth period class.

Throughout the day, he hoped to see Edd so he could talk to him then, but he could not find him or his friends, the other Eds, anywhere. He remembered thinking that Edd was probably purposely avoiding him for some reason — no, not for some reason. He was avoiding him because he likely thought Kevin hated him and would not want to see his face — yet he still lied to the guidance counselor about his being at their sessions over winter break. He did not understand. He also was not able to catch Edd throughout the school day, but when the time came, he was able to find him in the library; at the same table that he had been at, with the same materials, on the first day of the tutoring session.
“K-k-kevin?” Edd has asked when he looked up from doing what could only be his homework, and locked eyes with him. He clearly had not expected him there; he had probably already felt that Kevin would never come back to the library after what happened the first day.

“Why did you lie and say that I was here every day?” He was straight to the point. Edd seemed to shrink under his gaze, and looked away. “Dork. Answer me.”

“W-w-w-well… I thought that… m-maybe you were j-just having a hard time digesting the situation? I doubt that this a pleasant turn of events, and you were most likely aggravated and angry and were not sure what to do. Th-that was my hypothesis, at the least. So I decided to t-test it and… give you some time to come around — although I never really thought…” His voice trailed off.

Kevin took some time to digest the situation. He looked at Edd for a good couple of minutes, and then focused on the ever-so familiar setup in front of him. While Edd had been doing his own work in the library, the books from their first session were still stacked on a pile next to him. Kevin’s brows furrowed.

“Were you here… every day?”

“I thought that I had to be — i-in case you decided to come back one day, of course.”

He sighed.

He could feel something bubbling unpleasantly in the pit of his stomach, and pulled up a chair and took a seat. Edd had looked up at him, but he, Kevin, had his hands covering his face as he chewed on his lips. He knew the feeling in his stomach — guilt and frustration — it had not left him since the first meeting with the guidance counselor telling him that he was on academic probation.

He had not been very happy at that meeting. In truth, he knew that what he was doing was likely hurting his future, but he blinded himself with delusions of grandeur to get by. It was just… that in the past couple of weeks, before the new school year had begun, he had been feeling rather down. His strained motivation had felt as though it was reaching its limits, and he began to find it harder and harder to get out of bed. Yet he did. He forced himself to. The results of which being that he spent so much effort just getting out of bed, that he did not seem to have any to pay attention in school and act as he should — he felt as though he literally did not have any more care to give.

He sighed, feeling a bout of the anti-motivation wave that he was now constantly plagued with, rolling up over his shoulders.

“Look, Edd—” He started, but he was unable to finish. He slumped back into his chair and took some deep breaths. The wave of anti-motivation crashed into him and he suddenly felt like being under his comforter in his bedroom, where he could deal with this where eyes would not be on him.

He bit his bottom lip.

“K-kevin, if I may…” Edd’s voice was low and soft, and there was a detectable level of concern and worry and help that made Kevin look up and stare at the boy. “It is… none of my business but…” He paused. He seemed to be chewing something over in his own mind. “Sometimes… t-talking… and getting the level of help and support that you really need, helps.” He stood and began to pack away all of the items that he had brought to the tutoring session. “My recommendation — and you truly do not have to take it if you do not want — is that you go have a proper talk with a figure you trust, and find what you need. I do not think that right now, what needs to be initially focused on, is the result of your current state.”
He had his backpack on his two shoulders and the five textbooks that he had brought with him, in his hands. Kevin could see that he was having difficulty holding up all the books, but Edd did not seem ready to admit that.

“*We can pick up on tutoring, if you would like, when you are ready. You have my best wishes.*” When Edd began to leave, Kevin stood almost out of reflex. He got in front of the smaller, yet somehow taller, boy and grabbed the textbooks from his hands. Edd was surprised, to say the least.

“What—”

“We can talk after you finish helping me. I have a retake for Physics coming up.” He took the books back to the table and laid them down. In truth, he did not know what brought him to do what he did. In truth, all he could clearly make sense of was that when Edd had spoken to him just now, it seemed like he could, dare he say it, relate to however it was that he was feeling; Kevin felt as though he had been able to read that on Edd’s expression — and he responded to it. In truth, it was the first thing he had positively responded to in regards to this subject, in a very long time.

Edd had still been stunned, but he sat at the table and after a few moments of staring at him and deliberating in his mind, a smile came across his face.

“Well then, let us start.”

The tutoring session, he would admit, had gone well. Edd had been very attentive and yet covered all the material that had been the center of his failed test, and of his retake, with surprising quickness; and despite the speed, he was able to pick-up on every word and correction, and had all of his questions heard and resolved. It was similar to having a one-on-one classroom lesson that was much more suited to his way of learning. They had even covered so much so quickly, that they managed to dip into other subjects, too.

When it was all over, the library was closing and it was incredibly dark. As it was past the last-call for locker usage at Peach Creek High, they had to take the textbooks with them to their home instead of getting the luxury to enter the school for a few minutes to leave them in their lockers.

He carried the books, despite Edd’s persistence in trying to get one or two carried by him.

“I told you already, dork, I got this.”

“Yes, I am well-aware of that, however—”

“Then stop asking me if you’re so aware of it. They’re just books and don’t even weigh that much — even if it’s five of them. Jeez…”

“J—Jeez… very well, then.”

Since it was so late, he knew that his father was probably already at work by then. The man pulled 13-hour shifts at his place of work, certain days. As thus, he had to depend on his trusty bicycle to get him home that day; it would be a pain what with having to take the five textbooks with him, but he knew that some way, somehow, it could be done.

When they reached the bike rack where his was the only one left, he handed the textbooks to Edd momentarily before going to unchain it and set it up. When he was hopping on his bike, he took a look around the almost-empty parking lot and then asked Edd, “*When are your parents coming to
pick you up? I can wait here until they come, if you want.”

“O-oh!” Edd exclaimed, caught by surprise. Kevin noticed the shuffle of his feet — the shuffle of his whole body — as pink crept onto his face. “I— m-my parents are still h-hard at work at the night shift in the hospital. Th-they will not be able to pick me up — I-I think I will just… walk.”

“What are you, crazy?” Kevin asked, his face showing signs of annoyance. “There’s no way a kid like you can walk home at night. Come on. Hop on.”

Edd blushed heavily at his statement, and looked ready to decline and tell him that he was alright with walking home at the night’s current level of darkness — (that he had done it several times before) — but he would have none of it. He gave Edd a look that told him that he would not accept any nonsense or excuse, and to just hop on.

“This honestly saves me the trouble of figuring out how I’m gonna take these textbooks home on my bike.” He said, in a pseudo form of encouragement to Edd. “Sit in front of me since there’s more space to hold them there.”

“Will it not be difficult for you to peddle? My body will surely be an obtrusive force.” Edd asked.

“Not even. You’re as light as Sarah and we’re like the same height — I’ll be able to peddle just fine.”

Edd nodded and went to sit in front of Kevin on the bicycle, with the textbooks in his lap. Kevin moved back a little to give Edd more surface on the bicycle seat so he was not stuck with the narrow end. He had never been so glad before for having opted to get a bigger seat when he removed the back part off of his trusty, childhood bicycle. When Edd was settled and had his feet on the front foot pegs for leverage, as well as one hand at the front in between his handle bars — comfortable, he had assured him he was — he began to maneuver the bicycle out of the school parking lot. In truth, it was a tad harder to peddle with Edd’s body in front of his own, but that was only because he was not used to having someone ride in front; typically, it had always been in the back, using the pegs there and grabbing onto his shoulder.

For almost the whole ride, Edd’s back was flush against his chest. He could tell the smaller boy was nervous from how he pressed himself more and more against him, as though to be protected by the cage that was his arms holding onto the handlebars at either side.

He had honestly never been that physically close to the boy, in his entire life.

During the ride, however, the shaking boy had said to him, “E-earlier you s-said that after the s-session we would… t-t-talk — a-a-about your p-p-p-problem…” He sounded like he was about to be sick — like any second now he was going to throw-up — and he supposed that was why Edd had brought up that topic; to focus his mind on something other than the bike ride, which was making him nauseous.

“Ah, yeah — I forgot.”

“Y-y-y-you do not—”

“Nah, forget it. I will. I gotta at some point, right?” He smirked even though Edd could not see it. It was probably a defense mechanism for himself, trying to make a joke out of the situation, as he began to tackle a touchy subject. The smirk faded and there was silence besides the sounds of him peddling and the bike moving forward. It took him a while to say, “I… really can’t explain it much, to be honest… I just… can’t take this anymore…”
He felt on the verge of tears, now that he was finally confronting the millions of feelings that had been building up inside of him; but he would not dare cry in front of Edd, even though he could not see him. He swallowed down the lump in his throat and blinked to keep the tears back.

“I just—”

“F-find it h-h-hard to do simple t-t-tasks like get out of b-bed.” Edd started, silencing him with how close to his current predicament that was. “Y-y-you know something i-i-is wrong, and you p-p-probably even know w-why s-something is wrong, bu-but… You c-c-cannot seem to duh-duh-do anything about it… No matter h-how hard you try…”

 “…Yeah— Edd, have you—”

“I-it is actually q-q-quite common, eh-eve-even though it is o-often misdiagnosed in yuh-yuh-youth…” He knew it. Edd had dealt with something like that. Knowing that made him feel… better, really. He was not alone in this. There was someone who understood — someone who could explain it to him and even help him; because gosh did he need help; he hated to admit it, but he needed it badly; and so far, the help he was getting, which focused on the results, was not what he truly needed — just like Edd had led to in the library.

He suddenly felt bolder and braver discussing those topics. For the rest of the ride to the cul-de-sac, he was honest to both himself and Edd about what was going on. At one point, he had started to cry, and did not hold back. He did not care about how Edd may view him for the crying — it felt like his soul needed it.

When they reached the cul-de-sac, he stopped in front of Edd’s house, first. The smaller male was shaky as he got off of the bicycle, and Kevin found that he had to grab him by his upper body to help him to smoothly get on the sidewalk when he almost tripped during his dismount; the textbooks, at this time, were abandoned on the floor until Edd was stable once again.

“F-forgive me for that… disorderly display…” Edd commented, blushing.

Kevin shrugged at it. He found it more humorous than “disorderly”, to be honest. He had never before seen someone who got, well, bike-sick, before.

“It’s fine, just… be more careful next time.” Kevin said to him. Edd nodded and went to reach for the textbooks, but Kevin was faster and got them before he did. “I told you that I’ll be taking these home, today.” Kevin said. “I still got a lot of studying left to do, on my own…”

“Ah, yes, correct. I had… forgotten.”

He and Edd had stood at the sidewalk in front of Edd’s house awkwardly. A lot of things had been confessed between the two of them on the ride there, and in its aftermath, he was sure that Edd was just as uncertain about how to act, as he had been. He watched Edd shuffle his feet, and Kevin gave a deep sigh; bringing about the first bit of noise to break the very awkward silence between them.

“I’ll, uh, see you in the library tomorrow, Edd.”

Edd perked up, smiling.

“Yes, do come. I will be waiting there for you.”

He had unconsciously snorted at how eager and cheery — how happy — Edd sounded when he heard this. “Whatever, dork.” He spat out of reflex, and not with a hint of anger or frustration in his voice. “Goodnight...”
He had stood there until Edd walked into his home, giving a wave back at him. After, he put the textbooks on the seat of his bike and walked himself over to his house. The bike went into the garage from the side door that he unlocked, and he then entered his home from there, textbooks under his arms. The house was empty like he had expected, but in the dark he moved easily to the stairs and up to his bedroom; where he remembered sitting at his studying desk and committing himself to studying for the next few hours, only getting up to get a snack or to pee.

The following tutoring sessions after that were very fruitful.

He was picking up on the material and suddenly pulling grades that had his father and the guidance counselor — but most importantly, himself — proud. The good wave of grades was kicked-off with a near perfect score on the retake of the Physics exam that he had failed the week before. His exams after that, in both Physics and his other subjects, were marked in the high 80s and above. It boosted his ego, and he found himself wanting to do more. He even felt determined and confident enough to ask for and complete extra credit.

It was not all the seamless ride to success he was making it out to be, though. There were several nights that seemed harder than the rest and had him crying and on the verge of giving-up. During these nights, instead of burying himself under his bed covers, he found himself going over to Edd’s, to talk.

The first night that he had done that, Edd was caught off guard and awkward — but more than happy to listen. They sat in his kitchen where Edd prepared some tea that he said always helped him during times like those, and he talked, and Edd listened, and he felt himself getting better. The next few times this happened, Edd was up and a pot of tea was already brewing. Eventually, Edd had asked him for his number, and he gave it to him, and Edd would start to call him every night when he was up studying, just to make sure that he was okay. Each time the phone rang and he saw Vincent in the Caller ID, he gave a sigh of relief and a small smile crept on his face. Sometimes there was something to vent about, and other times there was not, but it was the action of calling to make sure that he was okay that spoke volumes to him and made him happy.

He liked Edd, he decided at one point. He was a good kid who was doing so much to help him, even though he made it seem as though what he was doing was normal — which, probably, it could be. He had said several times that what he was doing was common sense — he was not going out of his way to do anything, like Kevin had once said that he was. He liked Edd — he was a good friend.

In time his grades pulled up, but he found that to move onto the next grade, he would only have to complete summer school — he had never before been more excited in his life about hearing those words. He would not flunk the grade; he just needed one more, summery month of work and he could move on with all of his pals to his sophomore year of high school. He remembered how he had felt getting this news from the guidance counselor — she looked ecstatic for him, but inside, he was probably jumping more in his seat than she was.

When it came to telling his father the good news, he had been a tad apprehensive. While his father’s mood had improved when he saw his last report card, sporting more Bs than Cs and even one A, he wasn’t sure how he would feel hearing about how his son would have to go to summer school to fully make-up the material. He remembered how his father had walked into his room in a rush that day, and he had assumed it was to yell at him for something — for his report card, when he saw the
piece of paper in his father’s hands and remembered what time of the year it was — until his father hugged him, and gave him a kiss on the head — and then said that for dinner, to celebrate, they would have his favorite.

He was contemplative about that the whole ride back to the cul-de-sac, with Edd sitting in front of him yet again. After each study session, it had become habit that the two boys ride back on Kevin’s bicycle since Kevin’s father was not home, and neither were Edd’s parents.

He had, admittedly, shared his worries with (a bike-sick) Edd.

“Huh-he will be v-v-v-very happy to hear that, Kuh-kevin…” Edd said. “I-it is, after all, f-f-f-f—” Edd paused in his talking; he could hear the sound Edd’s head made when it went against the middle of the handlebars where his hands were, and could even hear him deeply breathing. He had stopped the bike then, to make it easier for Edd to regain his composure. He still found it ridiculous that Edd was capable of getting motion sickness on his bike, but that did not mean that he would just allow Edd to remain suffering for long periods of time without allowing him a break.

“T-th-thank you…” Edd said, when the bike finally came to a stop.

“Take your time.”

They stood on the road for a few minutes. Edd sat on the edge of the sidewalk, his head in his hands, and he remained on his bike, where he was most comfortable. After some time, Edd cleared his throat, grasping his attention, and said, “A-as I was saying, before… B-before my… disorderly display—” He rolled his eyes at Edd calling his previous actions that, again. “—Your father will be quite happy to hear that all which you must do is complete some weeks of summer school. With the alternative being getting held back, he cannot deny that this is much better.”

“Yeah… I know…” He said; he lifted his hat for a brief moment to shuffle around his hair, before putting it right back on his head. “I just… I dunno, man. I can’t explain while this is freaking me out so much.”

“You do not need to.” Edd said as he rose from the sidewalk and patted at the back of his clothing — probably in order to get rid of dirt there. “An explanation is not necessary — the actions are what matters. I believe that you ought to walk into your household today and be excited. Your father responded well to your improved grades, no?” Kevin nodded. Edd smiled; his braces glistening under the streetlights. “Then I can only imagine the level of his elatedness when he hears that you shall be passing onto the next grade, and that all that is required of you is a simple session of summer school. Those are my thoughts.”

Kevin’s flat-lined mouth slowly turned into a smile. “Get on,” he said to Edd. “I gotta get home early so I can wake-up and tell him when he gets back.”

Edd was not eager to get on the bike once again — he knew this — but did, in an act that he would later know was done because Kevin needed to get home, and he did not want to keep him occupied much longer. When Edd was on, he made sure to pull Edd as flush against him as possible, and to cage him in with his arms, too, because he knew that one of the things that helped Edd to get through the bike rides each day, was to focus on one solid, immovable piece of his surroundings — him, Kevin. He heard Edd breathe deeply, and this time, instead of in front of him, Edd’s hands are wrapped around his arms.

“Please be quick…” Kevin heard Edd mutter low beneath his breath.

He nodded and took off. He had gone at what he considered then to be his fastest speed, ever, on the
bike with Edd on it, and made sure to reach the cul-de-sac in but three minutes — two ahead of his usual time from their previous stopping point. He, like always, helped Edd get off of the bike and held him until the boy was steady on his feet and had his equilibrium back.

“Guh-good lord…” He heard Edd mutter when he was recollecting himself. “I am quite glad to not have chosen being an astronaut as my dream profession.”

“You wouldn’t even last through the training.”

“Quite right.”

Edd finally stood on his own two feet after a little while, and Kevin let go. Edd moved back some fixed his clothes, he watching him quietly — calmly — until Edd lifted his head and said to him, “There is a vehicle in your driveway.”

“What?” He remembered feeling both panic and shock as he turned his head to look over at the other side of the street, and spotted his father’s car under the lights of his garage. “He’s… home early…” Suddenly the bravado he had put on when Edd and he had re-gotten on the bike, melted away. His stomach churned. His mind reverted back to the state it had been in those five minutes before, a worried pile of mush in his skull.

“Would you…” Edd started. “Would you require… a physical presence for encouragement as you explain the situation to your father?” He asked tentatively. He turned to him, confused. Edd went on saying, “Would you like me to be there… w-while you tell him — as in… sh-shall I go with you?” He was fiddling with his hands and shuffling his feet, and he recognized those signs as Edd’s nervousness and anxiety, and steeled himself as he shook his head “no”.

“I can do it on my own — but… I… might have to call you, later, if something goes on, ya know…”

“I shall sit near my house phone, then.”

He had managed a slight grin for Edd, and Edd smiled a bit, too. The two of them then separated and he took the short bike ride across the street, to his house. It was one of the most maddening rides to his house, that he had ever taken. When he was going in from the side of the garage door, when he looked up back over at Edd’s house to see if he had already gone in, he was (happily) surprised to see that Edd had yet to leave that spot where he had left him, in front of his house. He gives a nod at the boy, happy that the side door light wass on and allowing Edd to see it. Edd gives him what he thinks was a double thumbs-up (since it was darker on Edd’s side and he had a hard time seeing him clearly), and he then took a breath and entered his home.

He left his bicycle in the garage — (where but a few months after would house him day and night as he worked on his motorcycle) — and went into his house to find his father in the kitchen, making himself a sandwich.

“Hey dad. You’re home early.” He had said.

“Oh, Kevin, I thought that was you.” His father said to him. He watched as his father went about licking his fingers of some tuna salad. “Want something to eat?”

“No thanks, actually…” He paused; his hands had gone into his pockets and his feet shuffled — almost copying Edd, exactly. He had never really felt so nervous in front of his father before; not even when he had been made to confess fully on his sinking grades in class. His dad, being his dad and knowing him so well, had caught on quicker than he would have liked.

“What’s wrong? It’s school, isn’t it?” His father’s voice had been deep and grave, and he could hear
He swallowed. “I… heard from the guidance counselor. Y-you know her, right? Ms. Hayweather — Haysmith, I mean!”

“You’re stalling, son.” His father’s word had been like a punch to the gut. “Please just…” He paused for a brief moment. His eyes closed and he began to move around his arm in a moment of both bracing himself for what he was about to say, and possible reevaluating the life choices that led to that. (He always wondered if his father regretted having him as a son, during that entire ordeal.) “Out with it.”

“I gotta go to summer school — to pass.”

There was silence for a moment.

“Summer school?”

“Y-yeah… If I can do well there, I’ll have recovered all my credit and be able to move on without any problem…”

“That… that’s great news!” His father’s face lit up and the man moved faster than he had ever seen him, as he went over to him and grasped his shoulders. On his father’s face was the brightest smile he would ever see. He was shocked at first, but when his father said, “Why didn’t you just say that? You’ll be able to pass? You won’t be held back? That’s all I’ve been wanting these past few months — son, I am so happy to hear this!” He smiled then, too, and all his past thoughts poofed out of his mind like smoke.

“I thought you were gonna be angry!” He said to his father, laughing, and earned a firm slap on his shoulder for it; it was not out of anger, he knew, but out of his own silliness for thinking that.

“Don’t be ridiculous!” His father said. “Why would I be angry?”

“Because it’s summer school!” He replied. “You told me you never wanted me going there!”

“That was if it was for you failing — but this means that you’re succeeding! This is great news — great news! Come, we gotta celebrate this. I made some tuna fish sandwiches but… how do you feel about pizza?”

The next few hours had been spent with him and his father happily chatting on the couches in the living room and watching sports and eating pizza, and when it came time to retire for the night, he called Edd — who was more than delighted to hear how well things had turned out for him, and gave him a well-deserved and positive “I told you so.”

Summers came and went. Just like he had predicted, with the help of Edd who stayed loyally at his side, he was able to finish making up all the course work and earned all the credits he needed to make his moving on to the tenth grade, concrete and final. When he went one summer day to get his report card from summer school in person, and read this news in a separate letter attached, he grinned from ear-to-ear and immediately rushed over to Edd’s house.

“Hello, Kevin, how—”
“I passed!” He shouted when Edd opened the door. “I finished! I mean— look! I did it! I completed summer school — I’m not getting held back! Officially!”

“Th-that is fantastic news to hear, Kevin!” Edd exclaimed, smiling. “I am quite jubilant for you. Congratulations.”

“Yeah, well… I wouldn’t have done it if it wasn’t for all your tutoring. And, you know… all the other stuff, too…” In truth, it was not the explaining of the course subjects and their materials that ended up helping him, he felt; it was all the nights of talking and listening and feeling better that truly, truly, made the difference. It was the act of being understood, and getting the help he needed.

That was what helped him pass. He felt that in earnest.

“I am very glad to hear that…” Edd said, his voice soft and still exuding happiness; but on a different level than before. More relieved.

“Yeah… Listen, Edd—” He pauses when he looks up to meet Edd’s eyes. He was stunned. Edd was crying.

“I-I am… v-very happy for you.” He was shaking, too.

“W-w-what’s wrong?” He was caught off guard. What had Edd crying? Did he say something wrong? No. That could not have been — their conversation had so far had been something very pleasant and friendly; almost like a small, one-on-one celebration between the two. How could that have possibly made Edd sad? He had not been able to understand.

He had completely missed the fact that Edd was smiling and was unable to connect that with the chance that Edd’s tears were not of sadness, but of happiness. However, he began to see that when Edd began to wipe at the tears and his metal-filled smile was more prominent; as well as his laughter.

“F-forgive me for frightening you just now, Kevin,” Edd said as he continued to smile and cry. “I—There is nothing wrong. I am simply… so relieved!”

“What?” Kevin asked.

“I am so happy for you!” He exclaimed more loudly; his hands were away from his face and Kevin could then clearly see all the positive signs of expression that made up the boy’s face. He had gone wide-eyed at them. “I… To speak candidly, I have been so worried about you these past few months, Kevin. I saw how hard you were working and was doing calculations at each interval to see if the progress you were making was enough. I had never concluded that it was, and that made me sick to my stomach, until the day you brought up summer school, which I had never considered as a factor before then. I had always kept my calculations strictly to the end of the school year. Haha! I had been so perturbed and frightened but now? Now you—!” Edd’s happy tears flowed faster, and Kevin soon smiled and began to laugh, himself.

His hand went to wipe at Edd’s tears. “Dork. You had me scared there for a second. I thought something had been wrong.”

“F-forgive me. I did not mean to come across like that. I assure you, all is well.” As though to encompass everything and anything into his statement, Edd briefly stopped his fit of laughter and happy-tears and looked directly into his eyes. “All is well…”

Looking back now, he could recall the exact things that had brought him to his next actions. He remembered feeling overjoyed for several reasons: Edd was not crying out of sadness. Edd was more than happy for him. Edd had been worried for him all this time. Edd had tried to make sure that he
finished the school year. Not to mention, there were also the factors that came not from Edd’s
actions, but Edd, himself. The tears on his face. The wide smile. The open book of emotions in his
blue eyes. The… dorkiness of it all, really.

With these things in mind, his hands had travelled from Edd’s cheeks, down the sides of his face,
where he cupped them and — with an action that he had then said was due to his not-thinking, but
now knew that that was entirely wrong — then moved his face closer to meet.

He remembered smiling against the kiss, and thinking that Edd was smiling, too, because he had
been when he was crying and so, naturally, he would have been smiling against the kiss, no?

No.

Edd had not smiled.

Edd had instead pushed Kevin back with more force than either of them had known he was capable
of, and slammed the door in Kevin’s face. He had stood stunned on the other side of the door for
quite some time, before he began banging on it asking Edd, once again, what was wrong.

“Edd? Edd! Edd, open this door! I’m sorry! What’s wrong?!"

The only response he had gotten was, “Go away! Do not come near me!” It was the only guidance
he had received, and could follow.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys enjoyed this... not so much "peek" as a "direct look" into what
happened between Eddward and Kevin their freshman year. There's of course going to
be constant mention of it going forth, so I'm glad you'll all be knowing what exactly
went down. For the moment, though, I enjoyed writing the subtle fluff between the two.

= u =

Next Chapter: This flashback is nice, but... Let's go back to the current time stream for a
bit, okay?
Chapter Notes

/sits down/

/gets comfy/

/sips hot chocolate/

Prepare yourselves... this chapter has a lot of heavy emotions. So get warm and comfy now, because it most certainly will not remain that way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The following day, it continued to rain.

While he was unable to jog on rainy days, he still got up early — admittedly, earlier than his regular time — and quickly prepared himself for the day. On rainy days such as that, it was often his job to transport the Kankers to and from school — after all, Lee’s vehicle did not come with a convertible top, and on rainy days, she never let it out from under the plastic tent she made with a tarp that she draped over it whenever she saw even the slightest hint of clouds forming above the sky that could lead to rain.

She had even once left school early because she felt it would start to rain while she was there, and was not willing to risk her “baby” getting wet. This had left Marie and May stranded at the school, and he stepped up to be the one to take them home. He remembered the argument the three sisters had had — two against one — when they reached the Kanker Residence and found Lee’s pink T-bird protected under its tarp, and Lee sitting on the couch eating Cheetos. Somewhere in between all the yelling and screaming, it had been decided that, from then on, whenever it was to rain, it would be his responsibility to take the sister trio to the school and later on back home.

In all truth and honesty, he did not argue against it because he felt that arguing would not change a thing. He was outnumbered — three to one — in the decision, and in the end, he was not even bothered by it.

He, in all truth and honesty, was happy to help.

He had just grabbed onto his umbrella and was ready to step out of his door, when he heard a knock against it, first. His brows furrowed, and he looked through the peephole in the door, first, before deciding whether to open it or not.

He was shocked to see Mr. Barr — Kevin’s father — on his doorstep.

“Greetings, Mister Barr,” Eddward said when opened the door and made eye-contact with the shorter-yet-older, man. “Whatever do I owe this visit to?”

“Hello, Eddward,” Mr. Barr said with a smile on his face. He was still dressed in what Eddward considered to be his night clothes, and was standing under a black umbrella. “Sorry to come by here so early, but I wanted to know if there was the chance that you could take Kevin to school, again?”
Eddward’s eyes went wide with shock; his heart seemed to plunge into the acid of his stomach — but only for a moment, as he quickly fixed his composure the next.

“Mister Barr, I would be… happy to accept the request, however… may I ask why?” He knew that despite Kevin’s motorcycle, the family owned another vehicle in the form of a car, and Mr. Barr did go through the proper licensing process to be capable of driving his son to school. He could, in theory, and as far as he knew, take his son to school that day.

(He had also brought up the option of having Kevin’s friends from the cul-de-sac drive him, but when he looked over at Nazz’s house, he found her convertible gone — he was forced to immediately drop that as an option.)

“My car needs some repairs and Kevin can’t drive his motorcycle — not that I would ever let him when it’s raining. That thing provides no type of protection against the elements and I told him he wasn’t ever allowed to drive it like this, but”— He cut himself off; catching himself as he ranted about his son and his stubbornness, to the kind young man who had just said that he would be taking him to school. He did not want to turn Eddward off from the action, in any way. However, he completely missed the small — small — smile on Eddward’s face as he saw the ranting as a father’s concern for his son. “Point is,” Mr. Barr said after clearing his throat, “Kevin can’t drive his motorcycle. Not just because he’s injured, but also because of the rain. Period.”

“Injured…” Eddward commented. An image of yesterday, of Kevin on the floor of his front door clutching his right shoulder with his left hand, came into Eddward’s mind. “His shoulder?” He asked as clarification.

“Yeah. It was already in bad shape from Monday but he messed it up even more yesterday. Honestly…” Mr. Barr punctuated his sentence with a shake of his head.

“Very well then, Mister Barr. I understand. I will say again that I am more than happy to acquiesce to your request—” (He thought to himself how he likely should have toned down how he felt being forced to accept the request, but he simply could not do that. Mr. Barr was a kind man who had never done Eddward any wrong. He was not the problem.) “—However, may I ask that you ensure that he is ready, immediately? I must go and chauffeur another set of friends today due to the rain, as well.”

“Oh! I see. Yes, I will get him out of the house right now. He’s eating breakfast, anyways.”

“That is good to hear. Please do.”

“Will everything be okay, though? Kevin won’t be too extra of a person, will he?”

(For a moment he considered lying.) “Not at all. We will all be able to fit perfectly into my car.”

“That’s good to hear. Thank you again for doing this, Eddward. I’ll see to it he’s out of the house in the next couple of minutes.” With that, Mr. Barr left his porch, and with his black umbrella shielding him from the rain, lightly jogged back over to his own home to get his son ready to be driven to school.

Eddward sighed when the father disappeared behind his glossy red door.

In his mind, as he stepped out of his house and closed and locked the front door, he told himself to be cool. As he opened his umbrella, he told himself to not think too much on the negative, magnified thoughts that were suddenly invading him. Walking to his car, he breathed and reminded himself that he was doing a good deed — and to focus on just that, the deed. Not the person it involved, but the
deed, itself.

You are doing a good thing, Eddward, he inwardly thought as he unlocked his door and stepped into his car. Remember that. Focus on that. Live that. Certainly nothing terrible will arise from this — good deeds are often not targets for punishment or negative magnifications of thoughts.

He swallowed a lump in his throat as he hit the push-to-start button — ignoring completely the fact that his hand was shaking — and began to pull out of his driveway. As he did so, using the image the back cameras in his car provided for him of his surroundings behind him, currently displayed on the front touch screen of the center console, to help him keep from hurting or hitting anyone or anything as he continued to drive in reverse, he could not help himself as he repositioned his front mirror and made it focus on the Barr Residence across from his house. He saw Kevin and his father stepping out of their home, with Mr. Barr holding the black umbrella he had used to get to the Vincent Residence, over his son’s head instead of his own.

A new lump formed in this throat; bigger and harder to swallow than the last. When he did, he felt as though he could feel it dunk down into his stomach, and try to sink his body. His grip tightened on the steering wheel. He bit his lip almost hard enough to draw blood, too.

Keep cool, Eddward.

He finished pulling out and then put the shift into drive, and made his way counter-clockwise around the cul-de-sac, to come to a stop at Kevin’s house.

He unlocked the passenger’s door next to him, and waited while Mr. Barr escorted his son over to the car. Not only was Mr. Barr holding his umbrella above Kevin, instead of himself, but he also seemed to be carrying Kevin’s backpack rather than letting his son do it. The expression on Kevin’s face spoke of some level of annoyance and embarrassment at his father’s overprotective actions — or at least, he inferred it would have, as he avoided looking at Kevin’s face.

It was also Mr. Barr who opened the door for Kevin.

“Pops, I could at least have done that.” Kevin said as he stepped carefully into the car.

(He held himself back from cringing.)

“Hmph. Watch your tone.” Mr. Barr said with a gruff facial expression. However, it was lost to the lines on his face as he removed his son’s backpack from his shoulders and put it at his feet inside of the car. “There’s an umbrella inside. Use that when you come home.”

“Why couldn’t you have let me use it now?”

“Because Eddward needs to go and we don’t have time to mess around with some umbrella — and mine was already out.” Mr. Barr turned his head up to look at Eddward. Eddward seemed to notice the gaze on him and moved his head up to look respectably at the older man. “I hope it also won’t be too much to ask you to keep an eye on him today, Eddward? Knowing him, he’s bound to try and take the sling off for some dumb reason.”

“Pops, I said I would wear it all day already, damn…”

His father smacked him across the head. A quick, almost painless slap that was not really meant to do any sort of harm to him.

“Watch it.” He reiterated. Then he sighed. “Just… don’t jack up your shoulder any more than it already is, Kevin. Okay?”
“I won’t… I promise.”

“Good.” His dad said. “And Eddward, again, thank you — for today and yesterday.”

“O-oh! It was not a big effort on my part, Mister Barr. Truly.” He tried his hardest to make the smile that he put on his face, to come across as the unchallenged truth. In his mind, however, he began to reprimand himself for his response. That did not sound calm and collected and cool, like he had told himself to be. He supposed it would have been if he had not stuttered at the beginning, but he did; now the nervousness he knew Kevin would be able to pick up on (because he was Kevin), was a dead giveaway and would make this car ride far more awkward than it needed to be — or already was.

“Still. You’re a good boy, Eddward. Drive safe.”

“Thank you, Mister Barr. I shall.” With that said, Mr. Barr closed the door of the car and stood at that spot while he watched Eddward drive out of the cul-de-sac; he had been waving, too, until he could no longer see them, and decided that it was time for him to go back into his house.

In the car, Eddward and Kevin were very silent.

Eddward clenched the steering wheel tight — tighter than he had yesterday or a few minutes ago — and put far more effort than he needed to, into keeping his eyes on the road. Next to him, Kevin sat staring out the window — in a similar position as he had been in yesterday. However, it felt to Eddward that Kevin was looking at him through his reflection in the window, making him incredibly nervous. He held back the urge to frown — snarl — at this.

After about two minutes of driving, Kevin said, “My dad said you had to pick someone else up?”

“Yeah…” He did not bother looking from the road, at Kevin, to address him. “I have been commissioned to drive Marie and her sisters to school.”

“Ah. Okay.” (He was secretly relieved when Kevin stopped talking, and hoped that the red-haired young man would not bother to open his mouth again for the rest of the ride.)

After some more time passed, he drove into the trailer park that housed the Kankers. He was glad to have reached the first of their two destinations; especially since at said destination, more people would begin to occupy his car, and he would not be alone with Kevin. He would instead focus on Marie and May and Lee, whom he knew he could have a pleasant car ride with.

“Excuse me for a moment…” He said as he grabbed his bubble umbrella and began to exit the car. He closed the door behind him and went over to knock on the Kankers’ door. After a few seconds, the wood door was opened by May.

“Edd!” She said, sounding very much surprised to see him — because she was. He could see it in that she, out of all of them, still was not dressed. She wore her pajamas (a nightgown), and still had her hair coiled and braided up in the bun she always slept in, a facemask ever present on her face. “I’m so sorry — we’re not ready yet! The storm last night knocked off our lights and the alarm clock wasn’t working.” A sound of frustration came from within her throat that sounded almost like an asthmatic elephant trying to breathe; he remembered her making that sound several times throughout their childhood when she was feeling particularly overwhelmed by emotions. “Can you give us… ten—”

“—Twenty!” Came a shout from behind her, further into the trailer. It was done with a mixture of Lee and Marie’s voices.
“—Twenty minutes more to get ready?” She asked him, shyly and worried.

Before he responded, Eddward glanced at his digital wristwatch. It was to keep his face busy for a few moments as he tried not to frown at the fact that he would now have to spend twenty minutes more, alone with Kevin. Absentmindedly, he noted the watch read twenty-six minutes to 8am.

“That is… quite alright with me,” he said. “Please, take the twenty minutes. However—”

“Great! Thanks, Edd! We’ll be out as soon as we can — promise!” May exclaimed, just before shutting the door in his face and going off elsewhere into the trailer. He stood there for a few seconds to let the frown he had been holding back, show; he had been about to ask May to hurry, though, since twenty minutes with Kevin sounded like twenty-times-too-much.

He sighed.

He turned and headed back into his car, where he once again settled himself in the driver’s seat with the bubble umbrella behind him. This time when Kevin spoke to ask, “What happened? Where are the girls?” he did not hold back his distaste at hearing his voice.

“Not here.” He said with a snarl on the side of his face that Kevin could see. “Obviously. Please do refrain from asking such ridiculously unintelligent questions.”

“Wh—” Kevin was momentarily stunned by the harsh tone that Eddward used to address him. Momentarily. For he soon recovered his senses and determined that he neither liked nor deserved Eddward’s tone of voice. A frown was quickly present on his face. “The hell, man? It was just a question. I don’t see why you gotta be a complete dick about it.”

“Hmph. Of course someone with such little comprehension for the things outside of their personal world view, like you, would be unable to see the cause for my displeasure.” Eddward said. “Oh! Also, since I know it is quite difficult for that unused muscle in your head you call your brain to see, allow me to drop a hint: it has nothing to do with the question, per se.”

Kevin’s frown was accompanied by an eye-roll. An eye-roll Eddward’s eyes were riled-up by.

“Are you gonna bitch about the kiss, again?”

“Again?” Eddward picked-up. “No. Allow me to correct you, Kevin.” He spat his name in the same way Draco Malfoy, admittedly from one of his favorite fantasy series, said “mudbloods”. “What again has happened is not my behavior over the kiss, but your initiation of it. Again you have invaded my personal space and taken something from me that I am not willing to give. Again you have assaulted me. Also, again you have chosen to be a complete and utter charlatan when it comes to why I could possibly be upset over these things. I suppose in your world everyone is just ready and willing to give you what you please, no? No one is ever allowed to dislike what the great Kevin Barr gives them, for the great Kevin Barr never does anything wrong. Hm?”

“Goddammit, Edd!” Kevin screamed, his face turning red. “Shut up! I know you’re upset over the kiss, okay? I wanted to say sorry immediately but you walked away!”

“I do not believe in giving second chances on matters like those.” Eddward said. “Especially not after you saw how much it hurt me the last time you did it. Remember? You seemed to think then, too, that I would appreciative to have your lips on mine — you did not once think—!”

“I apologized to you like a hundred times!” Kevin yelled, effectively cutting Eddward off and making him even more frustrated. “Remember?” He said, mocking him. “I called you like every day and left like a hundred voicemails saying I’m sorry. I tried to talk to you at school and you avoided
me like the damn plague. You literally ran away every time you saw me, and people thought that it was because I was bullying you or some shit like we were back in elementary school or junior high. Do you know the hell I had to go through because of all of that? Shit! Eventually I couldn’t take it anymore and I stopped. So shut up. Don’t act like I didn’t know you were pissed off because of it, and that I didn’t care about how you felt.”

“Then tell me this,” he paused to turn his body fully in the direction of Kevin. For these next parts, he felt, he would want his whole person put into what he was going to say. “If you knew how much I was… infuriated and disgusted and hurt by what you did last time, why would you ever do it again?” His voice was low and deep, menacing, even, with a compliment from his glaring blue eyes, and the last few words were pushed through his teeth. He was seething. Kevin had never quite seen him like that, ever.

He was very much caught off-guard by what Eddward had said, and how he was saying it. He sat in the seat with his lips shut and his face in a neutral, yet disbelieving and with a contemplative expression, as he stared at Eddward.

When he did not respond quickly like Eddward had needed, he was egged on by, “Well?”

He only finally responded when it looked like Eddward was going to go into another rant that would no doubt go for the jugular this time; and that was not something that he needed at this moment. “I… I was an idiot, okay. I wasn’t thinking.”

Eddward snorted and rolled his eyes, this time. “This again?” He said with a half-bored, half-angry expression and tone.

“No. Yes. Look, Edd—”

“I am not going to let you continue, Kevin. When you use that expression, is it because you, yourself, have yet to discover the reason why you have done what you did. Alas, I am not willing to listen to that meager jabbering on, either. I need a concrete and clear reason — not bad inferences from even worse critical thinking.” He said, using a dismissive tone.

He then turned his body away from Kevin. He no longer wanted to engage in conversation with the young man — the ignorant fool — next to him. He instead wanted to leave the conversation at that, with him having the last word, and wait in total silence for the Kanker sisters to finish getting prepared for school, and come into the car. He glanced at the digital clock in his vehicle and saw that it had only been five minutes since he was told they needed twenty. He frowned. Fifteen more minutes of him trying to pretend like Kevin was not sitting in the car next to him, until he could actually forget about that when the Kankers filled in the remainder of the space inside of his car.

However, as he soon saw, Kevin would not have any of that.

“Listen, dork—”

He sighed. “Back to the petty childhood mocking-names, Kevin? Quite honestly, is your state of mind still that of when you were in primary schooling?”

“No— would you… would you just shut up already!?”

“Screaming does not make anything that will come out of your mouth from here on out, any more intelligent or truthful. I know that is commonly what your kind believes, but let me tell you—”

“I like you, idiot!”
His eyes went wide and his head snapped to turn to Kevin’s direction. With his mouth slightly agape, he looked at a red-faced, freckled-faced Kevin with more horror than disbelief. He never bothered entertaining notions that maybe he had not heard him right, for he knew that unless external conditions that he could not control kept him from doing so, he would always hear what people said the first time they said it. He had heard Kevin right, he knew he did, he could see it on Kevin’s face that he did, but that did not mean that he did not feel gut-wrenching terror at it.

So much so, that he refused to ask Kevin to repeat himself as an excuse to gather all the thoughts now jumbling in his head, and instead said, “No.”

“What?” Kevin asked.

“No.” He repeated. “No. No, no, no, no, no!” He shook his head, ignoring the way in which Kevin stared at him with confusion, and his own pain now leaking into his expression.

“Edd—”

“No. Do not speak. I do not wish to hear you say those awful words again.” Eddward said, stunning Kevin even further. “Which, might I add, in no way excuses you from what you have done to me twice, already. Liking someone,” he forced himself to say, “Does not give you the right to do to them what you please.” Once again, he said this through clenched teeth and a tight jaw; and after he had said it, his head turned away from Kevin in a final, definitive action that they were done speaking about this.

He was certain Kevin had caught-on, for the young man did not open his mouth again.

Around fifteen minutes later, the Kanker girls came out of their home. They ran to his car without umbrellas, and only one of them, Marie, paused in the rain when she went to open the passenger side door next to Eddward and noticed that someone else was already in her seat.

“Kevin!” She exclaimed. “What the hell? Edd!” She looked up a bit to meet the eyes of her friend. “What. The. Hell?”

“I was asked by Mister Barr to chauffeur the younger Barr to school today.” Eddward responded; he refused to say Kevin’s name. “I apologize that he is occupying your seat, Marie.”

“I couldn’t give a rat’s ass about that.” Marie said, her face turning angry and eyes glaring. “I’m more pissed that he’s even here. Why didn’t you turn him down, Edd? This is… Kevin, after all. He —”

“Shut the fuck up, already!” Kevin screamed. “I don’t need you two talking about me like I’m not fucking here. Here, take your damn seat.” He pushed Marie aside with his body as he grabbed his backpack with his good arm and exited the car. Eddward could clearly see that he was taking his frustrations out on Marie, and was ready to confront Kevin about it — if Lee had not gotten to him, first, after seeing the way he shoved her sister.

“Hey! Don’t go pushin’ around my sister like that!” She screamed as she moved her body forward from behind the back seat, and seemed ready to jump out and grab Kevin.

Kevin looked down at the red-haired Kanker, uncaring, and snorted. “Whatever.”

Lee was forcing her body through the gap between to the two front seats, her butt in Eddward’s face, trying to grasp at Kevin, now. However, May grabbed onto her sister’s waist and was pulling her to the back, while Eddward grasped her shoulders and tried to get her back there, as well.
“Lee!” He exclaimed. “Please do calm down. Violence is not the answer in this — I shall handle it!”

“Let go a’ me, Edd! I’m gonna pound his face in for that!”

Marie was the one to put a stop to the situation by getting into the car and slamming the door shut. She locked the doors. With Kevin effectively barricaded from the group, Lee seemed ready to calm down and stopped trying to get to the front seats. She sat back down and was dealt with by both her sisters, while Eddward took the time to exit the car, without his umbrella, and approached Kevin on the matter. The red-haired young man stood outside of the passenger-side door, with the arm not in the sling across his chest under the one with the sling, to make a show of having his arms crossed. He seemed to be pouting.

“That was highly inappropriate.” Eddward said as he approached him. Kevin did not respond, and while that infuriated Eddward, he stayed on topic and kept talking out of necessity; because even if Kevin would not listen, he would still talk so that way, if anything were to happen later, he could honestly say that he tried. “You have effectively made quite a mess of the situation and now I doubt that Lee will let you back into the car without it coming to fisticuffs, first.”

“Like I care.” Kevin said. “I didn’t want to ride with you anyways. It was my dad’s dumb idea and the only reason I agreed was because Nazz wasn’t at her house today.”

“All the more reason for you to have been civil and not create this… hullabaloo.”

Kevin snorted, once again. While he had tried to keep it low enough under his breath so that they could not be heard over the rain, Eddward still managed to pick-up, “This is your fault to begin with…”

“What?!” This time Eddward did ask Kevin to reiterate on his words, out of anger. This time, he truly could not believe that Kevin had just said such a thing to him. “Are you more of a fool than I had originally thought you to be? How on Earth is any of this my fault?”

“Because if you hadn’t been such a total asshole about what I said earlier, I wouldn’t have done that shit to Marie. I don’t have any problems with Marie, but I do with how you treated me a few minutes ago.”

“Oh come on, Kevin!” Eddward exclaimed. By this point, his hat and jacket were thoroughly soaked by the rain, but he thought nothing of it. He was too blinded by his fury over the nonsense he was hearing. “That is just an excuse. If you had any type of common sense or self-control over your own actions, you would not have done that, period. Blaming others does nothing. Good lord, man! Accept that you did something wrong and go apologize to Marie so we can get out of this godforsaken rain and be well on our way to the school.” As he turned around, under his breath he muttered, “Foolish imbecile.”

However, he did not manage to make his way to the driver’s side of his car. When he was walking near the hood, Kevin had effectively twisted his body and used both of his arms to slam him against it. Inside the car, the Kanker girls were shocked by the sound Eddward’s body made against the hood, and soon spilled out of the car to go intervene. Outside, Eddward could see a mixture of pain on Kevin’s face; made from using his messed up shoulder so forcefully, and from something that Eddward could not easily determine. Glaring green-hazel eyes and showing, clenched teeth, stared down at him.

Kevin looked ready to say something, but could not, as Lee effectively grasped him from behind and, using the wrestling skills that she had picked-up from Marie, who excelled at wrestling and had been the only female on the school’s wrestling team back in freshman and sophomore year, had
Kevin slammed on the muddy floor within seconds.

“First my sister and now my friend?!” She screamed. While May went over to make sure that Lee did not hurt Kevin needlessly, Marie was at Eddward’s side.

“Edd, are you okay?” Marie asked him. Her eyes looked him over, searching for signs of an injury. When she could not find one, she gave a sigh of relief, and went to grab onto his bicep and help him up. When he sat upright against the hood of the car, she released him; however, with a look of worry still present on her face.

“I am quite fine, Marie, thank you.” Edd finally said. He told Marie only half the truth. While there was no serious physical damage, his head was throbbing a bit from being slammed down so hardly. He was grateful for his hat, though, as that helped to cushion what surely would have been a much more jarring blow without it.

He looked over at Kevin, then. Lee still had him face-first into the mud-turned floor, her body on top of his to make sure that he would not dare to move, and May was beside her sister trying to talk her on getting off of Kevin.

Lee would not budge.

Eddward, because it was the right thing to do, went over to Lee and Kevin, and asked Lee to get off of him. When she would not, he argued that Kevin had already learned his lesson and would not be able to do anything more — especially not since his shoulder was injured, and probably more so after using it to assault him. When she heard this, Lee, reluctantly, released Kevin from her grip and stood. As her clothes had gotten dirty from being on the wet ground, May quickly took her into the trailer to change before they went to school. Marie wanted to stay outside with Eddward, for she was weary about what Kevin might do next, but he asked her to go in as well and help Lee. Marie did not want to, but did because it was something Eddward asked of her.

When the sisters were gone, Eddward turned his attention to Kevin. He crouched down just enough to get closer to Kevin’s level, but without touching the filthy, filthy muddy floor.

“You can get up now. They have left. Come, rise. Any longer on that ground and your father will —”

“Oh shove it.” Kevin said. His voice was low, but hurt. He slowly got up; the entire front-half of his body was covered head-to-toe in mud — adding insult to injury of his pained shoulder. He would not look at Eddward.

“Hmph.” Eddward said. He rose to his full height and put his hands on his hips. He contemplated what to do next. He surely could not have Kevin going to school dripping in mud, but at the same time, he was not sure he could keep his promise with Mr. Barr, any more. Kevin had not only been very rude to his friend, but also assaulted him. He believed that to be grounds for a contract cancellation. As for how Kevin would get around to his next destination? whether it be school or his home? Eddward was happy to give him money for the next bus. He was ready to reiterate this to Kevin when he noticed something he quite had not seen before.

Kevin was crying.

At first Eddward had thought that it was the rain, but as he looked more closely at it, he could see that it was tears; his eye ducts were spewing water.

He immediately felt some disconcerting remorse.
“Kevin—”

“No! Leave me alone, you ass!” Kevin screamed, smacking away the hand that reached out for him with his pained shoulder. (Although Eddward was quite certain that his shoulder made up less than half of the pain that Kevin might currently be feeling.) “Fuck this! I’m out — I’m going home!” He stomped his way over to the side of Eddward’s car, where he had dropped his backpack right before he had rushed Eddward. His face was red with anger and embarrassment and regret, and he munched on his bottom lip as he tried to harden himself and stop the tears that were coming down his face.

When he was reaching for his backpack, Eddward grabbed it instead. Kevin rolled his eyes and looked-up at him. Eddward had a strap in each hand and a look on his face that told him that he was wondering what to say next. His previous demeanor had faltered. However, Kevin would not let him say a thing.

“Give me my backpack.” He demanded. “I’m catching the next bus and going home. My wallet and shit is in there.”

“Perhaps… you would prefer that I take you home right now? I can tell Marie—”

“Oh. Now you’re suddenly feeling sympathetic?” Kevin said with a biting voice. “Is that something the great Eddward Vincent does? Sympathize with the… commoners only when they’re finally crying? No. Fuck that. I don’t want anything to do with you right now. Just… just give me back my stuff so I can leave…”

He would admit that in that moment, he had returned Kevin’s backpack because the young man’s comment sunk into him and was more alarming than he would care to admit. When his personal item had been returned to him, Kevin put it on his good shoulder and gave one more glance at Eddward before starting his walk out of the trailer park. Eddward, who had been staring, could see that one moment, Kevin’s good arm came up to wipe the tears off of his face. He could not help himself as he felt that incredibly dumb of Kevin, since that would surely only get more mud on his face.

A few minutes later, when he could no longer see Kevin, the Kankers came back out of their home, and he settled his mind on having as normal a day at school, as possible.

Chapter End Notes

/puts away hot chocolate/ Nothing warms my soul like stirring up drama — in stories. In real life, I avoid drama like Eddward and Kevin are about to avoid each other. :3 But first—!

Next Chapter: This moment seems like it needs more context. Onward to Eddward’s side of the story.
Chapter Notes

A bit of context for this chapter... which is odd since this is a context chapter meant to better explain how and why people reacted the way they did in the previous chapter—context for the context. This baby is another summary chapter, and in fact, starts to take place the night of the events told in chapter 4/46—so literally, it's Eddward's point-of-view from the moment after he slammed the door in Kevin's face after that first kiss. Unfortunately, unlike Kevin's, this has a lot more paraphrasing than I wanted... I'll probably end up rewriting it after some time. Oh well.

(And then I never did, lol.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

About three years ago, after Edd had been kissed by Kevin, he found himself a mess of tears and anger and fright on the couch in his living room. He was shaking, and grasped tightly onto his shoulders as he tried to gain some control of himself. He tried to stop the shaking and the tears — telling himself that it was not as big of a deal as he was making it out to be.

However, it was.

In time he found himself up the stairs to his bathroom. He brushed his teeth and practically drowned himself in mouthwash as he tried to get rid of any signs of the… kiss. When he thought about it, he had to keep himself from vomiting. He was absolutely sick to his stomach.

He bathed, because he felt that an hour or two in a warm shower would help to get his mind off the situation. The action backfired on him, for all showering did was give him more solitary time to think about what had happened. He had never hated showering so much, as he did on that day. He turned off the water and ignored all of his usual showering procedures of putting on his slippers and drying himself as much as he could in his bathroom, before running into his bedroom.

A naked, wet, mess, he fell to his bed and cried. He cried and cried. His heart ached. His body shook from more than just being cold. He sniffled and snot came from his nose, and he wiped at it and his tears but they would not stop coming.

Finally, at around 12am, when he woke-up from an impromptu nap that had come during his hour of distress, he fixed himself and jumped in his skin when he heard the house phone ring. He quickly dressed himself in a pair of underwear and his favorite footsie pajamas, and headed down — he hoped he was not too late to get the call, just in case that it was his parents.

When he reached the receiver, he saw Barr on the caller ID and almost gagged.

The following day, he had made it a point to go seek some help. He woke-up at five in the morning and quickly bathed (even though he was certain he did not have to, for he had bathed yesterday night
and not much had happened since then), and dressed himself. He avoided putting on his beanie that
day, out of fear that it would be recognized.

Leaving his house, he first peeked his head out of the door. He looked left and right to make sure that
the street was clear, and in a pair of baggy clothes to disguise his physical form even more, he
quickly stepped out, locked the door, and ran out of the cul-de-sac as quickly as he could. He would
not, could not, feel safe until he was as far away from his neighborhood as possible, and onto the
ever-changing path through the park woods that he used to get to the house of his dear friend, Marie
Kanker.

When he was there, it was only around seven in the morning, and despite knowing that Marie and
her sisters were likely asleep since it was the summer, and a Sunday, and none of them had work on
that day, he knocked, hopeful.

No one ever came to the door. Yet, he was not yet ready to go back to his home. He could not leave,
he felt, until he spoke to Marie.

So he waited at the side of the Kankers’ door for the next couple of hours. The sun was hot against
him in his baggy clothes, but he made sure to ignore it. As the other residents of the trailer park
awoke and noticed him, he greeted them as best as he could in his awkward position, and then
explained to them what he was doing there so early. They nodded, and then went on their way. It
was not until around high noon when the door to the Kankers’ trailer was finally opened from the
inside, and Marie came out with a trash bag in her hand; in one of the shirts that he noticed was his
and had gone missing from his house some time ago, and a pair of short-shorts.

It did not take long for Marie to spot him. “Edd?!” She asked. She moved aside her long blue hair
— (for she would not yet cut it to create her fauxhawk for a couple more months) — so that she
could take a better look at the hatless, baggy-clothed person next to the door of her home. It did not
look like Edd.

“Greetings and salutations, Marie. How are you this fine morning?” However, it certainly sounded
like Edd.

“I’m… doing fine.” Marie said as she approached him. Her arms were crossed over her chest and
she looked Edd up and down. He could not help the way he tensed up against the intense gaze.
“How are you?”

“I…” The cheery voice and expression he had used a moment ago to greet her, melted away. His
face saddened, and he looked away. Marie knew immediately that something was wrong.

“Come inside. I’ll make you some of that tea you always like.”

Edd nodded and excused himself as he stepped into the Kanker Residence. As it was a habit of his
when he stepped into the home of another, conditioned from a habit of when he stepped into his own
household, he stopped at the front door and took off his shoes. He continued following Marie to the
kitchen, then, with just his socks on his feet.

He took a seat at what was now often deemed “his” seat at the four-person table they had in their
kitchen, and waited quietly, with nervous, fidgeting fingers, while Marie set up a pot of water to
brew his favorite tea. Admittedly, it was a recipe Marie had showed him, which she said she got
from her mother.

After some time, the tea was brewed and Marie was setting up two cups of it. “Lee and May are still
asleep.” She said as she took the cups to the table, where Edd accepted it graciously. “So we’ll be
fine to talk until around… 3 or 4. It was a late night last night.”

“That is good to hear.” Edd said. He sipped the tea and immediately felt a wave of calmness and euphoria go over him. He was thankful, yet again, for having Marie and her masterful brewing skills at his side.

They took some time to sip and drink, and only began talking when they were each halfway done with their cups of tea.

“So… what happened?” Marie asked.

Edd took a moment to respond. He looked into the cup of tea, at his murky reflection, and chewed on his bottom lip. He was unsure how to start. However, Marie, ever wise in reading him, seemed to hit the nail on the head without even knowing — or perhaps she did know and that was why she said it in the first place — when she said, “Is it Kevin? Did something happen? Ah! Don’t tell me he didn’t pass summer school. That ended yesterday, right? May went to get her report card, now that I remember…” She took a sip of tea at the end.

“Y-yes…” Edd said, now visibly shaking but trying very hard to keep calm. Some of the tea from the cup spilled onto his hand and he set it down, before grabbing the napkin that Marie offered him, and using it to clean the dot of tea. “A correction to what you said, I have. He didn’t fail summer school. I-instead… h-huh-he…”

Marie raised a blue eyebrow at him (because she saw not dying your eyebrows when you do your hair, as being tacky). “Edd?” She asked, softly, with worry lacing her voice like frosting that made it harder for Edd to stomach; because now he was causing his good friend concern, and he did not want that.

When Marie saw the first tear drop from Edd’s eyes, inwardly, she panicked. She immediately sought to go to him and hold him against her chest and comfort him, but held back, because she knew that that would be too much — as Edd had told her so before, several times, when she had done the very same thing — an over-affectionate mess — and instead settled for putting her hand over Edd’s and squeezing it as a sign of support.

Edd wrapped his fingers around Marie’s hand (a hand, which he noticed, was starting to feel smaller and daintier in his own), and squeezed it more. He knew that for the rest of their conversation, he would not let go of that hand, and instead would constantly go back to it for the power to continue.

“He…” He started again. “He… k-kuh-kissed me…” He ended.

Marie’s black eyes went wide. They were black for two reasons; primarily because black was her natural eye color, and secondarily due to the running black mascara that she had yet to clean off of her face from the night before.

Inside, she could feel something sink into her stomach like a rock.

She wanted to yell ‘He WHAT?’ but restrained herself because her two sisters were still asleep, and she did not want to wake them. She instead gritted her teeth and took a sip of tea to calm herself down. When the cup was back down on the table, she took a deep breath and focused on the matter at hand. Her friend, Edd, was hurt, and now was not the time to let her demeanor crack and show a fit of rage and jealousy at him having been kissed by… Kevin. Rage, yes, but jealousy, no. She took another breath.

“Why—”
“Oh Marie it was awful!” Edd exclaimed, as high as he could without being loud enough to wake the other two Kankers or draw attention to the residence. “He came over to tell me he passed and I was so happy for him that I cried because I really did want him to pass and did want the best for him but every time I calculated how he was doing and what he needed I did not see him passing and that scared me but then he did pass and I was crying tears of joy and then he…” Edd was hyperventilating; he had said all of that in one breath. He stopped only because he could go no longer. “He... huh-he…” His voice fell away.

Marie could feel herself burning with anger.

She decided in that moment that she did not like Kevin Barr one bit. She had held herself back from disliking him in the past, for they had both brought the poor Edd to tears at some point while they terrorized him; and she had not seen any reason to dislike him in their current time, for he seemed grateful to have Edd’s help and Edd had not reported anything particularly alarming to her — but now? Now she could hate him for kissing Edd and causing him to be so distraught. Now she would hate him — now she did hate him.

“Edd, please, calm down.” Marie’s other hand was over Edd’s in a matter of seconds when she noticed his shaking having gotten worse, and the tears now starting to flow from his eyes like a levy had broken. She stroked his hand and her voice was kind and soft as she sought to end all the tears by comforting his current, hurt self. “Edd, listen to me, I know you... I know how you are, and I know that having that done to you must be... just the worst, but you need to calm down. You need to breathe. You need to start—”

“I do not understand!” Edd exclaimed. “Why would he do that, Marie? I tried to answer that question for myself so many times last night, and got nothing. Nothing. It is sickening. Disgusting. Filthy, filthy. I... I wish...” His free hand went over his face — for his other would yet to release Marie’s — and he covered it. He tried to swallow his sobs as he said, “I-I k-k-know I shuh-should be l-less fuh-frustrated by i-it b-b-but... I cannot.”

“I know, I know.” Marie said soothingly; the stroke of her hands matching her voice. “I know, Edd. I understand. But you shouldn’t be less frustrated. This is fine. No. You should be more frustrated.”

Edd choked on a sob and then started a coughing fit. Marie was up on her feet to go pat his back, but Edd stopped her with his hand. He then used the same hand to grab at the cup of tea and drink what was left in it, before holding it up and saying, “M-m... more, p-please...”

“Right away.” Without releasing Edd’s hand, Marie went over to where the tea pot stood on the stove, and grabbed it then poured more tea into Edd’s cup. She poured some into hers, as well, which too had gone empty when she dumped it down her throat earlier. She put the pot back on the stove and then reclaimed a new seat; this one was at Edd’s side instead of being across from him, and she moved her cup in front of herself.

They sat and drank until their cups were half-empty, once more.

Marie was the first to break the silence with a sigh.

“What are you going to do?” She asked Edd. “Because if it were me, I’d pound his face in.”

Normally Edd would give a light laugh at Marie’s expressions of violence, which he could never tell whether she was joking or serious about, but today was not one of those day. Not even a twitch of his lips — the hint of a small smile — did Marie get in return for her statement.

“But, seriously though, Edd, what’re you gonna do about this? Are you gonna... talk to him or
“No!” Edd said immediately. His body froze up and Marie jumped up slightly at how loud he had suddenly gotten. Edd noticed and then immediately said, “S-sorry.” A light shade of embarrassment on his face.

“It’s fine.” Marie said. “Go on. Why won’t you talk to him?”

“H-how could I?” Edd had seemed to regain his composure because he was shaking less and creating little circles on the back of Marie’s hand, which still held his other in its grasp; something he only ever did when he was calm or trying to get calm. “He— Marie, I—” He was calmer, yes, but still very much unable to find the right words to express his thoughts. He took his time, Marie making it okay, before he finally sighed and had arranged his thoughts coherently enough. “I feel assaulted on such a personal level by what he did, even though in my heart I know that, truly, it is not as bad as it seems. However, I—to me… To me… it is awful. I feel so… invaded.” He sighed.

Marie brought her free hand up to stroke his hair; she was the only person besides Edd allowed to touch his hair, because it was she that helped him to become comfortable without his hat on at all times. He found that he very much enjoyed the way Marie would touch his hair, and rested his head against the table to make it easier for her to play with the inky, shoulder-length locks. Marie smiled.

“Oh Edd, I get it. I understand.” She said to him, almost like music to his ears to hear such words. “It’s fine how you’re feeling — rightfully so, too. What Kevin did was uncalled for and unnecessary. The jerk. He should’ve thought more about your feelings or… at least asked.” Edd was finally smiling, and it was growing wider with each word that Marie said. “You don’t have to talk to him. You don’t have to do anything. He, however, should be groveling at your feet with apologies. And if he isn’t, then he’s an ungrateful son of a—” She paused, knowing how much Edd disliked cursing and hearing others, especially her, do as such. “Point is: You don’t have to deal with him anymore. You did your job. He passed summer school. Now you can go your separate ways and cut him off. And if he ever comes around to mess with you again…” She paused to lean in and whisper into Edd’s ear, ”Tell me. And I’ll handle him very nicely.”

This time, Edd did manage a laugh.

The following days, he found himself spending more than his usual allotted time, at the Kanker Residence. Kevin, he had noticed, was consistently calling his house — and when he was not calling, he was knocking on his door at random hours in the night. About three days passed of this harassment before he gave up, and asked Marie if he could go to sleep at her house, instead. Marie did not even need an explanation from him before she accepted.

She went over to his home at 3am to help him get his things ready to head to her house. He had, admittedly, reprimanded her for traversing through the streets at the wee hours of the night, alone, but Marie brushed his worries away saying that if she had come across anyone troublesome, she would have handled it, herself. (In the back of his mind, he knew she was right. Marie had already displayed her physical prowess several times in the past, and current present, from being the only female “good enough” to make it onto the boys’ wrestling team, and top their records one after another. He knew that if Marie had come across any hooligans on her way to his house, the ones to be fearful surely would have been the people whom she would have encountered.)

Marie was diligent in packing for him; he was quite frazzled by the events and still shaking with his
mind not quite right, but Marie — Marie — was calm and collected and packed things for him that he had not even thought of; things he surely would have missed at one point when he was feeling better.

“I think that’s all of it, Edd.” She said to him when she finished getting his favorite, unfinished book from the shelf in his room — a book he constantly meant to go back to but never remembered to do so until it was too late — into the large duffle bag that she had brought from her home, because she knew that he did not have anything of the sort in his. “Ah!” She paused as she made her way over to his nightstand and grabbed the cactus plant labeled “Jim” that loyally rested there. “Now that’s all of it.”

“Oh thank you very much for this, Marie.” He said as he began to close-up the duffle bag. “I quite honestly do not know how best to express my thanks in regards to you for being so…” He could not quite find the words — but how was he supposed to get across how ecstatically grateful he was for having Marie Kanker as both a friend and a confidant?

“It’s nothing, Edd.” Marie said. She handed him Jim and then slung the duffle bag over her back, with ease. “Now come on. It’s only, like, 4. We can get there by 4:30 if we walk fast enough. And I can make you some more tea if you want, too. We can stay up all night just bingeing on Netflix — ah! We finally got Hulu, too! So there’s more to watch, now.”

Edd smiled and exited his home with Marie. He locked the front door and, hand-in-hand with her, chatted his nerves away as they walked out of the cul-de-sac and through the park and woods and over the bridge, and finally arrived at the front door of the Kanker Residence. Marie pulled out her key from inside of her bra (he blushed and looked away when he saw her nonchalantly pulling at the hem of her shirt and exposing more of her breasts than he was ever comfortable seeing), and then unlocked the screen door and the front, wood door. They then stepped in, him leaving his shoes at the mat out of habit.

“Obviously, while you’re here, you’re gonna have to sleep on the couch, Edd.” She said. “I mean, I personally wouldn’t mind if you slept in our room, but I doubt Lee would be okay with having a boy there. Our room is like… sacred Kanker sister territory, you know.”

“I understand — I expected as such. To be honest, I never wish to invade your personal sanctums. In fact… are you certain that this is… okay, Marie? Am I not—”

“Stop right there, Edd.” She said, putting her hand up against his chest. She had been walking to the living room and then swiftly turned around when she heard him begin spewing doubt. “There is no way I was gonna turn down a cry for help. Not from you, of all people, either. I’m sure there’ll be some nonsense from Lee, but even that’ll only last like… an hour or two. Besides, you’ll blend in in no time. I’m sure of it. It’ll be good to finally have a man around the house, too.” She winked at him and he could feel himself slowly getting better.

“Thank you, Marie.”

She waved her hand as she resumed going into the living room. “It’s fine, it’s fine. No need to thank me.” She set the duffle bag beside the long couch and then situated herself on it. She wasted no time in turning on the Smart TV and setting up Hulu. “We’re paying extra for the commercial-free option, by the way. So nothing is gonna stop our bingeing.”

He smiled and joined her on the couch. He sat vertically in contrast to her horizontal body, and her legs rested above his thighs in their usual manner whenever they watched something together. They sat there going through shows for about a half-hour before settling on a random set of movies until it was time for Marie to get up and go to work — something she only remembered she had that day.
when the alarm of her phone began to ring.

“**Oh shit.”** She said. **“I forgot I switched my shifts since school is starting in a few weeks. Ugh. Great.”**

“**Oh dear — and I kept you up all night...”** He was clearly worried about how she would do on such little sleep being a waitress at Peach Creek’s one and only “candy bar”, which doubled as a candy store and a restaurant. He was more than ready to blame himself for anything that may go wrong for her that day.

She snorted. **“Don’t worry, Edd. This isn’t the first time I’ve gone all-in with little to no sleep. You should’ve seen my sleep schedule during finals last year — I got like three hours over the course of two days.”** Edd’s eyes widened at her confession, and she laughed. Getting up from the couch, she stretched out like a cat and then released a breath. **“Brew me a pot of coffee though, will ya? That’ll definitely help me some.”**

He was more than happy to brew the coffee for her, while she got ready for work. Marie was a fast bather anddresser, and came down in her work uniform and blue hair tied back in a ponytail, just when he was pouring the coffee into a novelty mug that he remembered getting for her some time back. The mug had a little cat inside that “drowned” when you filled the cup, and then popped back up as you drank. Marie loved the cup because it was the type of cute/morbid aesthetic that she had lately been getting into. He handed her the coffee cup.

**“Thanks, Edd.”** She said as she took a sip. **“That means a lot to me — you have no idea.”**

“I also took the liberty of making some biscuits with jam.” He said as he presented to her a plate of two biscuits with jam already slathered in between each one in that heavy way that she liked. **“I hope you do not mind that I used some of you pre-made dough.”**

“Not at all.” Marie said, eyes shining. **“Ah! I already love having you here! May is usually never awake by the time I have to get ready for work, to make me breakfast. And obviously I can never do it, so...”** She took a seat at the table in the kitchen, Edd across from her, and delved into the biscuits and coffee and came out of it happy and refreshed. She could not help herself as she gave Edd a hug and a kiss on the cheek, on her way out. **“Thanks again. I’ll see you after work.”**

**“Have a good day at work.”** He said, smiling. Marie nodded and then exited her home. Edd was washing the dishes from that morning’s breakfast when, ten minutes later, he heard stomping coming from above him.

As he followed the sound, he was shocked to see Lee running into the kitchen with a metal baseball bat in her hands.

“**Who’s there?!”** She shouted, waving the bat around and more than ready to bash the face in of the person who dared to invade her home. She paused, however, when she noticed the frightened expression on Edd’s face. **“Double-D?!?”**

“**G-good morning, Lee.”** He said, trying to calm his heart from the fright the red-haired girl gave him. **“I see you are... energetic.”**

Lee lowered the bat. **“What’re ya doing here?”** She asked. She then took a look around the kitchen, searching for something — someone. **“And where’s Marie? She isn’t here, is she? She has work today.”**

**“Marie left but a few minutes ago, Lee.”**
“Ah. Okay… And what’re you doing here?” She asked, again, getting closer to him. It was then that he noticed that Lee was not fully-covered and dressed in only a pair of short-shorts and a top that was almost see-through. She did not seem to mind, however, that he could see her hardened nipples through the thin material of her shirt. He, in contrast, did, and turned his head away from her in respect, as he responded to her question.

“I… Due to an unfortunate… home situation, I have been given permission by Marie to temporarily take residency in your home for the next… three days, I believe.”

“Oh really?” Lee asked. The bat was now over her shoulder and she slowly approached him. He swallowed the lump that formed in his throat when he felt her body pressed up closely against his. Her face, also, was incredibly close. She was only a few inches shorter than him, after all; it did not take much on her part to reach his face.

“Y-y…yes…” He said.

“Hm… Okay then.” She said, shocking him. She moved away and he turned his head to look at her with widened blue eyes. He wanted to ask, ‘Excuse me?’ and get some clarification on why she was taking this so easily, but he was unable to as she said, “If you don’t work, you don’t stay. So you better pull your weight while you’re here, Double-D.” She then took a whiff of the kitchen. “And make me some biscuits, too. I’m gonna go pee.”

“R-right— right away.” He said.

When it came to telling May about his stay there, he would like to add, things went much more smoothly. May took it instantly with nothing but happiness and excitement, for she, too, saw benefit in his being there and very much enjoyed his company. She had grasped his hands and started jumping up and down and only spoke about how with him there, she would have someone to help her cook and clean and do laundry and everything else — he noted how she treated it like he was a permanent resident over at the Kanker Residence, but felt that more of a compliment than an issue, and smiled.

His days at the Kankers’ were never boring.

His mornings were spent waking up before them and starting on the breakfast. May was ecstatic to have someone else there that could take care of that, as that let her sleep-in, which made a significant difference in her days. In the afternoons, when all the Kankers were gone to work (he found that by 1pm each day, they would all have left for work except on Thursdays when May did not have work all day, and Sundays which they had each chosen to have as their day off so they could spend time with one another), he was doing laundry and mopping and cleaning as much of the inside and outside of the trailer as he could. He found he liked this alone time, and did not quite mind the “housewife” comments he got from Lee when she got home, earliest of them all, and came home to a clean house and dinner cooking, and slapped his butt (which he never has, and likely never will, get used to). The nights were the most fun, though. At night, they would sit around the couch and do marathons of their favorite shows or channel surf, while munching at unhealthy snacks. He found himself quite comfortable sitting between the three Kankers with Marie’s legs over his lap, Lee’s head on his shoulder, and May sitting on the floor, using his knees as a back-rest.

Needless to say, what had meant to be but a three-day absence from his household, turned into about a week-and-a-half. The Kanker girls had loved having him there and used their majority vote over
him to convince him to stay for a while longer. He had been ready to make a case against it, again, when he went back to his house with Marie to go get clean clothing; but when he checked his answering machine and found it full of messages from Kevin, he settled that staying there longer was the better thing to do.

Looking back, he supposed it was those warm days at the Kanker Residence that likely led to his relationship with Marie deepening as much as it did.

While he stayed over at her home, they seemed to assimilate into “husband and wife” roles, naturally. There were more hugs and kisses on the cheek, and he soon found her wrapping her arms around his waist while he cooked, and what he could now deem as flirting from both sides, being more prominent between the two. With all of that, it was only natural that “it” happened, he supposed.

There came a day when they were both helping Lee with the project of restoring the T-bird she found in the Peach Creek junkyard some time ago. Lee was very close to finishing up the almost year-long project, and was aiming to do so before the end of the summer — which was just two weeks from that point. She had a goal of driving it to school on the first day. As thus, she had asked the three of them — him, May and Marie — to assist in the final, decorative details while she got down to the heavy stuff.

It was his and Marie’s jobs to paint it pink.

“I can’t believe she chose pink, of all colors.” Marie said; they were both currently sanding the car down and getting it ready to apply a base coat of white, before putting on the pink spray paint. “She hasn’t liked pink ever.”

“Perhaps she has started to grow into it?” He asked. “If I recall, Lee was also not the most feminine of you three, and has yet purchased more high-heeled shoes than all of those of you and May, combined.”

“That’s true…” Marie said. She was finishing sanding the hood of the car, which she and Edd double-teamed and used as their final, conjoined point. They had each tackled the car from the back, and then gone on to the opposite sides, only to meet up once again at the hood. “But still. She’s too influenced by that ‘Grease’ movie. We watched it like once when we were kids, and I swear she’s built her whole persona around it.”

Edd laughed. They finished up sanding the car and then put the materials away as they went to deal with spray painting the base coat. As Lee wanted the job done as professionally as possible (but for as cheap as possible, too), she had asked her boss, Mo, from Mo and Tasha’s Garage, if she could borrow some of the equipment from the auto body shop to paint her car. Somehow he had said yes, and Edd and Marie now found themselves having a tough time trying to get the professional spray-painting machines to work.

“I think it’s clogged.” Marie said. She was pressing hard on the trigger and nothing was coming out. She shook it over and over, her ear close like she was trying to listen in for the liquid, and frowned when she found nothing.

“Perhaps it would be best if we identified the model of these machines and then did an internet search on how to properly use them?” Edd offered.

Marie nodded. She took out her cellphone, unlocked it, and then went to Google. She paused as she tried to find the model number or ID of the spray-painting machines. “I can’t find the model information anywhere.” She said.
“Here, let me try.” Edd said, trying to approach her.

“No, no, I got it.”

“Marie, please, it would only take a moment.”

“I said I got—” In her multitasking to keep Edd from taking the spray-painting gun from her hands, find the model number, and simultaneously search through Google, Marie had accidentally “unclogged” the gun, and managed to spray her chest white. She gasped as the cold paint hit her. “Oh my god!” She screamed. Her phone fell to the floor as she went to use her hand to assess the damage; it came back as white as her green shirt now was. “Goddammit!”

At this, Edd found himself laughing. While he was not one for enjoying the accidental slip-ups of others, lately, he had been feeling much more comfortable around Marie, and able to do things he felt he otherwise would not have — such as laugh at her having sprayed herself with the gun.

When Marie heard the sound of Edd’s laughter, she held back a smile as she instead tried to seem mad while saying, “You think this is funny?”

“W-what? Me? N-no. Not at—” He was not able to finish his sentence as he continued to laugh. His sarcasm fell when his funny bone was truly, truly tickled. He had his hands over his mouth; half to hide his face and half to keep his giggles in, but it was useless. He was clearly laughing and unable to control himself.

“Oh is that right? Then I guess you won’t mind if I do… this!” She turned the gun in his direction and hit the trigger. He froze, expecting to get blasted with cold paint, but got nothing, instead. Marie, once again, shook the gun in a fit of rage and anger and, once again, ended up spraying herself. In the face, this time. Edd’s laughter came higher and harder, and he could barely keep himself up straight as he clutched onto his stomach.

Marie threw the gun aside and tackled Edd. He fell back, a bit shocked. He was prepared to apologize for laughing at Marie, until he saw that she was rubbing her face and body up against him like a cat. He was confused as to why until he noticed the white stains on his shirt, and the paint disappearing from her face.

He laughed again.

“Stop laughing you big idiot!” She exclaimed. “This is very serious right now!”

He wanted to responded, but could not. Marie’s actions were simply too hysterical in his opinion, and he could not contain the laughter from rolling out of his mouth. He only came to a stop when he could take the pain of his stomach no more. He wiped at the tears that had come from his eyes and looked-up to see Marie, half-smirking, half-pouting down on him; there were still white spots on her face, but it was not fully covered like it had been, beforehand.

“Jeez, Edd…” She said. “You’re such a… ugh.”

“F-forgive me…” He said, still shaking with the remnants of his fit of laughter and giggles and chortles. “I did not mean to… to put on such a disorderly display. I simply… you… your face…” He bit his lip to keep himself from biting.

“Hey! What about my face? I think I look very cute!” Marie said; she took no hard feelings from what Edd said. She knew what he meant.

“Indeed. Very cute. Quite.” She blushed at Edd’s words and turned her face away. She was brought
back to face him, however, when one of his hands went up to her cheek. He scraped at the paint that was there, still smiling, and Marie gave, in return, a small, sad smile as she leaned into his hand. Why? Due to her knowing that she could not have what she truly wanted, and settling, instead. She knew how Edd was; how he felt about physical, romantic contact. Not to mention, she was also not keen on a full relationship, either. However, in that moment — in those past few days, really — she had begun to think, ‘Maybe… maybe it would not be so bad?’

She did not know that Edd had begun to think the same, until she felt both of his hands on her face and he stared up at her with confusion, hesitancy, and a want that she recognized because she had seen that look in her eyes before, several times, when she thought about him.

“Edd?”

“I—” His voice caught in his throat. He was unsure what to say. He did not know what he was even doing. No. That was not entirely the truth. He knew what he was doing — he just could not pinpoint a reason why. Yet he knew, and still did, that at that very moment, what he had wanted to do was kiss Marie Kanker — kiss the blue-haired, white-faced girl sitting on top of him, that had just given him one of the best laughing experiences that he had in his entire life.

Marie, as a surprise to him, smiled, and leaned her body in more. Their noses touched, her lips but an inch or so away from his.

“If you’re sure about this… I won’t mind.” She said.

He swallowed. He then leaned up, and captured her lips, in their first ever, mouth-to-mouth kiss (that he initiated).

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After the kiss, he and Marie had finished the job of painting Lee’s car pink (they finally learned to work the gun after finding the model number on the bottom of it), and then went inside, bathed (separately), and sat down on the couch for a heart-to-heart talk — no tea.

The center of the conversation was their relationship.

He admitted that in that moment, he could not quite understand where the desire to kiss her came from. Marie was okay with that; she knew that he probably would not be able to give an exact reason, after all, as she could read it in his eyes that he was confused and still sorting through his thoughts about the why. However, he told her, he would not deny in any way, that he had strongly wanted to kiss her — and that he did not regret it.

In fact, he liked kissing her, he said, and wanted to do it more.

Marie was shocked. She had not expected that. She asked him to elaborate on “more”, and he, blushing, said that he would like to kiss Marie once more. Maybe more than that. All he knew was that he felt… good kissing her — not scared, not violated, not disgusted — and he wanted to know why and how and perhaps, perhaps, if they kissed more often, he would be able to discover the reason.

Marie asked if he knew what kissing her more entailed.

A romantic relationship — she said.
He shocked her yet again by saying that, since it was with her, he, oddly, found that he did not mind being in that type of relationship.

They were not truly “dating”, as one would call it. While it looked that way to everyone outside of their two-person relationship, to them, it was far more complicated than two teenagers with an affinity for one another, mating.

To him, he would admit, it was more of an exploration as to why he did not mind being kissed or hugged or getting in some type of way romantically physical, with Marie. To Marie, it was helping to satisfy his curiosity while also hoping (secretly hoping) that he would discover that the difference was that he liked her, genuinely so, so that they could continue the relationship.

Yet, that did not mean that their relationship was lacking anything. He still enjoyed the kisses Marie would give him; the tighter hugs; the more intense cuddling that came when they settled themselves on the couch. He did not mind holding hands with her in public; going to her wrestling games when school started; nor often staying overnight at her house, on the weekends. Their relationship still consisted of truth and tea-talks and support — especially since the “Kevin situation” had yet to show any signs of letting up the first month of school — but the extra things that they were now doing, seemed to give it a different power over himself.

He remembered the first time he had gotten physically intimate with her. They had been on her couch, watching TV, when they erupted into a fit of giggles. At that time, their giggles always ended in them kissing if it was just the two of them — which it did. Yet that day their child-like kissing was suddenly deeper and more hands-on, and he found himself, not turned-on, but wanting to do a bit more.

He had told this to Marie, who, ever the good friend, asked him a bunch of questions to see what exactly it was that he wanted. They would not go into it blind and accidentally touch upon something that he was not ready to do. She did not think that what he wanted from her was the same thing she had started to want from him — and she had been right. He made it clear that while he did not feel comfortable just yet engaging in the act of penetrative sex, he did want to know what it felt like to have a closer type of intimacy with another.

He and Marie gave each other oral sex that night.

It was not long, really, before Marie found the relationship to be too much for her. Not because Edd was asking for a lot — he was really asking for nothing, in her opinion — but because he was not asking for the same things as her.

She liked the flow of the pseudo romantic relationship that she had with Edd. She really did. However, there was no denying that she wished that Edd was more comfortable doing all the things that she wanted to do. She wished that when they started to make-out on her couch, there would not be a moment of hesitancy in his eyes about what to do next. She wished that the relationship felt less like a demo for whatever future endeavors Edd may get himself into.

Most of all, she wished she was not taking advantage of the situation, to egg Edd into doing and
giving her some of the smaller things that she wanted.

It made her feel like a bad person. *She:* most likely the only person in the world, knew every detail about Edd’s confusion regarding his sexual and romantic orientation. He said that he did not feel hetero in both senses, yet also was not sure *what* he felt among the different labels. He was confused and scared — and she — *she* — was taking advantage of it to have the type of relationship with Edd that she was still pining for since she was much younger.

It made her *sick.*

Each time they did something new that went out of the realm of hugs and kisses and cuddling, she hated how much she was happy. She hated how she felt excited not for Edd to get some clarity, but for her and her greedy desires. It made her stomach churn with guilt, and she was happy that she faked sleep when these things were done, because she simply could not look him in the eye directly after them.

She *especially* could not handle how Edd kept calling her a good friend for helping him out. She could not handle how he gave her more kisses and more attention. She could fully, no longer handle it when Edd arrived at school one day with a bouquet of flowers for her — not out of love, she knew, but *gratitude.*

That had been the straw that broke the camel’s back, and she, with a heavy heart, ended the relationship. Not just the romantic one, but the friendship as well.

She did not deserve to have Edd being nice to her, she felt.

When Marie ended their relationship, Edd was mortified. He immediately felt remorse and guilt and was shaking and sobbing and unable to control himself at the news. She had done it through a simple phone call when he was home — she called, told him it was over — *that everything was over* — and then hung up. He had not even been able to process what had just gone on until he repeated her words over a hundred times in his head, until it *stuck* and broke him down.

He did not remember putting the phone in the receiver or doing much else besides going down to his knees and starting to cry. His heart lamented everything that he had done which could have possibly gotten them to that point. He told himself it was because he had been so *selfish* and not considered Marie’s feelings at all. Looking back, Marie had always been the one giving in the relationship, and he taking — he never once asked her what she would like to do. He never once considered doing something for *her* benefit.

He choked on sobs and tears and air and was really but a step away from throwing-up. His body was shaking, and he felt the burning need to go to Marie and ask her to reconsider and see if there was some way to salvage their *friendship* — for that was what he cared about most — but he could not find the strength in himself to do so.

He laid on the floor in the fetal position and held his legs close to his body and cried on the white carpet. In truth, he wanted to go, but if it was Marie’s wish to no longer speak to him — to no longer be friends…

He would respect that.
Life became hard without Marie.

There were several days when he felt much lonelier than he needed to be. Yes, he had Ed and Eddy and it was not as though he had abandoned their friendship with them in favor of Marie, but there was no denying that Marie had filled a spot in his life that was too hard to ignore — and impossible to replace.

He tried ignoring it by keeping himself busy. He focused on his studies and extracurricular activities; including the track team, which he had joined that year and knew he had to progress by leaps and bounds to keep up with everyone else. It was challenging on a different plane than the academics-based clubs he had joined the year prior, and he was thankful for that, because it did not come easy to him and he could drown himself in hours of stretching and getting into muscle training and seeing how far and fast he could run. The burn he felt the first few times he ran, almost tasting blood in the back of his throat, was horrifying; but in time, he began to feel that it was not so bad. He got used to it, and liked the bit of freedom that came with being able to run.

Yet this was not enough to replace Marie. Not when he had three classes with her. Not when he spotted her in the cafeteria. Not when he flinched at nearly every blue thing he saw because it could be her hair — her.

As his sophomore year of high school rounded up to a close, the spot in his heart that felt the presence of a Marie-shaped hole in the universe, dulled, until it was rekindled by the other two Kankers, Lee and May. He had had significantly less contact with Lee and May since his relationship fell-through with Marie. They were her sisters first, after all, and his friends second, and he did not feel right going over to their home to help May with her studies or chat with Lee, if Marie wanted nothing to do with him.

The two Kanker sisters, however, were found to be distraught over his and Marie’s not talking. They had been hoping that the two would kiss-and-make-up (not literally, of course) on their own, but now it had been months since the two even made eye-contact with one another, and they felt it their job to make things better.

They had physically grabbed him off of the field during track, and taken him to where they had locked Marie up inside of a janitor closet in the school. When they got there, they threw him in, Marie catching him because the closet was small and there was no way she could have moved out of the way to not get hurt; the red and blonde Kankers then closed and relocked the doors — saying that they would not come out until they talked and resolved their issues.

Of course Marie was furious. She yelled and screamed and cursed at her sisters like she never had before, but eventually, she stopped when she noticed that she still had him in her arms — that she was locked in a closet with him — and released him and turned her back to him.

He stood there in silence with her, for a good couple of minutes. His mind told him that he should just be quiet. There was no way the two Kanker girls would leave them there forever. However, his heart told him that he truly needed to speak with Marie. It had been over six months since they last positively conversed, and that was such a long time and he still did not know why — why had she stopped being his friend? What had he done wrong? Did she hate him for those months of their pseudo relationship? Or was it something else?

Marie had been the one to ask all the questions in the past, she had been the considerate one, but now it was his turn. So he talked and asked her hundreds of questions — all left unanswered until Marie talked, too.
She said to him that she liked him. She still liked him in the way she did as a child — maybe more. She had used him, she said, when they were in their relationship; while he had been curious and nervous, she had been excited because finally — finally — she was able to do the types of things with him that she had been wanting to for so, so long. The types of things that did not fade with time, she said, but only grew stronger.

She started to cry.

She said she ended things because she had been such a horrible friend. She had been selfish — an awful, filthy person for taking advantage of him like that. He deserved a better friend than her, she had said. Yet she also said that she had missed him terribly. She missed their hugs and movie marathons and the fun times that they would have together. She missed their friendship, too.

He started to cry.

He missed her as well — lord had he missed her.

They confessed as much as they could to one another while in that tiny closet. They talked, too, and caught-up on what they were doing in their lives, then. Marie was happy to see him getting accustomed to the track team, and he was upset that she had gotten kicked off of the wrestling team for being too rough, but glad that she was finding an alternative in roller derbies. She was thinking of cutting her hair shorter; she did not want the other girls to have an easy target with it came to their matches. He was actually thinking of growing his out more, and had been doing so for the past few weeks; this came from how much he had loved having his hair stroked by her, he said. They laughed, cried, and left the janitor’s closet, close. Not quite at the level they had been before their friendship was stopped.

However, it would only take that summer for that to be rekindled.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact! For those of you wondering about what Eddward's sexuality is in this fan-fic, there are many hints to it here.

Fun fact! While I'm uploading the beginnings of the drama-heavy chapters, I am physically writing down the chapters where all the fluff is going on. (For those of you wonder, that's past Chapter 15.)

Fun fact! I have gotten no sleep this night; I pulled a literal all-nighter coding for my class, and am operating on nap-power, only. I was going to pass out in blissful sleep after uploading this chapter, but now... now I'm gonna go play HuniePop (Rated M) instead.

Next Chapter: I now return you to your regularly-scheduled time-stream.
Chapter Notes

A round of applause for me actually getting the word count (including the author's notes holy crab cakes) under 5k. Also, I hadn't used my laptop all day Sunday and was up early so...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He could not remember the last time he had cried.

Not hard — blubbered, bawled, or wailed — but simply, cried. He supposed it had to be back when he was failing school, and his father had given him his first taste of physical punishment with a black leather belt. He remembered crying then; choking on his own sobs, even, from the fear that if he was louder or moved or did anything more than sit on the ground and cry silently, his father would go back out into the hallway and force a second wave of pain on him. He could just barely remember the stinging pain, and the image of the red marks against his light skin, hours after the deed had been done.

His eyes began to sting with more tears because there was still mud on his face; which he only managed to move around when he tried to wipe at his tears earlier, and now it was falling into his eyes and causing him pain. He, out of reflex, tried to use his right arm to wipe away the tears since the left was being useless, and flinched — physically pausing his whole body a second after — when the motion registered and he bit at his cheek to keep himself from screaming out.

Fuck! Shit! God— fuck! Internally, however, he screamed. He screamed and cursed as loud as his internal thoughts would allow him; if it had been any louder, he was certain that others could have heard him.

He gripped at his right arm with his left hand, and a hiss spewed between his clenched teeth. He felt more frustrated tears start to leak from his eyes. He had to hold back sobs and the urge to breakdown and stop trying to be strong and just cry in the middle of the road that he was now crossing. He would lay on the concrete and cry to his heart’s content.

No, he told himself. Can’t give up. ‘Gotta get my shit together and keep moving…

He swallowed back down the urge to stop and cry, locking it deep in the pit of his stomach and hoping that it would dissolve there, and let out a shaky breath.

It was still raining. Hard. The droplets that fell on him felt like pins and needles digging themselves into his skin. Prickly little pains. They showered him completely, from head-to-toe. They managed to wash down some of the mud that was on him — he even turned his head up to the sky at one point and let them prick-prick-prick on his face to get rid of the mud that was there and had contributed more to his stinging eyes. He found that he preferred being soaked in the cold rain over being covered in dry, crusty mud.

I hope I don’t get sick…

He reached the bus stop some five-to-ten minutes after he had left the trailer park. On the way, he
would admit, he had spotted a car on the road that looked all too much like Eddward’s — and he
supposed that it was. There were not too many people in Peach Creek who drove silver hybrids (not
too many people who drove silver cars, or hybrids, period; for they preferred red pickup trucks and
cars on the road for over a decade and the standard black car over the fancy, new-age vehicles
coming about). He found his rib cage to have gotten comparably tight when he spotted the silver
vehicle; his eyes had even strained themselves to see if the people — the person — inside of the car
was Eddward. The car drove by him too quickly, though — almost too, too quickly, like it was
purposely trying to ignore him — and he had not been able to decipher a thing about the person
driving.

He had told himself, then, that the car had not been Eddward’s. Even if it was, it was not. That was
what made him capable of breathing again, and going on forward.

When he reached the bus stop, he noticed the one that headed in the direction of his home, had
already arrived and was taking what few passengers were there. He sighed and went to sit at the one
that went in the direction of the school, on the right side of the road. As badly as he wanted to go
home and relax — to bathe and make himself warm soup and sit on his couch watching Netflix with
Lacey and Trix at his side — he knew that he could not.

It was not the bet that he had with his father regarding his attendance. Nor was it that he could not
miss a day of classes since that meant falling behind on some work, and he had been trying so very
hard to stay on top of his school work since he almost failed freshman year. Nor was it that going to
school was the “right thing” to do after the ordeal he just had.

No.

He was going to school because he would not dare to let Eddward and the Kankers win. He knew
that back at the trailer park, he had said that he would go home — however, how could he? If
anything, it was a physical admittance of defeat (opposite of the internal destruction he felt
emotionally).

Rather than go home and hide and cry like a baby — because while he had swallowed the urge to
cry, there was still the chance that it could reemerge at any moment and drag him and his sunken
confidence down even further — he would go to school with his head held as high as he possibly
could, and look each and every one of them in the eye as though to say, ‘You didn’t win.’

He was a fighter, after all.

The bus came about fifteen minutes after he first sat down under the glass area that was used to
provide some shade and shelter for people waiting. Stepping on, he noticed the look the bus driver
gave him. The older, fatter man was staring at him with a grim expression as though he were some
kind of foreign object. He ignored it, however, and quickly got out the spare change he kept in his
backpack for days when his dad was too persistent in not letting him drive his motorcycle in the rain
— although today and yesterday, he felt, his father had been spot-on with his worries — and put it
into the admittance slot. A bus transfer ticket popped out for him from the side, and he was grateful
to have it — because now he had a mode of transportation for when he would go to work later on
that day.

He sat in the back, near the back exit, and distracted his mind by looking out of the window while
the bus drove on.
When he arrived at the school after having gotten off the bus at the closest street and walked, he went along the perimeter of the land the school was built on, and headed over to the large building that was the athletics center of the school. It was detached from the main high school building, similarly to the library which also functioned as Peach Creek’s public library; except what was inside was two floors of sports-related facilities and equipment.

The locker room was situated in the back of the first floor, and that was where he had been headed. On the way to the school, he had decided on taking a shower there, before heading to the nurse to get the sling fixed (and his arm looked at, once again), and then, hopefully, heading to class. It was a good, solid plan that prioritized his physical condition first, and class second; because at this point he knew that he could sort the whole mess over with his father with some honesty and trust, and that he was in good enough with his first two teachers that day, that they would accommodate his absence in class that morning.

He dumped his red backpack on the bench closest to his locker, and then opened up the metal container. Inside was his duffle bag with his gym and football uniform shoved inside, his helmet, pads, shoes, his towel, some body sprays and deodorants, and — something he was extremely grateful for at that moment — a second change of clothes.

Pulling out the simple white t-shirt and black jeans, he mentally called out his idiocy at being annoyed with his father packing the clothes into his duffle bag without his looking; later on saying that it did not hurt to have them there.

Thanks, pops... He thought. His father could be a real worry-wort (an extreme contrast to the hard-ass that tended to pop-up from time-to-time), but there were moments when it was necessary and he was more than happy to have someone like that in his life. Especially if it was his dad.

He took off his clothing quick and carefully, so as not to add more insult to injury, and kept only his underwear on as he went to shower in one of the private stalls; admittedly, he kept his eyes off of his right shoulder. He closed the stall door, and finished stripping by taking off his underwear, and began washing himself. He felt relief start to overcome him as he scraped away the dirt and grime; and while there was some difficulty doing so because of his right shoulder, he still managed to get clean — much cleaner than he had been before, quite obviously.

He came out of the shower feeling refreshed, and wrapped himself up in his towel. He then went over to his locker and dried himself and put on the spare set of clothes, with the same underwear and socks and shoes that he had been wearing before, because it was not as though he had anticipated getting thrown in the mud, and needing to retake a shower, in the first place.

After a few minutes, he was clothed, deodorized, and body-sprayed down, and put all his needless items back into the locker, and headed out. While he had managed to salvage much of his dignity and pride with that shower, his staple red snapback, which had looked more brutalized than his body with all the deeply-embedded mud that was now in it, was not one of those things.

On his way to the nurse’s office, he came across something horrifying. Well, at least, it felt that way with how his body stood at full shock and attention, and his heart began to pound, when he spotted it. He had been so absentminded— no, correction. It was not that he had been absentminded, but rather that he had been so focused on getting to the nurse as quickly as possible, that he paid no attention to the route he had chosen — a route that directly led him to Eddward’s locker.
What was worse, even, was the fact that Eddward was standing there.

The black-beanie-wearing young man stood at his locker with a passive look on his face. There was a large plastic bag in his hand that was filled with something that he, Kevin, could not clearly identify from where he stood some good feet away hoping that Eddward would not see him. However, the attention of the young man he was observing was not clearly on his hand or open locker, but pinpointed to a pink envelope he held between his fingers.

Somewhere deep inside of him, something twisted unpleasantly, much to his confusion. His eyes focused themselves on the pink envelope — searching for anything that indicated as to what was inside (as though he already did not know). He stood, almost breathless, as he watched Eddward place the plastic bag inside of his locker, and then tend to the pink envelope.

He opened it and pulled out a letter.

Again, his insides coiled painfully. They rumbled. They roared. He found himself holding his breath in as Eddward read the letter.

He was not sure how to feel — he did not even know why he was reacting so badly to seeing the letter in Eddward’s possession and reading it. He did not know why he wanted Eddward to crumple up the letter and the pink envelope it came in, and toss it in the nearest waste bin.

“I like you!”

The words flew into his head. He focused on them; yet he was pushed back by them, as well. Was that it? Was he so bothered by this pink envelope and letter because he… liked, Eddward? It could not be, he felt. He liked Eddward in an almost friend type of way — that was the only way he knew. Yet, at the same time… had he not kissed Eddward? twice? and in a way that “friends” simply did not kiss? No. He had seen Eddward and Marie kiss on the lips about a dozen times, even after their break-up. They were just friends, were they not?

He felt himself getting annoyed and frustrated with his internal monologue and attempt to justify—nay, to clarify, why it was that he was bothered by what he was seeing. At the same time, he could not help the new wave of annoyance that came when he saw Eddward smile at the letter, neatly fold it up, put it back inside the pink envelope, and put it in his back pocket.

He’s keeping it?!

He stood at that exact spot until Eddward left. Once he did, he found himself sucking his teeth at what he had just seen transpire, and feeling a new set of emotions mixing in with the hot-pot that he had already formed from the morning’s — yesterday and today’s — unfortunate events.

He forced it all down to bubble and hopefully dissolve in his stomach, and continued on his way to the nurse’s office. He avoided glancing at Eddward’s locker as he passed it.

Needless to say, nurse Flo was not quite happy with him when he entered her office. He wished he had come in waving a white flag and an offering of peace, when those cold, analyzing eyes of hers landed on him and noticed the sling that should have been on his arm, sticking out from his front pocket, instead.

“You really want to get that amputation, don’t you?” She asked. She stood from the chair in front of
her computer, and, surprisingly enough (or not too surprising, he could not decide), she took a cigarette that she had been smoking, from her mouth, and dumped it in the ash tray. Almost immediately, she replaced it with a stick of gum and some Mentos.

“Better an amputation than lung cancer.” He remarked.

“Oh har-har.” She said. Her heels clicked on the floor and only stopped when she was finally standing in front of him. She was looking up at him from his head to his toes, as though she were searching for something.

“I wasn’t in a fight or anything.” He said. Sorta, he thought. “I just… can’t put it back on myself.”

“And how did you get it on this morning?” She asked, crossing her arms over her chest. “I’m going to assume you at least wore it then, right? Given how you just phrased your sentence.”

“My dad helped me.”

“And it got off how…?” She asked, stretching the sentence. In his mind, he could imagine her being his age. The type of girl that would have her hair up in twin pigtails and a lollipop constantly in her mouth; he could almost see her twirling that hypothetical lollipop, now. Perhaps at one point in her life, she was? She seemed to give off that air, somehow.

“Not telling.” He said, his face growing more serious. “I’d rather not… relive that at the moment, if you don’t mind.”

She caught on, and nodded. “Sit down, then.”

“Why? Can’t you put it on with me standing?”

“Don’t be an idiot, boy. I have to assess the damage you caused to your shoulder, now. Now sit down and shut up.”

As he felt her to be the type of woman he did not want arguing with, he obeyed and sat down on the bed in the office. This time, there was no one else there — since the school day just started about a half-hour ago — and the curtains separating the three beds were all drawn back. He sat on the one in the middle, where he had sat last time. Nurse Flo, once he was seated, pulled back the hem of his white shirt to take a look at his shoulder.

“Fuck.” She cursed.

“I thought you said you shouldn’t curse around students?” He asked; avoiding looking at his shoulder.

“That was because the little freshman girl was here last time. You, on the other hand, have probably heard — probably said — worse than that. So be silent.” She told him, face-to-face, before turning her head down and back to his shoulder. The red coloring of it had started to turn purple in some areas. “You’re challenging the Gods with this shoulder, boy. Aren’t you on the football team? Isn’t Homecoming close?”

“I know, I know.” Kevin said. “I swear I want it to heal — it’s just…” He paused. He thought back to earlier that day, when he had used his shoulder in an act of brash stupidity fueled by boiling emotions.

He… had not meant to slam Eddward against the hood of his car. Really, he did not. What he had been aiming for was to get him to stop walking. He had not wanted him to walk away then and
there; because he was not done talking; because he did not like the way Eddward had responded to his comment. Before he had known it, he had rushed him and his hands were dug into Eddward’s shirt, firm against his chest, and Eddward was staring up at him with widened blue eyes.

“I’m an idiot.” He said. He was unsure whether he said it to complete his sentence, or openly admitting that his actions had been less than intelligent and reasonable.

Nurse Flo looked at him for a few seconds, studying his face, before sighing.

“I can already tell. You’re a teenager, after all. All teenagers are idiots — adults, too. Humans in general, just…” She sighed, waving her hand. She moved away from his shoulder and went to her wall of cabinets to get some new medication to put on him; only this time, she went back with not just ointments, but gauze wraps.

“What’re those for?” He asked.

“Bindings.” She said. “To stop some mobility so you’ll be more conscious of the fact that you can’t move your shoulder.”

“I already know I shouldn’t be moving it.” He said.

“And apparently that’s not enough.”

He fell silent as she went about applying ointment and putting on the gauze. Before she did, however, she pressed down on the purple spot and he flinched; enough to make him look at what she was doing, and see the new color his shoulder was wearing.

“Shit.”

“No cursing in front of school personnel.” She said with a smirk on her red lips.

He sucked his teeth, and she went back to finishing up the work on his arm. When the ointment was on and the gauze were tight, she fixed his shirt and then went about securing the sling on his body. She made a point of showing him how to do it himself, with his one good arm.

“That way the next time it comes off you don’t have to drag your body all the way here.” She said, patting his shoulder. “Now, try to move your arm a little.” He did so, and she saw that he could not move it very much. The gauze was working how she needed it to, and for that, she smiled. Kevin was grateful as well. He truly wanted to play at Homecoming in a few weeks, and did not need his arm getting in the way of that. The gauze was a nice addition, he felt.

“Thanks.” He said, when it was all over. He hopped off of the bed and put his backpack on his good shoulder. He was glad to not have too many books to carry that day, since that made it easier to keep his backpack on his shoulder without it feeling too heavy.

“You’re welcome.” Nurse Flo said, smiling. “Now get out.”

At each of his classes that day, he was significantly handicapped with his right arm, the arm he used to write, in the sling. As he could not move it, and was not ambidextrous, he was left unable to take any notes; he had to rely on his natural skills of memorization, and the kindness of the people he sat with and his teachers, to get him some notes. After all his classes, he talked with his teachers about
how he would get the notes from class, each day. They agreed to let him bring in his iPad and use that to type — “But only for notes,” they all warned.

During his lunch period, his friends kept asking him repeatedly what had happened. They all assumed that he had gotten into some sort of fight and jacked his arm up. While that was… sort of what happened, he told them only that he had fallen victim to an accident at work, but that he would be fine by the time he had to play for the Homecoming game in a few weeks. Regardless, his friends teased him that there was more to the story and joked that eventually he would need a cast. Nazz, especially, was very verbal about how she would cover it with a rainbow of doodles from the multiple glitter pens she used throughout the day, if that were the case.

“I’ll even kiss it with my favorite, limited-edition lipstick.” She said with a playful wink at him.

Other girls, too, said the same, while his male friends said they would draw crude images over it with a permanent Sharpie.

“You guys are dicks.” He said.

“It’s funny you mention ‘dicks.’” One of them replied with a smirk. He rolled his eye at the male companion.

“Well, whatever. It’s not like I’m gonna need a cast, anyways. I’ll be good in a few weeks. You’ll see. Hell, I won’t be surprised if I can get it off next week or something.”

“Sure, sure.” The same male friend said. “We’ll see.”

“You will.”

The lunch period ended. The school day went on; and soon he found himself at the bus stop waiting for the one that would take him to downtown Peach Creek, where he would need to talk to Mo and Tasha about work that week. It was still raining, so he took out the umbrella his dad had put in his backpack the day before, to use.

“Kevin, what’re you doing?” Nazz asked as she pulled-up in her car. She had the top of her car up to protect her from the rain. Johnny was inside next to her, messing around with an app on his phone (he had become quite the programmer over the years; he was much quieter now, too, since there were so many ideas in his head that he could not waste much time speaking), and she semi-leaned over him with his window rolled down to talk to him.

“Waiting for the bus. I gotta get down to Mo and Tasha’s to talk about work this week.” He gave a side-glance to his shoulder. “…And possibly some weeks after.”

“What happened to, ‘I’ll be fine by next week’?” Nazz teased.

“Hey, just being realistic.” He said, with a smile on his face and a shrug.

“Well then, get in. I wanted to drive you home anyways since I knew your dad wouldn’t let you drive your motorcycle to school in the rain. Especially not with your arm like that.” She unlocked the back door, and he stepped in. “Did you take the bus this morning, too?” She asked.

“Yeah…” He responded.

On the way to Mo and Tasha’s, Nazz and he chatted about nearly everything. In those days, it was hard for the two of them to get together like they used to, since their lives were starting to go in their own directions. While he was busy with football practice and work and home, Nazz had her time
filled-up with student government and cheer practice (which she was incredibly happy to be able to do both with their new schedules that year), as well as her own, part-time job which she used to fuel her many interests. Nazz, unlike him, seemed to be breezing through high-school and looked to be a lawyer in the future — just like Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde*, she always said.

“We *have to* go do something one of these days.” She said to him, excitedly. “We barely get to see each other except those few times at school, and we, like, *live* near each other. It’s ridiculous.”

Kevin chuckled. “You’re right. You’re right.” He said. “There’re some movies coming out in the next town over. We could go to some of those.”

“Mmm. I can’t remember the last time we were even in the same *car* together, before now.” She said. “You were always on your bike and then on your motorcycle and—”

“I’ll take you to school on my motorcycle one day, if you want.” He said.

She paused.

“That’d be nice.”

They arrived at Mo and Tasha’s, and while he went in to speak with his bosses, Nazz said that she and Johnny would wait for him in her car. He went in and told them that because of his injury, he probably would not be able to do much at work that week — he probably would not be able to work, at all. Tasha was frustrated; not at him, but the worker who originally caused the injury.

“You’re such a hard worker, Kevin. Loyal, too. I hate to see your hours getting cut back on with your injury.” She said.

“It’s fine, it’s fine.” He said, trying to remedy the situation. “I don’t really mind. To be honest, I just wanna heal as fast as possible and if this is the way…” Tasha still looked frustrated and like she was ready to go walk over to the employee who had done that to him, and go have a talk with him. He added, “And it was my fault, anyways, that it got worse.”

“Tasha, honey,” Mo said, putting his hands gently on his wife. “Kevin can just pick-up some overtime when he gets better, if he likes.”

“Oh… whatever.” She said. “Just heal up, Kevin. I want you back here starry-eyed and capable of working, as soon as possible.” Her face had grown softer, and she was smiling. There was still some concern in her eyes, but her attention seemed to have shifted to what was more important.

Kevin smiled, nodding. “Of course. Thank you.” He was ready to leave the auto-body repair shop when he accidentally walked into someone.

Chapter End Notes

I hate to leave you guys on such a cliffhanger (especially since I know the next chapter's contents), but... yeah.

Next Chapter: *me chanting* Fight, fight, *fight*!
I'm very glad that with the way the scheduling for this story goes, this particular chapter is posted on this day — because it's a shorter wait until the next update. You'll see why in a bit.

Also, a bit of a late update today but weirdly enough I forgot to do so earlier, or kind of convinced myself I already had? Somehow it completely slipped my mind...

Also, also, a set of recent reviews for this story—both here and on FFN—have made me feel that it's important to mention that, most likely, this won't end up being the Kevedd story some of you are expecting. It's going to be very... turbulent, with a lot of unlikable traits and actions exhibited by the characters, before the good starts coming out—and these "bad" moments consist of half the chapters.

This story tells a very serious period of discovery for both Eddward and Kevin, and that wasn't something I could write happy-go-lucky where they kiss-kiss-fall-in-love ten chapters later. I hope the prospect of this interests you enough to keep reading. It's going to feel like a train-wreck, but my plans will do the concept justice.

In his mind, he told himself that he should have known that a mechanics-enthusiast like Kevin had found work at the only auto-body repair shops in all of Peach Creek. After all, Lee had found employment there as well, and she and Kevin often looked like they had been cut from the same wood — or in this case, formed from the same sheet of metal. So when it came to physically bumping into Kevin while he dropped off Lee at her place of work whilst simultaneously taking his vehicle in for its monthly maintenance, in reality, he should not have been as shocked and stunned as he was. He should not have stood there staring at Kevin, wide-eyed, for a few seconds.

“K-kevin?” He should not have asked; the surprise clearly evident in his voice. A part of his insides went straight to the point and yelled ‘Too soon! Too soon!’ yet again. First it was seeing Kevin the day after he violated his personal space and feelings once again, and now it was seeing him a mere couple of hours after that morning’s unfortunate incident.

“Edd?” Kevin looked equally surprised to see him. Good. That put them on an equal playing field.

“I am… going to assume that this is your place of employment and you have come to…” He glanced at Kevin’s restrained arm for a second. “Make the proper arrangements to accommodate your injury?”

“Yeah…” Kevin said; and suddenly, his surprised face turned into a wrinkly frown with green eyes glaring back at him. It looked almost as though Kevin wanted to stab him with his eyes. “But what do you care?”

“I expected such hostility from you.” Eddward said, unfazed. “I cannot deny that there is some… reasonable basis for it, either. However, can we not pass the olive branch from one hand to the other and let there be pacem?” He held out his hand for Kevin; a sign of truce and forgiveness and
understanding. While he had not been shocked at Kevin’s change in demeanor, he was when the young man slapped his hand away from him. The glare still ever-present on his face.

“I don’t want any of your… pac-man.” Kevin said.


“Alright, already!” Kevin exclaimed. “I don’t need a lesson in Latin right now, dude. And either way, there’s not gonna be any ‘peace’. Especially not right now…” Kevin looked ready to walk away, and he, Eddward, simply would not stand for it.

Throughout the day, he had been plagued by the memories of that morning — his mind rife with over a thousand questions. He had heard from some of his friends that they had seen Kevin in school, wearing a sling on his arm (the detail that made them bring up Kevin Barr in the first place, since it was so rare to see the athletic “demon” injured), and almost instantly, his curiosity had been piqued. He had wished to find Kevin and converse with him at several points throughout the day, however, his luck had not brought him anywhere near that. Yet here it was giving it to him now, and looking as though it were about to take it away. He was not a pushy person, but in matters such as this — which had him twisting up inside and feeling… unlike himself — he would be willing to push Kevin up against a wall if necessary.

“Please, Kevin, hold on for a moment.” He said.

“Why should I?” Kevin asked. He looked up at the taller young man with eyes aflame. Eddward could see it clearly written in Kevin’s facial expressions that he was not yet ready to listen to him. That was fine. Eddward would talk regardless. He knew Kevin’s nature quite well, and knew that with his talking, Kevin would eventually respond. It was the way he had always been.

“Well, for one, I am quite surprised to hear that you did go to school today.” He said. “You had mentioned returning home, after all.” Kevin scoffed at him. “There is also this sense of… mmm… relief, I believe, that comes with seeing your arm properly in its sling. I am going to assume that you visited the school’s health department. Good. Good. As you should have.”

Kevin rolled his eyes at him; Eddward could hear a low snort from his throat. He opened his mouth to tell him how unsanitary that actually was, but instead was forced to be silent as Kevin said, “Look, Edd—” (There it was again. Kevin’s key phrase. Oh how he hated it. Nothing good ever came from it when he used it.) “—I don’t get what it is that you’re trying to accomplish through all of this, and I don’t care. I’m leaving.”

“Please wait.”

“Why?” Kevin seemed to snap at him. He felt that if he were to ever write a story describing Kevin at that very moment, he would have said that there was “venom” in his voice. Venom worse than any creature within his knowledge that had it. “I don’t recall you ever ‘waiting’ for me before…”

“Yes, well—”

“I don’t wanna talk to you right now.” Kevin told him. “And since you’re always so damn respectful of others—” The sarcasm was quite strong in this statement; almost like a verbal eye-roll. “—Respect that I don’t wanna see your face right now. Or for a while.” Kevin looked ready to fully walk away, and had, in fact, taken a few steps, before turning to look back at Eddward and saying, “…I know we gotta talk about a bunch of shit at one point. Because I got a lot of things I gotta ask you, too. But
right now isn’t the time.”

Eddward did not have a hard time at all understanding what Kevin was saying. He understood. He could even see the reasoning behind it being the proper solution to their dilemma, at the moment. After all, it truly was just ‘Too soon’.

Chapter End Notes

Eddward speaks Latin now because I didn't take Latin for 4 long years for nothing.

Anyways, not... quite the fight that I had chanted about last chapter, but still a jolly good show, don't you think? This chapter is purposely this short. Mainly for plot development since they can't always be at each other's throats, you know. Also, consider it a mental break from all the drama and long chapters of the past, and for those to come—because right now I'm physically writing chapter 18 and just... seriously. Brace yourselves for ten chapters—five weeks—from now.

Next Chapter: Eddward and Kevin manage to live their lives drama-free for a month. Just a month.
When Kevin went to the Nurse’s Office that day, he could barely contain his excitement. It was just past 7am that morning — the morning of the Peach Creek High Homecoming event. It was the day that he had been both working towards and stressed about ever since around one month prior to that time, when he had gotten the injury at his place of work.

The past three or more weeks had been difficult for him; having the sling on his right arm, his primary arm, significantly handicapped him in what he could or could not do. He had to use his iPad to write all the notes down for his classes, and he was rather bad at typing when it was just his left hand. He had been unable to practice much in football; while his other teammates were running drills, he had been either benched or at the gym in the school’s athletics center, working on his legs since his arm was no good. Taking a shower, getting dressed, and other miniscule things had become a chore; walking his Pit Bulls, especially, had him worrying more than usual, since he could not rely on his second arm to help keep his girls in line. Then there was also the fact that his funds had decreased quite an amount not being able to work much due to his injury; the most he had been able to do was take inventory of car parts with his phone, and some inspections, with the pay being lower than his usual repair job. Finally, getting to and from school came with its own difficulty since he was unable to drive his motorcycle; while he was glad to have his friend Nazz drive him, every now and then, her schedule would make him either wait for her for long hours, or be forced to take the bus home, instead.

Yes, these past few weeks had been anything but pleasant for him. However, he felt that it would all be worth it if it meant that, after being a good boy and following all the proper procedures to accommodate his injured shoulder into his life, and keep it healing, he would finally be able to get it removed that very day.

“You’re here early.” Nurse Flo said to him. She was smoking a cigarette with the window open, again, and had yet to put on her white coat — her nursing uniform — over her clothes. This let Kevin see the old-school t-shirt she was wearing, with skinny jeans and Converse sneakers. She killed the cigarette and took out some gum from her back pocket. “Although,” she said in the midst of chewing, “I suppose that can only be expected.”

“I wanna get this thing off already.” He said. He went to sit on the middle bed in the room; it had become his usual place whenever he went in there those past few weeks for check-ups, and found it unoccupied.

“Oh come on. It couldn’t have been that bad.” Nurse Flo said as she grabbed her white coat from
inside a long, vertical wardrobe in the room, and began to put it on, on her way over to him.

“Says you. I could barely practice for the past three weeks with this thing on. It was like… *Leg Day* every day. What good are fast feet if my hand-eye coordination is off?” He said. Nurse Flo looked at him with a raised black eyebrow, and an odd form to her lips.

“Leg Day?” She asked. “What the hell is that?”

“It’s when you work-out in the gym and do upper body exercise one day, and then leg-strengthening exercises the other day, to balance things out. That way you don’t look ridiculous with one part overdone.” He explained.

“Ah.” She said. “These kids and their strange new terms nowadays…” She was finally in front of him, and he could feel himself inhale and hold a breath — and even have to fight back looking away — as she went to stretch his collar and pull it enough to allow a view of his right shoulder. He did, however, automatically lean in as he found that when she did not wear her heels, nurse Flo did not have enough height to look at his shoulder with no issues.

His eyes landed on his shoulder. The angry red mark that had been haunting him for weeks, was almost gone. The swelling had reduced immensely and it almost looked as though the red mark was just a flushed spot on his body from blushing or a fever or something — not a shoulder injury, he thought. In his opinion, his shoulder looked good — good enough to let him play in the game.

“Hmm…” He heard nurse Flo hum.

“What?” He asked. It was difficult for him to hide the nervousness in his voice. He was, after all, putting all his hopes into the sling being removed and his being able to play in the football game that evening. It was his last high school Homecoming, one of his most important games before college, and he could not *not* play; as with that would arise a whole set of issues and missed opportunities that he simply did not want to deal with.

Nurse Flo did not answer him immediately, nor directly. Rather, after a few minutes of staring at and feeling his shoulder, she said to him, “I’m going to remove the sling. We’ll do the same mobility exercises as usual.” He nodded.

Nurse Flo removed the sling from his body, and then asked him to stand. Once he did, she asked him to raise his right arm horizontally. He did. She asked him to make small circle rotations that formed into big circle rotations with his arm. He did. Her eyes watched him like a hawk as she asked him to do some more mobility and stretching exercises with his arm and shoulder. During them, she also asked him the same questions as usual.

“How is the pain?”

“ Barely there. I can hardly feel it.”

“Is there friction when you move your joints?”

“Not at all.”

“Does it feel comfortable?”

“Yes.”

“Would you be able to do some pushups for me?”
He positioned himself on a horizontal slant on the ground, and did ten pushups for her. After them, she asked, “Did that hurt?”

“No.”

“Was it hard or easy to do them?”

“Pretty easy. They’re just pushups, after all.”

When he rose once again to his feet, he noticed nurse Flo’s mouth start to move in that wobbly way that meant she was thinking something over in her mind. Usually, it was always in regards to a tough call — meaning, that there was a 50/50 chance that he may or may not be able to finally take off the sling, and play in the football game that evening. He bit the bottom of his lip in anticipation.

Finally, nurse Flo sighed and gave him a lazy look. “Honestly… it’s good enough to let you play today. I’ll probably be seeing you — and several other of your teammates — tomorrow morning for another round of medical care after the game, but… Yeah. You can take it off and play. There’s no denying that.”

“Are… are you serious?” He was feeling the same level of shock that he had on the first day he went to the Nurse’s Office, and nurse Flo joked about him needing an amputation. Except, this time, his shock was from a pleasant surprise; happiness; good news. It was from hearing that all the extra effort he put in those past three weeks to not mess his shoulder up any more, and to make sure that he wore the sling when necessary, had paid off. Finally.

“I don’t recall being in the mood for jokes.” Nurse Flo said. “It’s too early for that, after all, and someone interrupted my smoke.”

Kevin grinned. A wide, toothy grin that stressed out the skin and muscles on his face and almost, almost, registered as creepy for how wide and full of emotion it was. Nurse Flo cringed when she saw it, and was ready to comment on it, until the expression changed to accommodate Kevin’s moving lips as he said, “Hell yeah!” In response, nurse Flo rolled her eyes at him.

“Yes, yes.” She said, rather unenthusiastically. “Congratulations. But like I was saying, that game will probably mess it up even more. I hate to say it, but you’re still in the red zone even if I’m letting you take off the sling. Things aren’t fully healed yet — they’re at just enough. Understand?”

“I get it, I get it.” Kevin said. “I’ll be sure to double-check the padding for my shoulders, then. And I’ll try not to get hit. I swear it.” He knew that what nurse Flo was saying, was true. He knew that she was cutting him a break because he was so eager to play in the game. He knew this, and that was why he would try his hardest in the game that day, to both take his team to victory and get as minimal damage as possible on his shoulder. He did not want that sling back on him so soon, after all — no matter how eager he was to finally get on the football field and play.

“Mmm. I’m gonna trust you.” Nurse Flo said, as she went over to her desk and pulled out from the drawer a pack of cigarettes. “Just don’t fuck this up.”

Like all game day mornings, the football team was given special permission to not attend their classes from 8am to 12:30pm (lunch), for practice. Game days, especially Homecoming games, were huge in Peach Creek for the simple reason that it brought the whole community out together in support of the team. It was a “village” activity, as many people had taken to calling it; meaning that it involved
effort not just from the team players, but also many of those outside of the team. For that reason, not only was the football team missing from their classes, but also were some members of school clubs and associations involved in the execution of the Homecoming game. This involved student government, the cheerleaders, the school band, and so on. However, it was the football team that lasted so many consecutive hours out of class.

Kevin was happy to finally be able to run drills and plays with his teammates. While he had been able to study the patterns the coach spelled out for them, not being able to learn it through muscle memory made it quite hard for him to understand and get comfortable with what it was that he needed to do. So he was very much grateful for the long practice.

It turned out that for the game, the coach and his assistant had come-up with formations based on who had the best upper body strength, and lower body strength and stamina. It was his idea that if a fast runner caught the ball a strong thrower, threw, then they could connect large gaps in between their players, and scatter and leave the other team struggling to connect the lines, themselves. They were focusing on illusion and confusion, and Kevin could feel his insides start to buzz with excitement at the changes.

The coach had taken into account how much leg strengthening he had been forced to do during the time the sling was on him, and put him down as one of his key runners. Suddenly, he was grateful for Leg Day having been every day.

After practice was over, he showered in the locker rooms and then headed to his locker in the high school, to get his books for the next classes. Practice had been great in that type of fulfilling way that came from not caving into the effects of intense workouts, and he found himself unable to stop the small smile on his face as he thought about how he could improve his technique in the few hours between then and the Homecoming game. He found the extra thought and effort into coming up with theories to better execute the new formations, to be one of his favorite parts of the game. While it may not look like it, football involved a lot of mental work — a lot of Physics and mathematics — alongside the physical aspect that people typically saw. It was seeing all his mental calculations come to fruition that Kevin saw that he enjoyed most — he liked being right.

It was as he was on his way to his locker, that he came across Eddward. He was walking from the athletics building and passing the football field, when he noticed the familiar young man carrying a large, cumbersome box with items spilling from the top. In what he had unknowingly, nostalgically noted as “true Eddward fashion”, the young man tripped over his own feet and found himself on the floor, with the contents of the box — a large amount of decorative elements — scattered around the floor.

He would admit that there was a moment of hesitation inside of him, when he thought about going to help Eddward. They had, after all, not spoken to one another since their run-in at Mo and Tasha’s, a little over three weeks ago. Not to mention, there was still a sore spot over how Eddward had taken to his… confession (?) earlier that last day.

Yet at the same time, he knew that he could not avoid the young man forever. Nor could he deny that a part of him had wanted to make contact with Eddward those past three weeks. He had his own questions to ask him, after all; and knew that sooner or later, he would have to.

He took a deep breath and sighed. He went over to where Eddward was picking up the decorations, and put down his backpack next to him, as he went to help him. “Lemme get these.” He said,
announcing his presence.

He had made a point of keeping his head down while he spoke to Eddward, so as not to look up at
his face, just yet. However, this did not stop him from imagining what Eddward may have looked
like in that very moment, as he had spoken to him. Perhaps he was more shocked than he was at the
fact that he had entered the situation to help? Perhaps he was, dare he say it, giving a soft smile as he
accepted the help? Or perhaps he simply had on a neutral expression and saw nothing of it, trying to
keep the interaction as basic as possible? He did not know. He was unable to look up at Eddward,
just yet.

“That… is unnecessary…” Eddward responded with. He was unsure how he felt hearing that, but
continued to help in picking up the pieces and then in the end, stood and put them back into the box.
It was when all the decorations were gathered up ad safely inserted back in, that Eddward said to
him, “Unnecessary, but not unappreciated. I thank you for the assistance.”

It was in that moment that he was finally able to bring himself to look at Eddward’s face. The young
man looked the same as always, and while he had expected his eyes to look at him with the same
cold harshness and superiority that he had the last two times they interacted, he found that not to be
the case. His eyes looked… calm, he would describe them as. It did not look as though he found any
excessive annoyance with his presence.

“You’re welcome.” He said. Eddward gave him a nod, and that seemed to be the end of their
interaction, for Eddward then reached down to pick-up the box and walked past him as he began to
head down the stairs that led down to the football field. Like many times before when he was around
Eddward, Kevin found himself unable to end the interaction there, and chasing after him. When he
fell in step with Eddward, he mumbled, “So, uh…” with no clue what to say next.

“Is there a particular reason why you are following me?” Eddward asked him. As always, he was
quick as ever to pick-up on his, Kevin’s, odd behavior, and make him feel rather idiotic for following
his feelings sporadically, without any reasoning behind it.

“No… I just…” His right hand went to rub at the back of his neck. He sighed deeply. “I kinda
wanna ask what these decorations are for to make conversation, but I already know that they’re for
Homecoming, right?” Eddward nodded; he gave a sigh once more, this one deeper and heavier than
the last. “Honestly, I don’t know what to say. I just feel like I should be talking to you at this point.”

“This is a very inappropriate time to do so, Kevin.” (He noted the odd sense of relief that came from
hearing Eddward say his name. After the morning carpool’s incident with “the young Barr”, this
sounded like—) “I have many duties to attend to in preparation for Homecoming.”

“I can see that. Decorating committee?”

“…More or less.” Eddward said. “Nevertheless, it is all the more evidence to you that I cannot take
time out of my busy schedule today to converse with you. Not unless it is a fleeting conversation like
this one.”

“I know, but— I can’t help but think—”

“I understand what you mean.” Eddward said. They reached the benches for the players of the
school’s various sports teams in front of the bleachers, and Eddward rested the box atop a part of the
wooden surface. “I… know that eventually, you and I shall have to speak about our problems with
one another — as you alluded to, some weeks ago. However, now is quite literally not the time.
Please, do choose a better moment for the discussion.”
“What about tonight?” Kevin asked him, almost immediately.

“Excuse me?” Eddward asked, clearly surprised.

“Tonight. After Homecoming.” He elaborated on. “Are you gonna be there? We can… talk in the parking lot in front of the library, or something. Like—” His voice broke off. He immediately switched sentences. “I can be there. I feel like we should confront this sooner better than later… Is that okay with you?” His hands went deep into his pockets as he shrugged.

Eddward scrutinized him for some time, before finally saying, “You are asking me to remain at school property well into the night. While I am going to be attending the event, there is no telling how long it will take for the football game to end, nor how long it would take you to peel yourself from your peers and family, and make your way to the library. Not to mention, my doings during and after the game, are also a factor. It could be midnight by the time you and I are finally capable of meeting and speaking.”

“I know, I know, which is why—”

“I will be there.”

“Wait… what?” Kevin asked. He looked at Eddward as confused and surprised as he could possibly be.

Eddward gave a sigh, crossing his arms over his chest. “Honestly, are you that ine—” He paused, catching himself, before clearing his throat and instead saying, “I said: I will be there. I have agreed to speak with you after the Homecoming game — be it 12am or 1am, I shall be waiting. However, let it not happen at the parking lot. That place is too much a beacon for mischief, and there is no telling at what time it will be empty. I would prefer it be the steps of the library.”

“That’s… fine with me.” Kevin said. He was still stunned by Eddward’s agreement to meeting up with him after the Homecoming game that night. He had expected him to set his own time and date, which he would have had to adhere to. That did not mean, however, that he was not happy with Eddward’s acceptance. “I’ll try to get there before 12, though. I do got homework after all.”

“As do I. I, too, will try make a strong effort to arrive as early as possible, for this very purpose.”

“Great. So, see you tonight, then?”

Eddward nodded at him, and he felt himself able to part with him, then. He left the area and headed back up the stairs that led to the pathway he had been on before he had spotted Eddward, and noticed that he had left his red backpack sitting on the concrete, for anyone to steal. He mentally scolded himself for being so ridiculous as he went to grab and put on the backpack; and then headed to the cafeteria hoping to have enough time to eat something — the locker forgotten.

The remainder of the day had flown by rather quickly, and before he knew it, it was time for the Homecoming game. He had gone through the usual process of freshening up and putting on his padding and uniform, in a daze of excitement. All he could think about was the rush that would hit him on the field — heart thumping, legs moving, lungs burning, etcetera. The football drills had been great, but simply nothing could hold a candle to the adrenaline rush he got while on the field — nor the buildup before it.
From where he and his teammates left the locker room, at the athletics center about a half-block away from the football field, he could hear the cheering and chatter and life of the crowd, and was glad that his helmet was covering the majority of his face, and that his mouthpiece gave him an excuse to explain why he was smiling so wildly. He felt almost jumpy underneath his skin, and let it out by shaking his hands; allowing the nerves to travel from inside him, down his arms, and to the tips of his fingers.

While the coach and assistant coach were talking and likely giving pointers, he was inside of his own head and psyching himself out. He was running through the plays they did that morning, and then once more in the afternoon. He was adding in his own notes and changes, and basically planning out the game within his own head. He had even taken the last few hours to doing some recon and re-watching of the opposing team’s plays from the past year, and pointing out weaknesses and ways to combat what they might throw at him. He proudly admits to putting more effort into football, than he does the majority of his schoolwork.

It was about five minutes before the start of the game, when he finally tuned in on what was happening around him. He and his teammates were all huddled behind a large, opening banner that they would run through; and over the shouts of the crowd and the people who sat near the edges of the bleachers and could see them, the coach gave them one of his infamous pep-talks.

“Kick ass or get off my team!”

(Short, sweet, and to the point.)

He heard the team name being announced, and they rushed through the banner.

The football game… felt like a blur to him. When it was over, all he could really remember was looking up at the scoreboard and seeing that they had won — barely. It was one of their closest calls in the history of his being on the team. So close, in fact, that he had been surprised to see that they overcame the tie and when they had fallen behind in points, and actually somehow secured victory.

 Needless to say, while the crowd cheered at their victory, afterwards, in the locker room, the coach told them how disappointed he had been watching them during the game. He said he had never seen so many mistakes in an opening game, and that the rest of their season had better not look like it did that day. He threatened to replace the worst of them with freshman, even, saying that they could do a far better job than some of the guys who had been on the team for over a year.

Inside, he was secretly glad that his father was at work and had been unable to see the game at all, because the last thing he wanted was for his father to see him and his teammates in such a sorry state.

In the locker room, after the coach left and as he bathed, the agitation of his teammates was clearly visible. Many of them had started mumbling and cursing, and one or two looked ready to start a fight with another player whom they had said had caused more mess ups in the game than any of the rest of them. He left the locker room, however, just as one player grabbed onto the shirt collar of another — over an argument in regards to knocking into one another and forcing the ball out of their hands — and a fight looked fully ready to break-out.

It was around 11pm when he finally reached the steps of the library. On his way there, he had contemplated whether or not he should follow through on his talk with Eddward. He felt himself in a bad mood from the results of the football game just now, and was not sure how this would translate
into his feelings. He wanted to do the talk with a clear head, after all. However, when he got there, he noticed that Eddward was already sitting on the steps waiting for him, and knew that it was too late; his hopes of having the talk on another day had rested on whether or not Eddward would be in attendance and how that could be turned in his favor for an excuse.

When he was close enough for Eddward to hear him, the blue-eyed young man raised his head. The steps of the library were illuminated by the lights outside of the building, making it easy for one another to see each other. From there, he was able to see some people still left-over in the parking lot nearby, where he had originally suggested that he and Eddward meet.

“Greetings and salutations, Kevin.” Eddward said, standing from the steps. He put his cellphone away to the inside of his jacket, where Kevin theorized a pocket lay, and began to pat at the back of his pants.

“Hey.” He responded back. His voice did not sound as enthusiastic as he wished it to be, but he supposed that there was no helping it.

Eddward seemed to pick-up on his odd mood, instantly. “If you would like, we could talk another time.” He suggested.

“No, no.” He replied back. “I’ll get over this eventually, but… I wanna do this now.” He went to settle himself on the steps of the library. As he still had his backpack and extra duffle bag on him, he took them off of his shoulders and rested them right next to him; where he was certain not to lose them. Eddward did not sit at the steps, but remained standing, staring down at him.

“Are you certain?” Eddward asked. While he did not sit, he did lean against the stone pillar of the steps’ thick, stone railways; with one knee bent and foot pressed up against it, and his arms crossed over his chest. His face remained passive.

“Yeah. I am.” He replied back.

“In that case, what shall we talk about first?”

Chapter End Notes

I think that from now on, Monday updates are gonna be early in the day, and Friday updates in the afternoons. That's a nice balance, don't you think?

(The irony in this is deadlier.)

Next Chapter: "The Talk" — one of many more to come.
I feel awful that it's been so long since I updated this, especially since there was technically no work to be done until the chapters hitting the 20s! Life got away from me so fast — my own moopiness towards my writing hit as well, and I've spent a very long time contemplating where I want to take it. I thought deeply about what was keeping me from writing — and then more specifically on what was keeping me from updating this story.

Simply put, the original plot sucks. I know some of you have read it on my FFN account and could try and say otherwise, but even back then I wasn't comfortable with the plot because I thought a lot of elements were missing — most importantly, the reason behind Eddward's behavior was terribly weak. You see, the new chapter I actually have to write for this story goes into Eddward's background, and I have FOUR versions of it, with none of them being satisfying to write or read. Even back when I was plotting the story out, I didn't quite pinpoint a rational history my this Eddward. That really obliterated all of my motivation to continue this story as that history became a hurdle I couldn't seem to jump over... Goodness, I even considered abandoning/deleting the story altogether.

By now anyone reading this is wondering where I'm going with this diatribe. Well, I now have a good history for Eddward, and plan to revise the later chapters to best fit in these takes! THIS MEANS THAT FROM HERE ON OUT THERE WILL BE A DIVERGENCE FROM THE "ORIGINAL" MATERIAL THAT CAN BE FOUND ON MY FFN ACCOUNT (link in my profile, if you're interested in reading that to get the "Route A" of this saga).

I'm really excited about this as it allows me to put more realistic drama, and not have this tiff between them drag on and on and on, and better explore the growing pains in "risky" relationships! I hope that interested readers will be excited as well to see what gets cooked up — I promise I won't disappoint~!

Anyways, that's enough of this long note, haha. I'll try to go back to the original Monday and Friday update schedule, but may play around with the days as I get chapters done. There will definitely be an update a week though, so be sure to check back! (I also apologize in advance if I do miss updates, I'm warming up and getting into the swing of things again!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Do you hate me or something?” Kevin asked, straight to the point.

“Hate you? Whatever would make you assume that?” Eddward asked.

He looked down at Kevin from where he stood leaning against the stone railway of the library steps. He could manage to see Kevin due to the minimal lighting posted outside of the library, and along the top of the doorway. Lighting of which he knew would remain on until about 3am, part of the
reason why he had purposely changed the area of their meeting. In all honesty, he would have much rather preferred to have that talk another day, but sooner was better than later; and this fiasco and tension between him and Kevin had already taken up much of his time and patience.

“Oh, I dunno...” Kevin said to him; not attempting to hide the easily recognizable signs of sarcasm from his person. “With everything you’ve told me about how you’ve… felt, it only kinda makes sense that you hate me.”

“Kevin Barr, you are quite foolish.” He responded in turn. “Of course, I already knew this.” (He briefly played at a smug grin on his face, quite pleased with himself and the facial reaction he got from Kevin, as he continued to look down at the young man before him.) “I do not hate you. I may find your presence and actions intrusive on a level that make me wish our paths had never crossed, however, this does not mean that I hate you. Hate is such a very strong word, and so far I have yet to meet anyone who has garnered that reaction from me.”

“In truth, I had believed you to hate me until your… remark, some weeks ago…”

He could see on Kevin’s face the beginnings of a blush. He, himself, felt the topic to be blood-pumping, but held back the feeling of embarrassment and hesitancy as he pushed forward. He was uncomfortable with it, yes, but if he was to stay-up until the wee hours of the night conversing with the young man before him, he was certain to get his time’s worth.

When Kevin did not look ready or willing to move the conversation forward, he said, “Tell me: What you said — was it the truth or just a mistake led on by a moment of fury?”

It took some time for Kevin to respond. During this time, Eddward did not push for him to hasten himself with his response; something he certainly would have done, had it been any other time. Not now, he said to himself. This requires time and patience. Allow it.

“I… don’t even know.”

He was unable to hold back the turn of his head and roll of his eyes and sigh of his chest as he heard this. This situation was delicate and required patience, yes, but that did not mean that he was capable of giving it when Kevin seemed keen on using recycled phrases. At that point, he could not shake the feeling that he knew what would transpire in that conversation, and become much less enthusiastic towards it.

“Hey!” Kevin said, raising his voice. “Give me a break here. This ain’t exactly easy for me to put together, ya know!”

“It is also of utmost difficulty to listen to a broken record.” He responded.

Kevin sighed. Eddward knew that that was a sign that this conversation was taking a turn for the more unpleasant, and that they were not necessarily making any progress — in whatever direction it was that they were aiming for, because even he did not know what was the goal for this conversation. He assumed it was to air out grievances and start the process of… perhaps, reworking the relationship? He was unsure. All he knew was that, currently, the conversation was not going in a positive direction.

Eddward watched Kevin remove his red snapback from his head, and run his hands through his red-orange hair — signs of even greater frustration, he knew. When the snapback was back in its place, Eddward prepared himself for another wave of conversation.

“I don’t think I’ll ever be able to figure out why,” Kevin said to him.
“How convenient…” He could not help but reply. Kevin’s eyes immediately lowered into a glare as he stared up at him. He looked down at Kevin for a few moments, before looking away and giving his own sigh. “Your lack of understanding frustrates me. I want answers, after all, and it does not seem as though you are… capable of giving them to me.”

He pushed off of the stone wall, and prepared himself to leave. He regretted having high hopes for that talk. From the moment of its inception, he felt himself actually eager to finally converse with Kevin and get the answers that he had been begging for ever since the day Kevin first kissed him, about three years ago. It was why he had agreed to remain on school property at such a ridiculous time. He, more than anything, wanted answers.

Yet, perhaps… he should not have been so expectant of the situation. It is Kevin, after all…

“Wait.” He could hear Kevin stand to his feet, and felt him when he grabbed onto his hand. He immediately removed his hand from Kevin’s grip, and turned to him, ready to spew his annoyance at being touched by him since in recent times, that had never led to a good thing, but was made silent by Kevin’s, “Sorry. That probably wasn’t a good thing, right?”

“…Correct.”

“It’s just… you’re so quick to walk away from situations,” Kevin said to him. “At least give me a chance to put my thoughts together. Like I said, it’s not easy. And I know it annoys you but… things like this don’t come together in a day.”

“You have had three years, Kevin,” he responded. “Are you to tell me that after all of this time, you still have no… beginning of an idea as to why you have repeatedly… kissed me?” Saying that word in front of him was something that he was certain he would never get used to. It seemed to bring up from the depths of his mind all the emotional torment he had felt on the two separate occasions when Kevin had invaded his personal space, out of lack of controlling whatever desires he may hold. That unpleasantness was something he would never quite get used to.

Kevin was silent, yet again. He could feel himself start to grow angry and frustrated and tired, yet again. He turned to walk away and leave, yet again.

“I just… maybe… I do… like you…” Kevin said to him. The response was not quite what he had been expecting — an eloquent and well-thought-out response that gave him all of his answers in a single paragraph was more to his taste — however, it was enough to make him stop and listen. It was something, after all.

“Such as you screamed at me some weeks ago?” Eddward asked.

“Yeah. Maybe. I don’t really know. Inside… inside it’s all a mess and when I think about you…” Kevin paused, sighing. He hoped it was to reconvene on his thoughts and find something accurate or close to what he felt. “It… it’s not romance. At least, I dunno— I don’t think of kissing you as something romantic. I’m not attracted to you like that. It’s more like… What you did just got that from me because the first time… the first time you worried over you and you were happy and you had worried so much about me and that felt nice… and the second time… I think, I was just happy seeing you again. And having you worry over me — I was just happy to have you around… I think.”

“Do you kiss everyone who worries over you?” Eddward did not like the responses he was getting from Kevin. Rather than clarity, he was becoming more and more confused. Kevin’s current actions were… disagreeable.

“Of course not.” Kevin said; somehow he seemed more… confident? He was unsure. However, he
was certain he could see an immediate attitude change in Kevin; from the shy, rather soft-spoken and unsure man that he had seen but a few seconds ago. While Kevin’s response had made him confused, it seemed to be a breakthrough for Kevin, himself. As though the pieces were finally forming in his mind — as though he found something he could finally stick with.

“Then why—”

“It’s different with you. I really can’t explain it— err… I can. In some way, I can. I just don’t know if… if it’ll cause a freak out…”

“…From you, or from myself.”

“…Probably me…”

“Good lord…” He mumbled. He brought his hand up to play with the hairs at the back of his neck, that always seemed to stick out from under his beanie, despite all of his hair being tied up in a bun. The short little neck-hairs became his focus for a few seconds as he contemplated what to do next.

He could feel himself… scared of moving the conversation forward. He felt as though they were past a gate of importance, meant to warn others from what was deep inside, and now— Now there was nothing stopping them from going forward. He could feel it. He would be able to get some valid answers going on, but now that he was almost there, he asked himself: Do I… still want to know? He could feel his nerves building up, and his body start to break out in chilling goosebumps caused not by the air around him.

You have been begging for this Eddward, and now that you are finally to get it, you choose to turn your back? He asked himself. How cliché and feeble-minded…

“Tell me,” he said in the end. “It may cause you and I some discomfort or pain, however… I feel that it is necessary. Logically… this is why we are both here, is it not?” His voice was soft and his eyes half-lidded with his own uncertainty. He did not think in that moment. He let his mouth move and create words seemingly on its own. Now was not a time to think and hesitate — action was the call.

It did take some moments of silence to get there — in which he found himself unable to look at the young man standing in front of him, and instead settled his gaze on the parking lot patrons that he could still see were there — but after some five or so minutes of solid, seemingly impenetrable silence, Kevin spoke.

He spoke without stopping.

“Don’t hate me for this. Seriously, man, don’t hate me. I barely understand this shit myself and it makes no sense because — fucking dammit — how? But… but… I know — hell if I do, but I do — that with you… shit is different. Different, yeah. Different. Like I said, I don’t see you as like… a girl. Ya’ get what I mean? Like you’re… attractive and all — or whatever — but you’re not my type like that. Nah. Not really for me. But… I can’t help but think— you’re kinda… cute? Ah, fuck. Fuck this. Damn. Shit. No. Wait. I got this. I’ll finish. Look, it’s just… you’re cute. Not you physically — like I said, you’re not my type like that — but it’s just… the shit you do. The way you act. The way you speak. You’re a huge dork, yeah — still are even after all of these years. But you’re not a dork like the other two. The other two still piss me off. Especially Eddy. But you? You… you don’t. I don’t think you ever have. You’re smart and helpful and can actually be pretty cool and your level of dorkiness is different than theirs. Like… the way you act. Yeah, that’s it. The way you act — the way you’ve always acted. You just… act nice. Not ‘nice’ as in you’re a good person nice, but as in… I like how you act. It appeals to me. I like it, yeah. Does that make sense? Fuck that probably makes no sense. Whatever. I’m done caring. Thing is: I like how you act. I like
how you are. I like the things you do and how you react to things and how you start things and how you can do so many things. I like how you’re smart and dorky and do shit all the time, but you’re always the one to clean things up and help others and just… Ah, dammit. I like you. Okay? I like you. Even the bull-headed shit you’ve recently been doing, I like. Because it’s like… you, but just a different part of you. And I can’t help but want to get close to you… and be with you more and see more of the shit you do and, like… Yeah. I just wanna be with you. Not in that way! But you know… yeah…”

He took a step back.

Watching and hearing Kevin as he said all that, with about a hundred facial expressions occurring in the time he presented him with such a long… confession — admittedly his style — overwhelmed him, he would admit. He needed to take a step back and breathe a little. He needed time to process everything that had been said to him. He needed… air. He needed to breathe — he had started to hold his breath partway through that, and it was only then that he realized it. Almost in the same way that he would hold his breath when he went to try the jump over the river— except… maybe… metaphorically… now he had made it across?

“I…” He spoke without even thinking. He did not know what to say. Yet he was compelled to speak — and he said: “I am scared…” He could feel his demeanor and confidence and shell crack at the end of his two words. He positioned his hands to grab onto the opposite arms, and hold himself tight. He could feel himself shaking. He bit harshly onto his bottom lip. He wanted to coil himself in as much as he could to hold himself together and keep himself from… crying? Did he want to cry? He was unsure. He just needed… not to fall apart.

“Edd?”

“Do not touch me!” He yelled.

Kevin had taken a step towards him, and he now took three back. He needed distance. He needed not to be near this person at the moment.

“I do not want you near me…” He said, lower. His rational mind told him that if he screamed louder again, the patrons in the parking lot may hear and come investigate what all the noise was about. The last thing he wanted was more people. In fact, he needed less people. One less. Whether that person be himself or Kevin, was of no concern; for either way, he would not be in that current situation.

“Please, just… do not come close to me…”

The expression on Kevin’s face read of forlorn anger. Sadness. Tragedy. Hurt— hate, perhaps, even? Frustration? Tears? He could not pinpoint any one emotion. It was all a mixture of negative intensity, saturating his eyes and face, and perhaps even his body. He, Eddward, inhaled sharply. It was too much to look at.

Then he watched red begin to spread over Kevin’s face like watercolor; tinting his skin, and getting darker and darker as Kevin clenched his jaws and his fingers — and his nerves — and looked ready to yell and scream at him. He looked ready to punch and kick him. Dare he go as far to say that Kevin looked ready to kill him? However… he watched all of it fade. He watched Kevin’s hands go up to his face; he inhaled; exhaled; shook his shoulders; shook his head; his body clenched. He could see that besides himself, Kevin was feeling his own turmoil at that moment.

Yet he could not bring himself to show his care and worry at this. He was not stable enough to shove all of his own feelings down his throat, and show concern for the other half in this predicament.

Kevin moved his hands down his face, and he could see tints of red in his eyes, and signs of moisture
along his cheeks. While he had been struggling to keep back his own tears, Kevin had started to cry. Not just cry, but also — “Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck… fuck!” — curse.

“What the hell, man? What the hell?! This isn’t okay. This shit is not… fuck. Fuck me. Fuck you. Fuck this…” He slumped down to the ground; knees bent, head in between, arms over. The other, Eddward, looked away; he could not continue looking.

He could feel his own tears start to fall down his face, eventually, after being subjected to hearing Kevin’s sobs and whimpers and sharp inhales to stop his own. He covered his mouth to not let these same sounds be heard. He was shaking even worse, now. The situation had escalated far beyond what he had wanted it to. He wished he could go back and stop Kevin from speaking. He wished he had not urged the man to tell him the whole truth. He wished… he wished he did not find a confession such as that, to be so frightening.

“I need to go,” he finally said, voice watery and weak and unsure and hesitant yet eager — oh so very eager to leave and go back into a comfort zone.

He said that, and began to walk — only stopping when he felt another person’s warmth on him. Immediately his alarms went off. He could feel an entire body pressing up against him from behind, and his heart raced, and his body shook, and he needed that other body away. He was fully prepared to turn and even yell and scream at Kevin to get away from him, but was stopped when Kevin said, weakly, “Come on, Eddward… don’t walk away. You’ve done that a lot already and it does… nothing. Just— stay. Don’t leave. Not now… Please.”

He did not know what to respond. “I am scared…”


“I… d-do not feel comfortable talking about this.”

“You act as if I felt comfortable. That was one of the worst things I’ve ever had to do…” Kevin said. “And you made me do it, so now… Talk. Be fair and talk.”

He did not want to. Talking would mean confronting and he already felt as though he had confronted a lot — much more than he had the capacity to take — and to talk more and confront more… He could not. He simply could not. Yet, he could not deny what Kevin had said. Kevin had been made to talk by him — made to confront his insides, by him. It was truly, honestly and wholeheartedly, only fair.

As badly as he wanted to be selfish, he could not escape that.

He did not want to speak. “I am scared.” He hated speaking about things like that. “What you said is scary — it is the worst!” He really, really hated how his emotions boiled over. “I just… so much stuff. This is not good. It is not good at all.” He hated how his voice cracked and wavered, when he spoke. “I… I have been through his before, okay? A situation like this. Not good. It ended terribly.” His body was shaking even worse. “I do not want to go through that again. It hurt.” Oh good lord, he felt as though he were going to vomit. “I do not want to hear that or go through that again! It is scary and frightening and I hate-hate-hated it when I went through it and I might not get as lucky as last time and have things end up well and just-just-just—!” He was a crying, disorganized mess.

“Eddward? Hey, Edd! Please calm down.” Kevin was in front of him, now. His hands went up to touch his face, and he could feel the pads of Kevin’s fingers as he ran them across his skin and wiped at his tears. He immediately felt the nostalgia of the situation.
“A-are you…” He started, weakly. “G-g-going to kiss me again?” He was scared to ask.

“No. No. Not at all.” Kevin said; still wiping at the tears — the increase of them that had come when he asked that question. “I don’t wanna scare you like that anymore. Now that I know how it hurts you even more, I don’t ever wanna do that.” Kevin’s green-hazel eyes widened. “I-is… is this okay?” He asked, tentatively.

Eddward thought about it logically. “…This is fine…” He paused. Kevin’s hands were still on his face, wiping at the tears and tear spots still there, and as he had been staring at Kevin’s own face while he did this, he could not help but say, “You have your own tears, you know… you do not have to tend to mine…”

There was the hint of a smirk on Kevin’s lips. Perhaps it was to lighten the mood and try to bring back a sense of normalcy to the anything-but situation?

“I’ll take care of mine in a bit. But first, you—”

“Foolish idiot,” he said, cutting Kevin off. He removed himself from Kevin’s reach, and while the young man stood shocked — scared, watching — he reached into the inner pocket of his jacket, and pulled out a travel size packet of tissues. He opened the little plastic package and took out one tissue, and went to wipe at the tears on Kevin’s face. His face was neutral as he did this. “You are so… Take care of yourself, for once.”

“Why?” Kevin asked; he could see him trying to hide some positive level of surprise as he spoke. “Does it make you… worry?”

He finished cleaning Kevin’s face, and then put the tissue away, and got a second to clean his own. As he did this, he calculated in his mind how to respond. “…I suppose that would result in you getting… excited, would it not?” It seemed to take some time for Kevin to understand what he meant, but when he did, the red-haired adolescent had eyes wide with shock and a face painted pink.

“I-I said I don’t think of you that way!” He exclaimed; out of more embarrassment than anger, he was sure.

“Which is quite difficult to believe, mind you.” (He could feel himself having been able to recover. While his body was still shaking, the tremors were of less scale and visibility than before. His heart was still pounding, but he could keep his voice calm. He was in a better mindset, for some reason — he assumed the tear-wiping had been a good distraction. Just what he needed to get back, steadily, on his feet and recreate the barriers around him that kept him together.) “Everything that you said… sounds as though you do think of me romantically. Or something akin to that… As… uncomfortable as it makes me, that is what I think.”

“I know what it sounds like. But you gotta trust me when I say that it’s not like that. Like kissing you is one thing, but I seriously think that’s all I can do with you. And it’s not like I can do it at any moment. Like right now? Right now I don’t feel the… urge to get near you intimately and kiss you,” Kevin said.

“I know. You said you would not in favor of my feelings.”

“Yeah. That and… I dunno. You’re cute and all — even crying — but now… doesn’t feel like the right time. I don’t feel that urge. It feels like the right buttons haven’t been pushed, or something.”

“…How easy it is for you to admit your thoughts of me. What a change,” he observed.

“Well… it still feels weird to say — to admit — but I feel like I gotta, you know? I might as well
continue on and be honest to make things go easier for the two of us. Do you understand?"

Eddward nodded. He did. He even felt grateful towards it, as odd as it may seem. Full honesty would help him to decipher, process, and cope.

They went silent.

A lot had happened within the span of — he looked down at his wrist-watch, and saw that it was just past 11:30pm — a half-hour. He felt himself having gone through a big emotional change that seemed to suck away at his life force. He felt tired. Fatigued. He wanted to go home — not to avoid Kevin, but rather, to lie down and hopefully get some sleep and then… to rest. He needed to rest and renew in the hopes of being able to tackle the remainder of this situation, better, the following day.

“I need to go home.” He finally said.

“Running away again?” Kevin asked him. He looked forward at the young man, contemplating how to act next. He wanted to make a snippy comment, but felt that that was not the right thing to do. For, in truth, he knew that Kevin said that out of his own fear; thinking he was trying to run away again.

“Not at all,” Eddward responded. “It is as you have said: That accomplishes nothing. I am just… very tired from all of this. The weight of the day has finally started to fall on me, too. I just wish to rest until the next day.”

“…I can feel ya on that,” Kevin said, visibly relaxing, yet giving a roll of his shoulder. “I’m tired, too. I feel like I need to sleep for a hundred years.”

“That would certainly be nice. Maybe then I can wake-up and—”

“Forget all this happened?”

“—be able to understand this situation better. You are quite the frustrating person, Kevin Barr,” he said. This time, Kevin grinned. He seemed proud to hear him say that. In return, he sighed; annoyed. “You certainly jump back from situations quickly. You were crying but a few moments ago.”

“So were you.”

“I am still not fully recovered.”

Kevin paused.

“How long do you think before… you feel better?”

“…Not long,” he said. “I at least have managed to collect myself faster than it took last time. That is a good sign that the rest of me will come together in little to no time.”

“If you say so,” Kevin said. A moment later he added, “I hope so.”

Silence.

“So… how are you gonna get home?” Kevin asked him.

“My car, of course.”

“…Can I get a ride?”

Silence.
“Very well, then. It seems that is only appropriate and the right thing to do in this situation. Please get your backpack. We leave now.”

Chapter End Notes

I was GOING to put the original FFN note here, but upon reading it I realized that it... no longer fits with the plot, so~

How about that drama? That, uh, confession(?). They’re both non-hetero disasters...;;

**Next Chapter:** Eddward may have had a difficult time conversing with Kevin, but there's someone he'll always have an easy time talking with.
Chapter Notes

I'll try to integrate my revisions as smooth as possible. This is the first chapter with a very visible difference from what I had originally planned, and really has me happy about the direction I'll be taking this story in. Again, you can read Route A (as I'll be calling my original version of this story) on my FFN account!

Now, focusing on THIS chapter, I want to say that it's a really nice little exposition chapter. It's all dialogue, but I think that's a good fit for a scene that's literally only a phone conversation in the middle of the night.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Marie… Do you… can we talk?”

“Edd? Is that… ergh, is that you? Dude, what the— frick! It’s like… one in the morning…”

“I know—forgive me. I did not want to wake you, but… I need to talk to you, Marie. Something awful just happened to me. I was hoping I could keep it in until the morning, but I want to get this out now so maybe I feel a little better? Forgive me, please do—but can you indulge me again on this?”

“Of course! Agh, oops, almost woke them up… Do you need me to go over there? Or are you gonna come over?”

“Over the phone, please. I do not have the strength to go over right now.”

“Okay. Just give me a second to get out of our room.”

“Take your time.”

“…”

“…”

“Ugh. There. I’m in the living room. I swear I hate when Lee cuddles up to me. She’s light, but she’s so heavy when she’s asleep.”

“I do somewhat wish I could go over now and sleep with you all. Maybe the physical support would be better—but I do not know if I can stomach having someone touch me right now.”

“…It really doesn’t sound good what happened to you, Edd. Now I’m really getting worried. Tell me what happened.”

“I… now I think it would be better if I put this to bed and did not think on it anymore.”
“Please, Edd. What happened? Did anyone hurt you?”

“Kevin… Again, it was Kevin.”

“Kevin?! That idiot! When’s he gonna stop messing with you already? I thought he’d be too busy being a cheerleader to even think about you today—but morons always find a way, it seems. That numbskull!”

“Edd? Edd are you still there.”

“I am, I am—just… a lot is going on in my mind right now.”

“Just talk it through—if you can. You don’t have to say anything if it bothers you too much.”

“No, no, I want to let this out. It is just… difficult for me. I want it to clear my head. Give me a moment… I am so sorry for being like this. He and I have so many issues that it taxes my mind when I think of them, and sometimes I… I just need answers. That is what I went to him today for—answers. I needed to hear what he had to say so that I can move on. Or rather… that was what I was hoping would happen—answers and a clear mind, stupidly.”

“Okay. Air it out.”

“I… I think I egged him on more than I should have. Maybe I should have left things as they were? He was honest—from what I could tell—and I was made to be more honest than I was comfortable with…”

“It was not the greatest thing to happen.”

“Edd… you know I barely understood what you just said, right? I get that you and Kevin had some sort of… ‘honest hour’, but I don’t really know what happened. And I want to help you through this since I can already tell that it hurt you a lot, but you gotta be more clear.”

“…”

“Edd?”

“…Right, sorry.

“It scares me when you apologize this much.”

“It… started yesterday afternoon. I had not spoken to Kevin since we ran into each other at Mo and Tasha’s, but today while I was helping to set-up for Homecoming I tripped while carrying a box of decorations, and Kevin helped me to pick them up. I wonder how long he had been waiting there, and if he was hoping I would trip so he could talk to me?”

“He must’ve been in a chipper mood or something to help you. Or do you think it was pity? Or could it be… does he—”

“—have a heart?”

“Marie…”

“I can hear you smiling. You found that funny.”
“…Moving on. After he helped me pick the decorations up, I thanked him and then tried to go on my way. He followed me and tried to make conversation. I confronted him on that—I could feel he wanted something from me, and I did not want to listen to him. Especially not in the middle of working. So he asked me to stay after Homecoming to have a talk then.”

“Sounds like you should’ve just went home and skipped the game like you said you would.”

“I did not attend the game at all. Eddy basically told me the game was over by texting me that he had lost some money because of the results—I know I would not have been able to sit still in the stands.”

“Yeah, waiting like that would nauseate you for sure.”

“At first I was not going to accept his proposal, but I ended up agreeing because at the time I wished this whole… thing between us to end badly enough to go against my better judgment. I felt that agreeing and finally talking with one another would help that.”

“—I really should not have done that.”

“I’m here for you, Edd. I’m listening. Go on.”

“Marie, he told me… he told me that he… liked me.”

“There’s a shock. As though that wasn’t plainly obvious from the two times he’s kissed you already—I guess he really is going through a second sexual awakening. I always knew he had to be gay or bi or something. A deep in-the-closet type, though.”

“…!”

“O-oh no…”

“He did not speak of his sexuality, much, haha… Well… he did say that he did not find me appealing in the way that he finds girls attractive—finally, some relief! I just… wish I did not seem to be the exception to his otherwise heterosexual existence. Perhaps that really is my best talent?”

“Do you want me to break his other arm? Because I will! I’ll even accept jail time for it!”

“I do not think violence is the right solution in this case.”

“You’re—fudge. It worked last time, so I can make it work aga—”

“Marie, please… just stop for a second…”

“Okay, Edd, I’m sorry, I… I’m just sorry…”

“…He… did make an attempt to explain himself. He was very keen on saying that what he liked was my behavior. He specifically mentioned how his feelings towards me started to… change back when I tutored him. How I would… openly care for him. I got this feeling that the moment he… ugh… fell for me, was when we… You know, I told you he and I had a heart-to-heart one day, and then he started making progress on his tutoring.”

“Right. You never went into detail about it.”

“It will never be my business to tell.”

“And I respect that. Go on.”
“He said he even liked me despite how I have been treating him lately—I thought purposely treating him badly would make him hate me.”

“So not only is he gay but he’s a masochist too. What a mess.”

“…Then came the horrifying thing.”

“What could be more horrifying than—”

“He openly admitted to wanting to be with me.”

“…”

“…What?”

“He said that he wanted to be with me more. Not in that ‘romantic’ way he prattled on about not feeling for me—trying to convince himself as much as possible that he does not see me as a girl. He tried to make it seem like what he was really after was a friendship between us two—ha! Hard as he did, he failed miserably. I could still sense that he wanted me as a girlfriend.”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“Marie? Marie, are you still there?”

“…”

“…I’m still here, Edd. Yeah. I’m still here. I’m getting more annoyed, but I’m still here.”

“This isn’t about me, though. I can deal with my shit— Sorry. My ish. Later. I know stuff like that isn’t your favorite thing to hear. How did you take it? What happened after he said all that?”

“I had a panic attack. I could not hold myself together. I started projecting. He sounded like— My days of hiding under the bed are over! I wish he had just said he was confused, but had a clear head now, and wanted to be regular friends—I would have preferred that so much more! I tried to leave, but he would not let me. He got me to feel bad for him. He said I always ran away and that never solved any of our problems; he was right, I knew he was right; so I stayed and listened, hoping that maybe the situation could be salvaged somehow; hoping that despite the start, our conversation could end well.”

“I should have ignored him and just left. I think I made him think that… we could be more? I let him take control of me again! I… I feel so emotionally drained and scared for tomorrow. I do not want to see him at school. Still, I feel as though I am overreacting and maybe things will not be as bad as I am making it all out to be—but I do not want to take that risk.”

“You’re really freaked out by this.”

“How can I not be? Kevin was… he was… I… I liked him. Not as he does me, but I still liked him; I wanted to have his confidence for such a long time; he was my model for throwing aside that… girlish persona I had worn back when— Ugh, I want to stop thinking about this. I wish I could get
“drunk.”

“I have some stuff here if you want it…”

“Marie!”

“Okay yeah so we didn’t throw it all out back when you tried to clean up our house, but that’s not the important thing right now! Plus, it could even help you, so what’s all the dad-ing about?”

“…”

“…You want my opinion on this, Edd?”

“Yes. I very much do. Please tell me what to do, Marie, I cannot think of a solution for this on my own. I want to… do so much yet nothing at all.”

“Liar. You already know you shouldn’t do this again—you’ve already said it yourself during our conversation twice. Let me remind you that after Alistair you said you were going to stop looking for toxic relationships like that—how… after you and I broke-up, that you’d start to think long and hard about what the people around you want from you, and what you want from them, and if those things could lead to something healthy? Kevin says he wants to be your friend, and he’s clearly very confused about his feelings towards you, and you know how this story ends.”

“Are you crying? I can hear you sniffling.”

“N-not as much as I could be…”

“…Tomorrow at school you should set your boundaries with Kevin. Clear boundaries. And if you can’t, I’ll do it for you. How do you feel about that?”

“I know… it would be best for me.”

“Can you do it?”

“Maybe? No? I feel worse now than when I called you. I can barely think. I just want this to be over. I want to—”

“I’ll talk to him tomorrow.”

“…I am so sorry. I want to do it myself and not rely on you so much, but I—”

“Stop talking. I know, I know. Just get some rest—and let me sleep over tomorrow. You need it.”

“Please.”

Chapter End Notes

Of the changed dialogue, some were a set of lines that confirmed Eddward's sexuality. I
couldn't find a good way to keep those lines in, so I'll state it here outright: Eddwards falls on the asexual spectrum. However, I have to stress that there will be some give-and-take to this—putting the emphasis on spectrum, so please don't go on reading if you expect him to disengage during all the sexual content that will be present in this story.

What do you guys think about the hints of Eddward's past that I planted here? Ironically, there won't be a direct look at it until literally 11-chapters from now, but there's still plenty of juicy stuff along the way~ This is going to be a very twisted love triangle... square?

Next Chapter: Some things you should do yourself.
You’re doing it again…

She approaches Kevin at the beginning of their gym class, keeping herself as cool and coy as possible. As usual, he is surrounded by a set number of friends as they chat about his healed arm—and to think she had told Eddward she would only need to break the whole one. Fighting a two-armed Kevin would not be easy to do.

No, no, she is not approaching him for a fight. Eddward would be so mad at her… maybe? No, he would be annoyed at the very least, and that would make it more awkward for when she goes to his house later. Should she swing by their favorite pizza place and grab a couple of boxes? Or has Eddward already planned to cook for her? It has been so long since she last ate something made from his kitchen—should she ask him to?

Focus, she tells herself, focus; think of how her night will go when the day ends.

As they notice her incoming presence, the classmates surrounding Kevin audibly ask him if he has done anything to upset her because she is coming their way. He does not answer. She stops just a few steps short of them.

“I need to talk to you after class ends. Please.”

His brow furrows. “Please?” He repeats. She shifts her weight to another foot.

“Yes, please. Are you really gonna get all hung up on me being… respectful?”

“You’re not exactly someone who’s treated me nicely out here.” She notices how he rolls his right
shoulder—she thinks back to that day in the rain when she had slammed him into the ground for assaulting Eddward. Okay, perhaps she has been one of the bigger threats to his health as of late?

“Some things you bring on yourself.” He fully frowns at her reply. She rolls her eyes. “Just agree to talk to me after class—alone.” His friends guffaw at her as though it is incredulous she would even think that they would listen in, but she knows the nosy brats from the various sports team in the school, and boys gossip just as much as girls.

“You can’t—” He stops himself out of nowhere, expression becoming more pondering, leading into a sigh. “Fine. Right after class?”

“Right after class.”

She turns on the balls of her feet and walks away. Her heart is pounding harshly; her nerves starting to catch up with her; some sections of her heart filling with regret.

*You’re doing it again…*

For gym class that day they are doing the finals for their soccer assessment. As per usual, the class is split into two with each side getting to choose their captain. The gym teacher has a pretty good grasp on fairness and therefore puts her and Kevin on opposing teams, with their classmates choosing them as the captains. It is the way the process has gone since they started soccer a few weeks back; of all the students, they have some of the highest physical ability, and her guard as goalie is perfect to go up against Kevin’s powerhouse kicks.

Said kicks should be even more difficult to deal with since he has spent weeks exercising only his lower half and solar plexus due to his arm. She makes a note of that as she stands before him during the coin toss.

“How or tails?” Their teacher asks them.

“Tails,” Kevin chooses.

“Heads.” She bites back an “obviously.”

The flip comes out Tails.

“Do you want to attack or defend?”

“We’ll attack first,” he responds.

Again, she holds back an “obviously.”

“Alright, captains get your teams in line, and let’s have us a good game!”

She starts to brim. With what? Her emotions feel all over the place—is this how Eddward felt last night? At the mention of him, she takes another glance back at Kevin as she heads to her position as goalie. He looks as he normally does; no sign that he had felt as traumatized as Eddward by their conversation last night. She starts to feel prickly. Ah. Is that what her emotions are twisting into? Jealousy and anger? Protectiveness? Fear? She is such a mess…

*You’re doing it again…*

She tries to remain calm during the entirety of the game, but it is clear to herself—and likely the rest of her teammates—that something is off about her. Her engine is so cold. She misses two of the other
team’s kicks and lets them score, putting them ahead in the game by one point. Both times she seems to snap back into the reality of the ongoing scuffle a few inches too late to stop the ball from getting past her. A few of the friends that are on her team ask her if she is okay. She lies and says that she is.

Her mind only gets clearer when Kevin is finally on the attack. What is it about him that infuriates her so much? Why is seeing him streaking past her teammates making her so annoyed beyond the scope of the mock game? He kicks with his left leg, and she reacts at the speed of her usual condition and stops the ball in its tracks. Her teammates cheer.

2-1

“As long as she can hold her own against Kevin we’ll be fine,” she hears one of them say, somehow unable to distinguish their voice between male or female.

She tosses the ball to the front.

The next point is crucial, and she can feel time in the class waning to a close. Adrenaline starts to pump through her—she does not want to lose to him, she does not want to lose to him, she does not want to lose to him.

Would their victory have been secured if she had won the coin toss? Or if the call from that morning had never happened? Or if she was on the frontline of this game, being a striker equal to him? Why is she already thinking they have lost when the entire class is still engaged in the throes of battle? She stands taller, breathes, takes a good stance, and opens her eyes.

Focus, focus.

The ball comes at her, aiming for her head, and she catches it and then quickly sends it to the nearest teammate. She cheers them on internally as the limber girl dances her way through Kevin’s team, only to have the ball stolen from her by Kevin himself. This time one of Kevin’s friends trades some footwork with him and manages to slip the ball from the redhead, then makes a break for their goal. He manages to confuse the goalie and score, and she cheers with the rest of her team.

A few minutes later, at the end of an unsuccessful play by Kevin’s part to get the ball past her, the teacher calls time. “It’s a tie!” No winners or losers in this battle. “Line up and shake hands!”

Her mind is ahead of the class as they go through the cordial proceeding. When she and Kevin shake, her grip is firmer than it had been with everyone else. Normally her mornings would be half-over by the time second period ended, but right now it feels as though it is just beginning.

*You’re doing it again…*

“Skipping the shower?” One of her friends asks her after she tells them that she needs to step away from the group for a moment.

“Skipping the day.”

The girls look at one another. “Something’s up with you today, Marie.” Another said.

“I have a lot on my mind, yeah. So I’m gonna take the day off and chill so I can get better.”

“…It’s not depression, is it?” The third, most social conscious one, asks.

“Nah, nothing serious like that. I just didn’t get enough sleep last night and that’s seriously fucking with me today. I haven’t had a skip day in a while, too.”
“Well, okay, as long as it’s nothing super serious. Get some rest, Mar.” They all give her some goodbyes, and she promises to text when she wakes up from her nap.

She stands by the entrance to the school building after seeing her friends off, in waiting, by the double doors for Kevin and his group to arrive. When they do arrive, his friends look weary once more about leaving the two of them together, but Kevin assures them that there is nothing for them to be so worried over.

“Don’t let her break your arm.” One hits the alternative universe nail on the head.

“Relax, nothing’s gonna really happen. I’ll see you guys in a bit.” The boys leave them, and she turns to head to the corner on the left side of the school building, where they can have some privacy. There they are shaded by the massive brick wall, and perfectly out of sight of the field where some students linger to help the teacher put all the equipment away.

 “…I’m guessing this about Edd.”

“I need you to leave him alone.”

His mood, she feels, takes a turn for the sour. Then it worsens.

“He talked to you about what happened.”

“Yes, and we agreed that it’s better for you to not be near him at all.”

He sucks his teeth.

“I’d rather hear that from him—you know you should’ve said this is what you wanted to talk to me about so I could’ve ignored you. Your bullshit meddling is getting old.”

“Do not cuss at me right now. I’m trying to keep my head cool. And you clearly had an idea of why I wanted to talk to you, but you still came sooo… you can’t blame anyone but yourself right now for being here.”

“If I hadn’t come you probably would’ve shoved my face into the dirt again.” His voice is a bit monotone. She can tell he is not purposely trying to antagonize her. He is honestly hurt. He has the same look in his eyes that she does when—she stops.

“No, of course not… I promised Edd I wouldn’t hurt you. I want to fight you about as much as you want to fight me.”

“Then you do want to hurt me.” She stiffens her posture in surprise and anxiousness. He sighs. “I don’t want to fight you. I’m just getting mad. Did he tell you he said he wouldn’t run away from me again? Tell me how this isn’t him running away?”

“I told him I’d do this for him because he kind of had a panic attack after your chat and was kind of bawling his eyes out over everything. Like what type of friend would I be if I made him face you again? What type of person would you be to make him face that trauma again?”

“Trauma?” His attitude falls, and he wears his sadness on his face. It keeps her from replying in any way. He shakes himself out of it. “Still, I would’ve preferred to actually talk to him about our problems face-to-face.”

“Don’t you think you’ve done enough of that already?”
“Don’t you think you’re overstepping his boundaries—my boundaries? Do you think I feel good right now knowing that he said all that to you? And that my business is now just… out there?”

“It’s not like I’d tell anyone—”

“That doesn’t matter! I didn’t want anyone but me or Edd to know what’s going on between us. It’s… frustrating and embarrassing. It’s private… Jeez, I didn’t think he’d care so little about me to just expose me like that.” She briefly wonders what the tint on his ears and face means. His head hangs forlornly.

“Ugh. Don’t make it out to be such a big deal. It’s not like I’d go around telling anyone that you’re gay.”

He freezes; his eyes widen; the flushing color dissipates.

“I… I’m not… Shut up. Don’t say that again! What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Calm down, I’m not gonna out you or anything—”

“Don’t say I’m fucking gay ever again, I—!” His green eyes are in turmoil. The scene makes her feel awful.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to jump to conclusions like that.”

“Don’t ever—”

“I won’t. I promise.”

He calms down; he looks away from her at the wall beside them. He turns his body so he can rest his forehead against the cool brick.

“Please don’t,” he continues, “because I don’t even know if that’s what happening. And I’d rather talk this out with Edd.”

“Edd doesn’t want to talk to you at all, so just go to someone else about this—find another guy you can explore these… feelings with.”

He straightens up and glares at her. “Marie, I’m getting really tired of you talking to me like you know it all.” She shifts her weight.

“What else can I say to get you to give-up on him for whatever it is that you want?”

“I’ll talk to Edd and we’ll sort this out.” He turns his body to stand firm in front of her. “If he wants me out of his life, he can tell me to my face—because right now him sending you to do his dirty work is a hell of a lot disrespectful to how I feel.”

“It’s not fair that all you’ve done is make Edd cry,” her blood starts to boil, “which would definitely happen again if he had to be near you.”

“It’s not fair to me to have someone else that doesn’t know me come into my face with this… mess. To talk about my business like they were with us when it happened. This is in no way about you Marie, so step out of it. Just because you and Edd dated for a few years doesn’t make you his keeper. He broke-up with you.” He does not know how much his words sting.

“And?!” She exclaims. “So what? I can’t be worried for my friend? I can’t want him to be happy? I can’t be protective? If one of your friends was being hounded by some girl and it was fucking him
up, you’d be in my position right now! Don’t act like it’s anything different!”

How heated is she getting? Her fists are balled up, and the fatigue from the class is starting to catch-up with her. Is it the same for him? Are they both teetering on the edge of letting their tempers explode? He looks at her with eyes sharpened into a glare, frowning, teeth gritted. If one of them takes a step towards the other, what would happen? Who will end up tasting brick first?

“Give it a rest,” he finally replies, “I need you to leave Edd alone? Isn’t that what you said? Not, Edd wants you to leave him alone. You’re only here for yourself.”

“You’re doing it again…”

“I’m not! He doesn’t want to be around you ever again! He said so himself! I even asked him if he felt like he could talk to you about it, and he said he didn’t—and that’s why I’m here.”

“Whatever, Marie.” He starts to walk away from her. She feels a jolt of panic and grasps his left arm as he tries to pass her. “What the fuck, don’t grab me!”

“Say you won’t come near Edd again and I’ll let you go.” Can he hear the desperation in her voice? The unhinged panic that is starting to cloud her mind? She does not feel like herself in the slightest. What is she even doing right now?

He pulls at his arm as forcefully as he can. She digs her feet in the dirt to keep her grip on him, stabilizing it with her other arm.

“You’re acting like a fucking psycho!”

“Just say it!”

The next thing she knows, her back thumps against the brick wall as Kevin gives in to her momentum and uses it to slam her backwards. Her head hits the wall just hard enough to make her gasp, and her instincts have her see red. Who cares if she hits him a little? Eddward will forgive her, she is certain of it.

Without allowing either of them to think, she lets go of him with her left hand only to bring it across swiftly and punch him in his face. He jostles. She kicks one of his knees back to get him off his balance, and then dumps all of her weight on him to tackle him down onto the grassy ground. She pulls an arm back to punch him again but is forced to pause.

He is not doing anything to stop her. If she were in his position, she would have tried to kick her attacker in the gut. He lays beneath her, eyes making contact with hers, watching what she will do next—wanting more proof.

She grits her teeth but cannot stop the tears from beginning to fall. They land on his face and neck before she sits back against her hips and starts to wipe at them with her hands as quickly as she can. What is she doing? What is she doing? Is this not one of the things she told Eddward she would not do? How annoyed is he going to be when he hears that she punched his crush?

Eddward does not know it, but he has a crush on Kevin; all of the boys of Eddward’s past have been prominent crushes that put him through a cycle of torment. She knows he would not be feeling so much grief over what to do about his and Kevin’s relationship if there was not so much at stake. There is always a checklist to these things—formed from patterns she pondered over during her own moments of heartache—and for Eddward to be the way he is, Kevin must have hit them all.

She needs him to stay away from Eddward. She really does.
“Please, just…” Her voice comes out weakly—can he even hear her? “Leave us alone…” Leave me and the man I love alone, so you cannot take him from me. It simmers within her.

A moment of silence passes. It is broken by the bell for the next period. She gasps—Eddward would be expecting her at his locker, hoping to hear that her talk with Kevin went as planned. She scrambles to get off of him, clawing at the grass to get in position to lift her feet. He stops her by grabbing onto one of her arms, but much less tightly than she had done. She cannot look at him, and swiftly turns her head away as he talks.

“This thing you have with Edd… it means shit to me.”

That makes her angry enough to snap her wrist from his fingers, and then hurriedly stand and make a run for the entrance around the corner. Her mind is a mess, a mess, a mess.

_You’re doing it again…_

How late is she? When she spots him at his locker, he seems to be in good shape; dressed impeccably as always; a little brighter in the face than she had expected; seeing him calms her heart. Still in her gym uniform, she approaches.

“Hey, Edd,” she says in her usual casual tone, trying to keep it natural. “How’s your day going?”

“Marie, why are you still dressed for your gym class?” He questions her with a lifted threaded eyebrow. Did he get them done that morning? The skin still seems a bit red.

“Early spa?”

“It helps clear my mind.”

“Well staying in my gym uniform does the same for me,” she jokes. He shakes his head with a small smile on his face as he finishes switching the books out in his locker, and then closes it. “I just finished talking with Kevin—I took care of it.” The dirt streaks on her face and knees were wiped clean, her puffy eyes were patted down with a wet napkin, her messed up hair was fluffed into a more expected style for her. Yes, she took care of it.

“Really?”

“Really, really.” She grabs onto his arm and rests her head against it, letting him guide her to the chemistry lab he always goes to for third period.

“You have class, Marie.”

“Humor me and let me skip it today, okay?”

He sighs. “Did you leave your bag in the girls’ locker room?”

“Maybe.”

“You will be late to class, but that is better than not going at all.” He turns in the direction opposite of the lab.

“Edd, I don’t want to go to class right now.” Softly.

“You need to.” Sternly.

“What for?”
“Yourself.”

“Edd—”

“If you want, I can go in with you.” He dips his head to say this to her so those around them cannot hear. He knows her too well, as that simple sentence makes her complacent. When they arrive at the locker room, the hallway is clear, and she heads in to see if anyone other than them would be present. No one. When she goes back to the entrance, he grabs one of his hands with both of hers and guides him inside him. He closes the door behind them as quickly as he can without making it too obvious.

“Is your locker combination still the same?” He asks as he searches for the one he knows is her favorite; a top row one right by the showers. She starts to undress.

“Same crappy lock as always.” Her top and bra are off by the time he opens her locker. As she sits on one of the nearby benches to take off her shoes, he searches for her towel and clothes.

He makes a face when he smells her towel. “Marie, how long has this been here?” He looks at her as he holds it up like an offense. There is no crack in his expression at her nakedness.

“I dunno… a while?”

“We are washing this tonight,” he declares.

“Yeah, yeah…” She pulls her shorts and panties off in one go, and tosses them onto the bench without a second though. She knows he will pick it up and put everything neatly away, as he has done the few times before. Eddward approaches with the dirty towel in hand and rests it around her neck and shoulders. He then kneels to study the various colorful bandages on her knees; he notices a missing one, with the scab a lively red.

“What happened?”

She bites back how irked she is that despite her being naked, despite him being so close, there is no desire coming from him. Her B-cup breasts, milky thighs, and shaved vulva do not stir him. Even if he looks at them, it has always felt to her that he is looking well past it all.

“We were playing soccer in gym, ya know.” She tries to keep herself calm as she leans back on one hand for support as the other goes to touch the tufts of hair visible outside of his beanie. “I skid pretty hard trying to get us the win.”

“Then why are your legs not covered in dirt?” She flinches. He notices.

“Marie—”

She pushes him back with her foot and stands.

“I’m gonna shower.”

He does not come after her and for once she is happy. Inside the stall she lets the cold water turn warm and tries to let it melt her frustrations. Her head is pounding over and over with her own foolishness. She will have to tell him; Eddward is too observant for his own good, and likely had an idea of what occurred between her and Kevin since he saw her in the hallway. Her anxiety begins to rebuild itself with new materials.

He surprisingly knocks on the stall’s door. “You forgot your body wash.”
A part of her snaps. She opens the door and pulls him in to get soaked in the water along with her. He tries to ask her what she is doing but stops as she pushes him against the wall and rests her body on top. Despite the water raining down on them, she can still hear his heart through his chest; it is much calmer than her own.

“Skip with me today.” She pulls the beanie off his head, exposing his shiny black hair. She reaches to undo it from its low bun, but he grasps her hand to stop her.

“What has gotten into you today?” His blue eyes are storming.

“I just don’t want to be at school right now. If you don’t want to skip with me, at least leave me at your place when we go there in a few.” She knows he has no change of clothes, and is ever conscious of his public appearance. He has to leave the school and return home to make himself more presentable for the day—and if he hurries, he can make it back before the next period. She has trapped him.

“What happened with Kevin?”

“Don’t say his name right now.” Her fingers play with the hem of his concert t-shirt from the one she took him to a few months back. Pressing her palm against him, she lightly lifts it to expose more of the pale skin on his stomach.

“I would rather we not do this at school.”

“Then take me home.” She holds his eyes. He caves.

They both exit the stall, and he goes about rinsing his clothing as much as possible as she settles on only wearing her gym top and bottom, no shoes, so they can get out of there faster. She tosses everything she is not wearing into her backpack, not at all caring about the papers inside, and follows Eddward as they head through the field exit of the locker room to reach the parking lot with the smallest chance of getting caught. Said exit is really only good for moments like this since it is so far away from the track and field.

“Sorry I’m about to get your car wet,” she apologizes when they get to his silver ride and he starts unlocking the doors.

“I will dry it.” He always opens her side first. “The lady goes first.” His princely tone makes the exposed brat in her swoon for a moment. He takes her backpack as she settles into the passenger’s seat. She watches through the rear-view mirror as he puts it into the trunk; then, finally, he enters the car through the driver’s side and starts the engine. The only thing she held onto when they left the bathroom was his beanie, which she toys with in her hands, so she is able to admire the side-view of his slick hair sticking to his face. Why can he not admire her in the same way?

He starts the car, pulls out of the parking space, and takes her home.

You’re doing it again...

She does not let go of his hand until they reach his bedroom, and he starts to fix her up.

“Lift your arms,” she does, and he takes her shirt off.

“Grab onto me,” she does, and he takes her pants off.

He loops her arms around him and picks her up bridal-style, and then escorts her to the bathroom. Still nothing. So close, and yet no spark. Both of them are naked at this very moment, yet nothing
will truly happen between them and she knows. She showers as he dries his body and his hair, then he passes her a set of towels to dry herself with. She ogles him as she fixes her hair while wearing the robe she always does when she stays over; she had him get her one after it was clear she would be a recurring visitor.

“Do you want me to bring you anything when classes finish?” The blow-dry on his hair is not complete, but he is pressed for time as is. He returns to his bedroom with her following behind.

“The usual—and… can you stop by my place to get some booze? Lee will know what I want.” He frowns at her. “Please.” He sighs while he starts getting dressed.

“I do not approve—”

“I know.”

“—but I will get it for you. Just… try not to make this a habit. You know how you get when you start to drink.” She rolls her eyes. While he continues to refresh himself, she sits on his bed and stares, her mind so noisy it all makes her draw a blank. She licks her lips to moisturize them, then remembers how much he dislikes that and goes into her bag to find her lip balm instead.

A few moments later he is ready to go.

First, though, he puts new bandages on her knees—stretchy, sticky, hypoallergenic, and waterproof.

“Do you not have practice today?”

“It’s a skip day.”

In the process of standing to his feet, he pauses for a moment at her face level. She closes her eyes and brings her head forward as he expectantly kisses her on her lips. She gets greedy and keeps him there longer with her hands at the side of his face. He grasps her hands gently to remove them. His lips pepper her face until she sighs in satisfaction.

“What do you want from me tonight, Marie?”

She states the obvious:

“Pick-up some condoms on your way back.”

He kisses her once last time before leaving, as deep as he knows she wants him to.

You’re doing it again…

Chapter End Notes

There's some deep irony in there—did you spot it?

Next Chapter: The night continues.
Chapter Notes

I looove last minute decisions to completely rewrite a chapter because the flow of the original wasn't working out in the editing process, ha-ha-ha-ha.

This chapter is full of sweet, sweet, fan-service.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Trauma” weighs heavy on his heart.

Of his… conversation with Marie in the morning, that word had plunged something awful into his heart. It continues to twist into it now as he rests on his bed in the deadness of the night, absentmindedly scrolling through his social media pages. Trauma, trauma… what could she have been referring to?

His gut instinct tells him that the trauma is none other than the kiss between them—no, kisses are more mutual, therefore him pressing his lips onto Eddward’s does not qualify as a kiss. It is… “trauma.” His body stirs.

“What should I do?” He asks this aloud to the stillness of the bedroom. He hopes his sleeping Pit Bulls would pick-up on their owner’s desire and rouse from their sleep to offer some sort of guidance. Yet the two girls rest beside him on his full-sized bed, curled into one another, Trix’s head protectively atop Lacey. He sighs. He knows they will not answer, but will continue to speak to them regardless; the process always helps to soothe his mind somewhat in his times of need.

“I want to talk to him about it, but… I’m scared about what he’ll say. We’ve argued so fucking much already, and I’m… so sick of seeing him cry. It really makes my heart hurt… But there was so much shit I had to do today that I couldn’t go and talk to him—I mean, I tried to when third period started, but he wasn’t at the lab like all the other times. And I guess that kind of just killed my motivation to find him for the rest of the day.”

“And now it’s…” A pause to glance at the top right of his cellphone’s notification bar to check the time. “Three-in-the-morning? No way he’s up right now. Plus, I don’t have any way to contact him… Wait…”

He quickly checks his contacts list, and finds ‘Edd’ among them. The number is for his house phone since Eddward’s parents had not allowed him to have a private cellphone back during freshman year. He cannot quite remember the reason why—although he sure asked Eddward as to why this was, protesting that he should think of a plan to convince them to get him one. In the end, his tutor had said he was fine with his parents’ decision. That still irritates him a bit to this day.

“If it’d been his cell I could’ve tried to text him or something.” It is the middle of the night, and Eddward is surely asleep; were he to call now, it would cause irritation more than anything else. He does not need more content against him.
He groans.

“I just want to talk…”

He stares at the contact information endlessly, mulling over whether to take the leap or not. If only Eddward was awake… or, could he be? The notion pops into his head for a split second, but holds him firmly. He slowly moves off of his bed to avoid stirring his girls awake and heads to the nearby window. A gander across the street shows a single light on at Eddward’s home. His heart skips a beat.

Before he talks himself out of it, he presses the button to call. The ring-ring-ring is maddening; a slow demise. The pattern repeats four times. He prepares himself for the obvious failure.

A click.

“Vincent household, Eddward speaking.”

“E…Edd…”

“…Please make this quick, Kevin. I want to rest soon.”

“Sorry, I just…” What can he say? What is he going to say? Why did he call him? “I saw the light on at your place, and was wondering why.”

“Is that all?”

No.

“Yeah… sorry…”

He reprimands himself immediately. Did he really just do that? Did he toss aside this moment of luck because the unexpectedness of it all left him tongue-tied? A full day’s worth of regret and sadness for a thirty-second exchange of small talk? Kevin, you fool.

From the other end of the connection, Eddward sighs. He seems to speak to himself for a few sentences.

“Would you like to come over?”

“What?”

“I think it would be quite fitting to put an end to this… discourse between us in the privacy of night. I cannot sleep, and that is your fault entirely—and I know that you being unable to do the same is mine. Let us settle this now, when no one and nothing can get in our way. If you want to.”

In the blink of an eye the phone call is over and he is standing at Eddward’s doorstep. His mind catches up with the time. What is he wearing? Sweatpants, a tank top, a leather jacket, and sandals. What does his hair look like? He had left his signature snapback in his bedroom. Is there any way he can make the red locks look any less like he had been lying against them? What if he tussles his bangs the right way? In the middle of his fiddling, Eddward opens the door to his home.

“How long were you going to stand there to fix yourself up?” He had not been able to pick-up on it before, but Eddward’s voice is… strange. It is the most drained he has ever heard it; even back during their exchange yesterday night—
He cannot believe it. Yesterday night. Barely 24-hours have passed since the Homecoming debacle. It feels so much longer than that.

—Eddward’s voice may have been spilling his emotions, but never had it sounded as though it had been put through the wringer. This vocal observation leads into more visual notes:

> Eddward is not wearing his beanie, with his shoulder-length black hair resting loosely on his head; a section almost covering his right eye

> He is dressed in a nightgown that looks to be made of silk or satin, with its length going down past his knees. The nightwear is something he remembers seeing a much younger Eddward wear to neighborhood sleepovers when they randomly occurred

> A cup of steaming tea is in his right hand, and it smells… familiar

“Lemon Balm.”

“I am reheating the pot for you. Come inside.”

The smell of freshman year memories guides him as he leaves his sandals at the front door and switches over to the plush alligator slippers Eddward asks him to wear instead; his host wears a white rabbit set. He does not ask if they are the same slippers from all those years back; he has a strong feeling that they are not, given that they fit his current shoe size to begin with, but a part of him tries to convince him that they are.

—That the slippers are the same; that the house is the same; that he and Eddward are the same; that it is simply another sleepless night and he has gone over to his friend’s house to air himself out and feel better; the tea is the same, after all.

It is the only element that is.

He sits in the kitchen—the island countertop is different—and watches Eddward silently as he prepares him his own cup of Lemon Balm tea—the tea pot and cup are different, the spoon Eddward uses to stir it to saturation is different, and the previously placed coaster at his spot is different.

Yet the tea tastes the same… and so many emotions and thoughts wash over him that he feels his eyes begin to water.

“I’m so sorry,” he finally begins, but is not allowed to finish.

“Please, let me start…” Eddward asks of him. He nods his head in approval. He notices the change in grip on Eddward’s teacup; he exhales, loosens his fingers, and looks directly at him. “What can I say so that we can move on?”

Kevin cannot answer. He does not need to.

“I… have a lot of regrets in regards to you over these past couple of years—but they have never hurt as much as those I have collected in the past… day. Kevin, I—” A hitch in his throat, eyes watering. “Please do not say how sorry you are, because you cannot ask for forgiveness more than I need to. I have done you ill. I… made you suffer—and all because of my immaturity…” He sniffs, resting the teacup on the table, and moving it away from his face with its coaster so that no non-tea fluids fall into it. “There is nothing… nothing I can say that would make this all right, and I know that—because I do not know what it is that I want. How do we move forward? How do I move forward? How… just…!”
Eddward’s neck and head slump. His forehead rests on the island with a thud. His shoulders are shaking. His inhales are deep, exhales deeper. Waves of torment roll off of his body.

All of this is matched by Kevin who is letting his tears fall wherever they do.

“All of this is matched by Kevin who is letting his tears fall wherever they do.

“Edd…” What can he say? What can he say to soothe… his friend? What can he say to make the crying stop? What can he say to make the lead in his heart disappear? He takes a long sip of the warm tea; it provides him with… an unexpected strength to open-up and be more honest than ever. “We’re both idiots,” he declares, “because we either did or said as much dumb shit as we could. This… is my fault too because if I hadn’t…” He chokes up, and guzzles down the remainder of the tea. “If I hadn’t kissed you back then all of this wouldn’t have happened! If I had just… kept my emotions under control—if I wasn’t so… starved—for you! I…”

“I loved… how good you made me feel… And I didn’t know how to express that.” His voice is soft. The revelations come to him piece-by-piece, forming into a clearer picture of what his younger self wanted at that time, as the seconds tick by—as well as of what he currently wants. “But I’ve always kissed the girls that made me feel… something, so…” His face heats up. “Fuck, I’m so sorry…” He sounds ghostly.

“I was shocked…” Eddward’s voice gradually moves from it muffled tone to become more audible as he raises his head and wipes at his eyes. There is hair sticking to his forehead and cheeks, and he moves it all aside to be able to clean his face. “B-but still I do not know w-why I did what I did… I do not r-remember why I started to…”

“—Forgive me for l-lying for so long, please! I do not h-hate you, Kevin! I c-c-could n-never hate you…” His words are punctuated by sobs.

Kevin wants to stop holding himself back physically. He wants to leap across the island and bring Eddward into his arms—and hug and kiss his torment away.

“I don’t… want to cause you any more trauma…” He says with a defeatist attitude, feeling worse than before. He cannot. He cannot. He cannot do what he wants lest it put Eddward in more pain. The harsh reminder in his heart shackles him where he sits.

So Eddward comes to him.

He cannot think or move while Eddward runs around the sides of the island and throws himself into his arms. As Eddward’s frustrations are unleashed on his chest, his heart starts to melt, and the oncoming tears start to detox his body. He reciprocates the gesture and wraps his arms around Eddward. He bares his soul as his cries get more potent. More words are exchanged between them, but he cannot say for certain if he is speaking to Eddward or speaking to himself; he cannot hear what Eddward is saying as all his senses focus on the hot tears soaking his chest. He wants to make them stop, he wants to make them stop, he wants to make them stop. He wants to make Eddward happy.

“How can I make you happy…?”

Somehow, Eddward gets calmer. Something is spoken into his chest, but Kevin does not notice. He is at the point where he cannot tell his vibrations apart from Eddward’s.

Eddward then lifts his chin up to catch Kevin’s weeping eyes, and says to him, “Kiss me.”

Kevin’s heart plummets into his stomach; he starts to shake.

“No—”
“I… I am asking you to… p-please…”

“That’s… I’ve wanted to before, but…” Trauma, trauma, trauma.

Eddward is taller than him. Eddward reminds him of this by parting their bodies and standing at his full height; Kevin being the one still sitting on an elevated barstool does little to make-up for the difference. They are once again at face-level with one another. He notices the stirred melancholy in Eddward’s blue eyes.

“I just said… that I c-could never hate you…” Is he… annoyed?

Ah. So he is doomed when he does not kiss him, and doomed when he does.

Or so he would have left his fate up to were it not for Eddward taking the initiative and being the one to kiss him.

Kevin is still. His mind is racing while it tries to make sense of what is going on. He can feel Eddward’s body pressed against his again, but with his hands on his chest, and his lips on his own. Yet the reality of the situation does not connect until Eddward slowly peppers kisses around his mouth—check, chin, top of lip, lips, corner of mouth, cheek, lips, chin, and so on.

“—te you…” What is Eddward saying? He is having a difficult time focusing. “—ver hate you… you… never hate you… I could never hate you…”

He inhales sharply as it all starts to come together, and Eddward’s lips are back on his own. He feels Eddward’s arms move themselves to wrap around his waist and back. The kiss feels more meaningful now. Kevin indulges himself in the pleasant reality. He closes his eyes and puts a hand behind Eddward’s head, the other at Eddward’s chin, and uses the two to make the kiss last even longer by holding Eddward steadily to him.

“Edd… Edd…” He praises, getting more into it, his greed growing. “Can I—” He pauses as Eddward nuzzles his neck and kisses his throat. It sends shivers down to his core.

In a blink they are on the couch. His lips have a pleasant leftover tingle to them. Lost in the lust, he is kissing the pale fingers of the boy beneath him. Softly.

“Kevin,” Eddward’s words float, “have you… been with a guy before?”

He stops.

“No, right?”

Kevin looks down again at him; Eddward’s face and lips are flushed with the color of new life. The obvious answer is “No,” he has not ever been with a guy before. The thought had never occurred to him until… now, when he is atop another guy, in the middle of making out with him. Oh.

“Have you?”

“I have.” Eddward responds coolly. A set of gears are put into motion in Kevin’s head. His body starts to buzz with anticipation. He blushes.

“I don’t know what to do with a guy.”

“Can I show you?”

The unknown draws closer. Is there any more tea left? It gave him courage before… did it not? Can
it do so again? He does not know what type of expression he is presenting on his face, but he knows it is coated in unexpectedness. Eddward’s light touch on the side of his face brings him back into the world, and he once again finds himself sinking into eyes as deep as the ocean.

“You are too frightened; it is very unnecessary.” Eddward moves his hands to Kevin’s chest and pushes him away. He then uses the space between them to properly sit-up on the sofa. He closes his eyes, lets out a breath, and pushes all his hair back and away from his face. The air around them seems to change considerably as they both get their bearings. It does not at all feel as though a half hour ago they were wallowing in misery and unsure as to the next step to take.

No, the next steps now are curious as well. What ought he to do?

Eddward looks like his regular and composed self again.

“Well, I mean, aren’t you going to—”

“Penetrate you? Of course not.” Eddward positions himself on all fours and gestures for Kevin to lie even further back on the couch, which the redhead does until his head is on the armrest. “That has to be eased into—it is anal sex, after all, and never really something a man or woman can simply… jump into due to all the apprehensions with it. There is also the fact that I have never been on the giving end of that exchange.”

An image flashes through his mind that makes Kevin both aroused and… jealous?

“Who was it?”

“No one you know.”

Eddward is now hovering over him. Looking up, he finds himself—

“Damn… I really do have a crush on you…”

Eddward smiles. “I know, but thank you…” They share another kiss.

The kiss changes like the atmosphere around them had. It is not only between lips, but now tongues as well. Eddward’s fingers interlock with his at their sides. They bite, lick, and suck at the other’s face and neck. The big gap between them starts to get in the way, and Kevin pulls Eddward down to be flush against him. Eddward’s hands play with Kevin’s hair, whilst Kevin’s are at Eddward’s waist to hold him tightly in place.

Kevin starts to move his hips up into Eddward’s.

“Mmm... that feels good...” Eddward presses his hips down more harshly onto Kevin’s. The friction and pressure flirting with their penises are delightful. He moans as they get into an opposing and smooth rhythm that eggs them both on.

“This is weird,” Kevin admits into Eddward’s neck, “but I’m happy.”

“Happy?”

“That it’s with you.”

A brief smooch.

“That was strangely romantic of you.”
“Did you hate you?”

Eddward responds wordlessly by switching the position of their legs so that both of his are wrapped around Kevin’s right, and then shamelessly grabs onto Kevin’s growing erection through his gray sweatpants Kevin moans; he closes his eyes to recollect himself; his green eyes flutter open, hazy. “Grip it tighter.”

“Are you a masochist?” The grip strength increases.

“No, it’s just… hard to feel through my pants.”

“What about if I jerk it?” He starts pumping along the shaft, and immediately elicits a reaction out of Kevin who digs his fingernails into the exposed side of the couch cushion while cussing under his breath. Kevin then bends his free knee so that he can push it out horizontally and use it as weight to lift his hips higher into Eddward’s hand—or to at least try to, since Eddward’s weight on his leg effectively stops him.

“Oh, fuck,” he says louder than the rest. He can feel himself getting close to his sweet spot; it is a steady rhythm that can perfectly coax his desire out of him.

Eddward is impressive. His crush is impressively generous. He also seems to know the best times to pick-up speed or to slow down. The tempo decreases into a slow but tight hum when Eddward wants to distract him with some light conversation to keep him from spilling his top. How does he like it? What does he want him to do next? He has always loved his hair. His freckles are cute. The tempo increases when Eddward wants to draw him closer to the edge and see him squirm. Kevin begs for him to move his hands under his pants and underwear and touch him raw. Eddward stops for a moment to address this wish, with the index finger of the hand that had been stimulating him resting atop the growing wet spot, drawing small circles on it whilst his penis stands stiff.

“If I did that you would finish too soon. I want to enjoy more time with you, Kevin, and make this last as long as possible.” The more he hears Eddward stroke his name through his tongue, the hornier he gets.

His breathing is controlled and heavy. “Let’s just do it more than once—please—I really, really want to cum…”

He watches Eddward think it over. Hoping. Pleading.

“Well—” His heart leaps in great anticipation. “—I suppose my hand is getting tired…” He cannot describe the emotions that well up in him as Eddward asks him to lift his hips. He then grabs onto the waistbands of his pants and underwear, and pulls them down to his knees. His penis twitches with excitement at its freedom and what will come next.

Eddward smirks at seeing it exposed, and does not hesitate to bring his head down, tongue out, to lick it from base to tip. That is enough to—

The jolt is sudden. He awakens coated in sweaty thrill, but also a mild daze. Why does it feel so absurdly hot in his bedroom in the middle of Fall? He gives his mind time to simmer down. While airing out his chest by flapping the collar of his loose tank, his eyes finally adjust to the darkness and he finally notices his droopy erection poking through his blanket. That must be the weight he has been feeling. He groans. His heart is loud.
Fuck… fuck, fuck.

He is not upset with the erection existing, but rather with the dream coming to an abrupt end. He wants to be able to see it through to the end. Eddward’s lips had barely grazed him before—

His penis twitches.

He moves the blanket aside to more clearly see it throbbing. He helps himself to slipping his hand under the two layers of clothing. His head at the top part of his shaft are slick with pre-cum. He gives it a couple of jerks before deciding that as much as he would like to, finishing in the bedroom is too messy and risky. The last thing he wants right now is to hide soiled sheets from his father so he does not get question on what he had been fantasizing about at the time of the deed.

His hand still down under, he rises from his bed, heads out of his bedroom, makes his way down the unilluminated hallway, and feels his way to the bathroom with his free hand. The lights are on, and the door is closed and locked behind him. On his way to the toilet he passes the sink’s mirror, and stares at himself.

“I look like a pervert…” He cannot bring himself to care too deeply about that.

In a house of only men, the toilet seat cover and seat itself are typically left up, as they are now. He assumes a position over the toilet; legs apart; his hand pointing his penis downwards towards the toilet bowl; his free hand against the wall to support him; eyes closed. He then continues what he started in the bedroom.

Almost immediately he is pulled into continuing his dream—or perhaps he is creating a new daydream? He reaches an eager and steady pace and then he gives his mind up to the fantasy.

*Suck me off... please, Edd, please...*

The vision of Eddward taking him into his mouth on a couch is cycled out for one sitting on the toilet with his mouth wide open and ready to receive his semen.

*I want to cum all over your face—oooh, fuck, Edd...!

He strokes himself faster and bucks his hips, pumping into his hand, to inch closer and closer to covering the submissive Eddward with his fluids. Submissive. The word makes him spiral out of control as 1001 scenarios start to form, all of Eddward giving himself to him, and never wanting to let go.

“Fuck!”

He squeezes all of the cum that he can from his penis as he ejaculates into the toilet bowl. He keeps massaging his penis slowly, wanting to empty himself out from the time being. When he feels spent, he lets go of his penis and it falls into a dangle over his seed.

He catches his breath.

What should he do now?

Chapter End Notes
Yes, it was a dream—and if you read carefully, there are outright discrepancies with how I've established these characters at the beginning of the chapter that outright spell out that it's a dream. I did wonder if I should make it real, but~ I think that would have ruined the pacing I'm going for. Plus I want the first, official sex scene to be way juicier.

The original version of this chapter was actually the first time I ever wrote M|M, and I had its realism proofread by a male friend at the time. Shout out to him for being such a good sport!

**Next Chapter:** Time as measured by moments.
Chapter Notes

It's still weird for me to write about male sexy times because I worry about it sounding unnatural; and silly; and like all my sex ed comes from porn. Lol. I constantly have to ask myself, "What part of this is realistic and what part comes from exaggerated BL???

[Insert Laughing Emoji]

Enjoy, though!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

#1

His body feels too hot and sticky for him to simply wipe himself off, wash his hands and face, and then return to his bedroom. He knows that he needs a shower. He stretches his neck to look at the clock hanging over the door, and sees that it is still only ten past 3am, meaning his father will not be coming through any doors for about another hour or two. This allows him the freedom to strip down to the nude in his bathroom—the work already half done—and immediately toss his clothes into the bin next to the door. He will have to be the one to do the laundry so that his father does not notice the fluids in his underwear or on his sweatpants.

Speaking of, he briefly forgets that his right hand is technically dirty. He almost touches the light switch in the hallway with said hand, very close to breaking the rule in the house of keeping his messes—all inclusive—to himself. He keeps his right hand close to his thigh, and uses his left to touch everything he needs to.

While they are not on his bed like in his dream (which he is immensely grateful for), Lacey and Trix are sleeping in his room. The two are snuggled beside the foot of his bed, and so he moves quietly so as not to stir them. The last thing he wants is for the whole neighborhood to know that he is awake, and for him to get questioned later on as to why.

He grabs his towel which hangs from the back of his door, and makes a quick return to the bathroom.

In his shower, his thoughts reaffirm his current situation.

He had just finished masturbating to a wet dream about Eddward—he had had a wet dream about Eddward, and then fantasized about him being in front of him as he masturbated. The set-up is nothing new to him, as he has often fantasized about the people he is lusting after being with him during his private time, but never about another male before.

‘Damn… I really do have a crush on you…’

He leans his head back so the water splashes on his face; the lather of soap he had covered his face and neck in start to rinse away.

—Earlier that day, no, yesterday, he had yelled at Marie not to call him “gay.” Now, after a dream like that, he wonders how much he overreacted. Well, he already knows that he could have made his
point in a less infuriated and panicky manner, but now it feels as though said statement has been invalidated.

One dream doesn’t make me gay… I think. Shit.

But—

What about the emotions that were poured into the dream? What about the regret he displayed in it? The resolve? The relief? The desire? He has… not wanted to fully admit to himself the extent of his infatuation with Eddward, but he cannot deny the bits and pieces of dialogue that are coming back to him.

He has a crush on Eddward.

It is all… a little silly. To think these feelings have persisted for almost three-years, despite Eddward somewhat cutting him off after the first kiss. He remembers the feelings drifting sometime during his sophomore year, and then not existing at all during his junior year. Or perhaps it was that he had managed to lock them away with other distractions? It is surprising that over that time he had not once come into direct contact with Eddward until that rainy day back in September this year. He remembers them sharing a few classes during sophomore year, but junior year everything seemed to change and he never once saw or heard of him. Had Eddward still been avoiding him back then, or was it that their lives began to differ that much?

Has he ever been through a situation like this before, when old feelings reemerge this vehemently? Thinking back…

Nazz…

Every now and then the “something” they had between them would call out to him, but he has made his peace with his and Nazz’s relationship, and is not driven to seek more out of it. Then the answer is “no.” This is now a time of many firsts.

He finishes his shower and dries himself with his towel; then proceeds to wrap the towel around his waist and head back to his bedroom.

What should he do next?

Back in his room, he slips on new boxers and a random pair of pajama pants. He decides to go shirtless. Passing by his window, he takes a glance past his curtains towards Eddward’s house. None of the lights are on. Grabbing his charging phone from his nightstand, he searches through his contacts and does not find Eddward’s name among the E’s. Should he be surprised as to the extent of his disappointment? If Eddward was up… If he had his number…

There is great irony in how easily his horniness is coming back, and how badly he wants to act on it. He lies down on his bed and does feel up his crotch, gently pressing onto it and rubbing its shape from the sides. He keeps his movements soft and slow—he prefers slow burns, and had already given into immediate gratification earlier in the bathroom.

“Hmm…”

He briefly wonders why he even put pants on if he was just going to pull them down again—but at least for the boxers he simply pulls his penis through the front opening. As much as his desire is stirring within him, he is not fully erect. Like Eddward in his dream had done, he touches the wet tip of his head with his finger and uses it to move his penis around in distracted little circles. His mind does what it can to replace his hands with Eddward’s softer, paler ones.
He lets his head fall back on his pillow.

Is this going to be the rest of his night?

#2

When the preset alarm on his phone goes off, telling him that he has to start getting ready for the day, he knows he is in for a second wind of trials and tribulations. He gets that feeling in his empty gut.

At least he had anticipated the ringing alarm and cut his antics off before they could spill into his morning routine, *as much* as he would have liked to lose himself in the fantasies further. Returning to his bedroom after cleaning himself once again, and then brushing his teeth, he takes a set of deep breaths to settle his mind. It is time for him to take control of the day.

Lacey and Trix wake-up towards the end of him getting dressed just as he is doing the final touches to his hair. They drowsily approach him, and he pets both of their heads and necks in greeting.

“You guys ready to go for a walk?” They answer with happy barks. They run in front of him as they all head down the stairs to the first floor, where their leashes lay in wait at the kitchen, hanging above their food bowls; the leashes are conveniently low enough for the two dogs to grab them on their own, which they often do. He puts on his jacket, knowing that like yesterday, today is bound to have some chilly weather. The two girls run back into the front hallway where the coat closet is with the leashes—collars attached—in their mouths; he puts their respective pieces on, and then they all exit the house for their routine wake-up walk.

As usual, they leave the cul-de-sac and head to the park, where they run and play, before making their way back to their home.

“Hey Kevin.” Waiting for him at his front door is Nazz. She is fully dressed for school, hair and makeup done, with a cream-colored overcoat on for protection from the cold, and the tote bag that she uses as her backpack resting on her left shoulder. She gives him a smile that widens as they got close, and Lacey and Trix—who have fuzzy memories of Nazz, he is sure—greet her with the same interest and care they greet almost everyone. “Hi!” Nazz’s voice almost immediately takes the form of baby-talk. “And how are you two doing today? Is Kevin treating you well? Oh you both have gotten so, so big!” She pats and rubs their heads and ruffles their ears and strokes their tummies—all things they both know the Pit Bulls like from when he got them as puppies about two years back.

Nazz had been with him when he saw them both at the animal shelter where she had been volunteering at the time, on a day he went to help out. She helped him to take care of them for the first few weeks, too. When they became busy with their lives, Nazz stopped coming over and Lacey and Trix no longer saw her, but it does not look as though that means they had forgotten about her.

“You’ve been doing a good job raising them, Kevin,” Nazz says, still bent down a bit and rubbing at both of his girls’ backs. “Their coats are beautiful and their noses are wet. They look so healthy and happy.”

“Thanks,” he replies with a smile. He is always glad to hear good things when it came to his Pit Bulls. “They’re both a handful, but their company more than makes up for it.” Raising a dog, in itself, is not an easy task—and when they are two fully-grown Pit Bulls with lots of love and energy to give, the task quickly becomes one of the hardest and best things in the world. He finds taking
care of his two girls to be his favorite chore.

“Can we go in, though? It’s kind of cold and this weather isn’t good for them. Their coats aren’t that thick to begin with.” Nazz stands to her feet and grabs her large, black leather tote bag with the Hello Kitty bow decal on it after putting it to the side so she could better interact with the girls.

“Ah, yeah. I forgot.” He quickly moves forward and takes out his keys to unlock the door. Once unlocked, he lets Lacey and Trix loose into his house before he and Nazz both step in; he holds the door for her.

“Always the gentleman,” she says in a swooned-like voice.

He grins. “I try my best.” Flattery gets a lot of points with him.

He closes the door behind him and then goes about taking off his jacket and taking Nazz’s overcoat, before putting both items on the coat rack—next to the coat closet. His father had bought the rack after he complained about how hard it was to get the coats out of the closet. (Yet, still he still puts his coat away in said closet every night after he comes home, saying it is more protected that way.)

He and Nazz follow Lacey and Trix to the kitchen.

“So… not to sound forgetful or anything,” he says, speaking to Nazz, while he goes into one of the cupboards to get the dry dog food for the girls, “and it’s not like I hate it, either, but… why are you here again, Nazz?”

Sitting at the kitchen island, Nazz frowns at him with pouty, glossy-pink lips. “Honestly Kevin, don’t tell me you forgot.”

“Let’s say I did—what would your response be?” He bends over in front of the food bowls to scoop some of the girls’ breakfast into Lacey’s. Lacey’s white bowl sits next to Trix’s bright green bowl, on an elevated platform that makes it easier and safer for both dogs to eat. Their water bowls are atop one as well. Lacey’s bowl filled, his following scoops are for Trix.

Nazz sighs. “You promised me a few weeks ago that I’d get to ride your motorcycle with you someday. We settled on it today because I don’t have any late after-school activities, and won’t have to take Jonny to school.” Her smile is too calm for her to be annoyed about him forgetting.

The conversation comes back to him. “Riiight…” He says, stretching out the word and nodding his head along. “Right, right. Now I remember.”

“Right.” She mocks him with a playful grin on her face. He looks up at her for a brief moment, but she just continues to give a wide smile that pulls her cheeks up and back, with her head resting atop a net of her folded fingers, and her elbows on the table. He rolls his eyes at her picture perfect persona and she begins to laugh. He finishes filling Lacey and Trix’s food bowls, and they know the last few shakes of the bag are the signal for them to eat; they hurry to their spots and begin their meal.

“Why do you do that by the way?” He asks as he puts away the bag of dog food, and then goes to the fridge to get one of the plastic pitchers of water they have inside. “Take Jonny to school, that is.”

“Jonny’s a friend. He doesn’t have a car or a bike, and you know how the bus is in this area. Our schedules usually fit perfectly with one another, so there’s never been a problem driving him to and from school—and he always gives me gas money, too, which is nice.”

“Ah, okay.” Up until that point he had been thinking it was because they were dating or something similar. He pours some of the water from the pitcher into the two separate tin water bowls while the
girls eat. He rubs at the back of their heads. “Easy, easy…” He then returns the pitcher to the fridge. “What time is it?” Nazz knows the question is directed at her.

“Seven thirty-six,” she responds. “If we want to make it to school on time, we should leave before forty-five.”

“Sweet. I have time to get something to eat.” He rubs his hands together as he makes his way over to the pantry.

“Not McDonald’s again, I hope,” Nazz reprimands, “I don’t know how you can eat that stuff. It’s nothing compared to Wendy’s.”

Kevin snorts. “Yeah, right.” He opens the pantry and aims for the box of unopened strawberry Pop-Tarts. “McDonald’s is like the king of fast food. I don’t see Wendy’s or Burger King with any indoor playgrounds.”

“Because you hardly leave Peach Creek. Plus, at least Wendy’s fries aren’t like 80% salt.”

“You’re 80% salt, Nazz,” he jokes, gassing himself up with a chuckle. Nazz scoffs at him, but he knows she knows that was funny. “Did you eat breakfast already, though?”

“Yeah. I made myself an omelet.”

“I’m making Pop-Tarts!” He exclaims with the vigor and excitement of a child as he puts two tarts on a plate and pops them into the toaster oven.

Nazz laughs. “I can see that. Strawberry?”

“You’re such a purist.”

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

When the Pop-Tarts are done, he eats them as he continues conversing with Nazz. They talk about school and upcoming tests and events both on and off campus, and he even jokes with Nazz about getting the veteran cheerleaders who will be leaving the squad after that season—her included—extremely small mini-mini-skirts as part of the personalized uniform mementoes they give the graduating seniors of a sports club.

She rolls her eyes. “If I do that, then you and the rest of your graduating teammates are going to get crop top jerseys and tight-tights as your mementoes.” She smirks at him; hoping to get a rise out of him.

“Hey. I have a great body. You’d be doing the world a great service by helping me show it off more.” He winks. This earns a loud laugh from Nazz, and a couple (he assumes happy) barks from Lacey and Trix.

He finishes up eating, and then completes his morning chores by cleaning the dishes for him and his girls. He then makes sure the door to the backyard is locked; and does a quick check upstairs to verify that all the doors and windows are closed, before checking the downstairs windows too.

“I don’t want them getting out or anything while I’m gone,” he tells Nazz when he finishes checking the last window, after seeing the curious look on her face.
“Isn’t your dad here?” She asks; standing, leaning back against the island, with her tote bag in hand and ready to go.

“Yeah, but he’s usually sleeping. And I don’t want him feeling guilty if they get out while he’s resting.”

“You’re a good son, Kevin.” He tries to hide the small blush that arises on his cheeks when she says this. He settles on covering it up with some good, old-fashioned narcissism.

“Yeah, I know.”

Both of them then head to front the door and put on their respective outerwear, and after one last interaction with the two beloved Pit Bulls, they exit his home and he locks the door. He then opens the garage door with the controller attached to his keys.

“I remember when you and your dad were putting up that automatic door,” Nazz reminisces. “You guys were having trouble and then asked the Eds to help since they were always building things.”

His heart reacts at the mention of the Eds—at the mention of Eddward—but he keeps his outer shell cool.

“Yeah… It was a pain to even ask them for help, but working with them was even harder. But, they did end up getting the job done. Although it was mostly Double-D who did anything worth mentioning…” He could not help briefly thinking back to that time. He remembers regretting asking for their help when all Ed and Eddy did were mess around and look for jawbreakers. It was Eddward who got a grasp of the situation and organized them enough to get the door installed. He starts to stir familiarly, but keeps himself under control.

“Eddward is always such a big help.” (Nazz is probably being the only person who is not an adult that refers to Eddward by his full name.) “In student government, he’s like a glue keeping us from falling apart. He was a major help executing Homecoming—doing, like, a little bit of everything.”

“He’s in student government with you?” He only ever wears his motorcycle helmet when the weather gets obtrusive—but not obtrusive enough to have his father ban him from driving his baby for the day—but he knows that Nazz is the type to always wear protection. He unhooks it for her from the back of the garage.

“He’s my vice president.” Nazz takes the black helmet he hands her and gives him her tote bag. She continues her response while examining the helmet. “Has been since I was voted president last year.”

“I didn’t know that,” he says more so to himself than her, “I didn’t really think he was in any clubs besides track.”

“Well do you talk to Eddward much at all?” She asks, putting the helmet on her head. It is a good thing Nazz has short, pixie-cut hair because if she had anything curlier the helmet would surely flatten out her hairstyle, and cause the vanity-oriented parts of her some stress. It looks a bit big on her, though, so he adjusts the straps to try and make it more comfortable.

As he is doing this, he continues to contemplate her lingering question. He does not talk to Eddward every day, but he certainly has been talking to him more than usual for the past couple of days—but it has never been casually. What they have mostly done is yell, cry, and argue. There seems to be no room for soft bits like their personal lives. His confrontation with Marie flashes through his mind. ‘I need you to stay away from Edd…’ Is he… ever going to get the chance to talk about those sorts of things with him?
“…Not really,” he ends up saying.

“Well that’s why,” Nazz responds affirmatively. After the helmet is on her head nice and tight, he goes to sit at the front of the motorcycle. Both his backpack and Nazz’s tote bag hang from one of the handlebars for the time being. Then, as he expected, Nazz says, “Whoa. Where’s your helmet, Kevin?”

“My helmet?” He feigns ignorance.

“Yes. Your helmet. The one you’re going to be wearing?”

The way she taps the one he is lending her makes him chuckle. “Come on, Nazz. You know I don’t really wear a helmet.”

“Yeah, but I always thought that was because you didn’t have one—but now I see that you do. Is there another? You really should be wearing a helmet. It’s not safe to operate a motorcycle without one.”

At the oh-so-familiar tone of concern, he, voice melancholic, says, “You sound like Edd.”

“…Eddward?”

“Yeah. He’d constantly be on my case about that back when I’d take him around on my bike.”

“That’s cute; I didn’t know you guys had been that close.”

In his mind he can see that first night he rid with Eddward on his bicycle; Eddward in front, carrying his books, and him behind, his heart feeling light, his body warmed by Eddward’s presence. The glow of the memory… makes him nostalgic for those days.

“…”

“Kevin?”

“Hm?”

“Are you alright?”

He returns from the idyllic world of years gone past. “I’m fine.”

Nazz’s expression sags. “Are you sure? You’ve… been looking sad for a while now.”

“Sad?”

Nazz takes out her phone, fiddles with it, and then turns it to him; she has it on the Camera using the front lens. He sees what she is talking about. “I’m fine.” He gently moves her hand aside. “Get on, or we’ll be late.” He pretends to be checking the fuel gauge.

Having not moved, Nazz crosses her arms over her chest and gives him a stern but concerned look. “Kevin—” She stops at the look he gives her; not a glare, but a gentle pleading. She sighs, and then returns her phone to her tote’s pocket. Her agreeing to not press him further on the matter puts him at ease.

“…I still can’t believe you don’t have a second helmet,” she says as she settles herself on and he transfers their bags to her hands so they do not fly away during the ride. “I know what I’m getting you for Christmas this year.”
As they exit his garage, his eyes are not on the road, but on the blue house just a few away from his. It takes a moment for him to pull his focus from the house, and put it onto where it needs to be, as he steps on the gas pedal and circles out of the cul-de-sac. Nazz is holding onto him tightly around his waist. By hyper-focusing on the road, he is purposely trying to forget Nazz’s presence. It is not that he finds driving her to school to be any sort of inconvenience, but rather that Nazz is too… similar. Her floral smell and petite figure pressed against him, fog up his reality as his mind is taken back to his rides with Eddward. He wishes that at those times he could have leaned into him for a—

“Kevin, stop! Red light! Red light!”

His mind and eyes pop back into the present. He sees himself and Nazz dangerously close to going into oncoming traffic. His body immediately dopes itself on adrenaline as he forcefully slows his motorcycle down. It is a strain on his leg and wrist—dragging his leg on the pavement from one side, forcing as much pressure as possible onto the breaks. During this, he is painfully aware of Nazz screaming into his back as he burns a trail of tire marks behind him, almost skidding into the side of the road. When the world comes to a halt and he finds his motorcycle parallel to the horizontal road they almost drove into, just barely a foot before the traffic lights above them, he breathes heavily and his mind immediately goes to her. “Nazz?! A-are you okay?!”

It takes some time for Nazz to respond. His heart is scared. While he can feel her arms still around his waist, and her front against his back, he, for but a moment, believes Nazz to have fallen off of his motorcycle during the jerky stop; or under his wheel; or being dragged behind him.

“I’m fine…” She finally says; causing him to release a breath of fright that he did not know he had been holding. As she talks, her warm breath tickles the back of his neck. “I’m fine.” She says it again. “I’m fine.” It is as though she cannot believe it herself.

Jesus—fucking—Christ!

“Oh thank god.” He leans forward on the handlebars. “Oh fuck, Nazz, I’m sorry! I—I got distracted by—shit, I wasn’t thinking!” The drumming of his heart is near deafening, and a massive, thick ball of guilt grows in his stomach.

Fuck—Fuck! I almost got Nazz and me—

Nazz seems to sense that he is taking it much harder than he likely should be—or perhaps, just as bad as he should be, which is difficult in its own right—for she smoothly replies, “It’s okay, Kevin,”—motherly, concerned, batting the worries away—“it’s all okay. We’re fine, after all. We’re still breathing. No harm done.”

He slams his fist onto the gasoline gauge, the adrenaline still fueling him. The cool metal of the connection between the handlebars feels good against his hot head. Did he… really just cause that? Did he really almost drive into traffic because his mind…? He did, he did, he did… A shaky breath travels through his body. I’ve fucked up…

A car horn scares both him and Nazz. He quickly looks around for the person who did that, with the intent to chew them out in the middle of the street. Nazz seems to pick-up on this and immediately
stops him.

“Kevin, hold on. It’s a green light. We’re technically blocking traffic.”

“We almost died!” Who would honk on someone to hurry along after seeing such a thing? Where is this heartless, thoughtless person so he can drive them into the dirt?

“But we didn’t, and I doubt everyone here even saw that…” As she mentions so, the cars behind them start to go around the stopped motorcycle. No one seems to think more of the scene than a couple of teenagers blocking the way. He wipes his hands down his face, groaning, as he does what he can to get back into the right mindset.

“I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize. I’m just glad we’re okay.” Her arms have not moved from his waist, but he can feel a change in their intention—to hug him, instead of to hold onto him. Or perhaps a little of both?

“You were right,” he confesses, “about earlier when you said I looked sad. I am—I’m feeling a lot of shit right now and that distracted me, and I almost killed us.”

He cannot see her move her head from how deeply it is pressed into his back, to lifting her chin so she can clearly speak with him. “Do you want to talk about it?”

In truth he would have preferred to keep these troubles to himself—and perhaps shared them with Eddward when he got the chance—but this moment has now brought Nazz into it, and she at the very least deserves to know all of what just occurred to him with her as potential collateral damage.

“Yeah, but not here.” His arms and legs do feel weakened, but he muscles through their shakiness to rev his motorcycle back up and move forward with the next green light. His eyes and mind never leave the world in front of him.

#4

He breathes a sigh of relief when they pull into the school’s unofficial student parking lot, a small gravel extension to the faculty’s lot. The student government had tried some times before to raise money to properly pave the land and make a formal area for students’ vehicles, but truthfully not enough students in Peach Creek drove to the high school for the cause to gain the support they needed. So when the fundraiser failed, it was decided that the money would partially be used to fix up a large rectangle of land next to the faculty lot and make it more suitable for students, with the remaining money going to fund school-wide events. He had been the one to help Nazz pick out the gravel, as the small rocks needed to lie smoothly enough for students who used motorbikes like him to drive on and off without any trouble.

He turns off the engine of his motorcycle, and pushes out the kickstand to let it all come to a rest. He is glad the remainder of the ride had occurred smoothly. Nazz gets off first while he holds the bike steady, and he soon follows. When he is on his feet Nazz has taken off the helmet, her hand moving about her hair to fix any stray locks, and he swaps the helmet for her tote bag as he hands it over to her. He snaps the helmet’s strap closed around the end of one of his backpack’s shoulder straps.

“So, where should we go for our talk?” He is surprised that she is asking him this so soon.
“Don’t you have class first period?”

“Yes, but, you’re not exactly the irresponsible type, Kevin. So whatever caused you to— Whatever almost caused that incident must be pretty important. I’d rather help you out with that than go to class.”

He gives a bittersweet smile. “I appreciate that, Nazz, really I do.”

“I’m always here for you, you know.”

“Right. Sometimes I forget.”

Nazz grabs his hand, squeezing it in comfort, before beginning to lead him towards the school’s entrance. “Do you have a place in mind?”

There is only one he can think of: “The library.” Where his infatuation with Eddward all started.

“Mind if we stop by my locker before we go? I want to grab my books for second period so we don’t have to leave the library early.”

He smiles. “Sure.” The prospect of conversing with Nazz about his problems… is actually making him happy makes. After all, keeping all of this to himself has done him some damage, he recognizes. He knows now that it would be better to confide in someone about this situation, so he can think about it more clearly and possibly get some help moving forward. The fact that Nazz has made it clear that she wants to take this role on in his life makes him feel better.

—But much of this feeling is sucked away from him as he sees an all-too-familiar silver car in the lot. His eyes are locked onto the car as he watches Eddward step out of it, head to the passenger’s side, and—something in him screams—Marie exits the car. That same something feels a pinch of agony as Marie jumps into Eddward’s arm and kisses him. Eddward appears to kiss her back.

“Kevin?”

He does not answer Nazz. Instead he drags her along to get into the school—to get away from the couple—as fast as he can.

Chapter End Notes

This popped into my head while I was writing the last scene, so I want to say it in case others have been thinking it’s a possibility too: There will not be any pregnancies in this story, lol. While I ~love~ drama, pregnancy drama… is so overdone… and really never gets more complicated than Keep The Baby vs. Don’t Keep The Baby. I’d rather make people suffer in more convoluted ways. =u=

Next Chapter: Finally, Kevin gets some support.
He has not been back to the library since the last day Eddward tutored him there during their first and only summer together. He remembers the day quite fondly, too.

It had been right before his last examination for summer school, and he and Eddward had spent the whole day in the stuffy library; they fought back against the intense heat and discomfort with small battery-operated fans that were sold at the local pharmacy (not the ones with candy accompaniments, though, because as nice as the treats inside were to snack on, the fans themselves had proven to be too small for any significant cooling). They also had water bottles that Eddward would periodically refill at the closest fountain. Eddward had also kept him fed with scheduled snack breaks that took place outside in a more open space, so that his mind could get a break from the unchanging scenery of books and shelves and dim lighting.

He remembers telling Eddward that he did not have to dote on him so much, and his tutor responding by saying that he needed all the time in the world to study for the big test that next day, and should not be distracted by such menial tasks.

“I will not let you get up from that chair for anything other than to relax. You get burnt out on studying quickly and forget to take the breaks you need, and can lose focus easily. So, no. You will stay there and finish the review—let me do everything else… please. I want you to succeed.”

He smirks at the memories as he takes his assigned seat during those times; all those long, stressful, fun months. It is at the third table in the first of the two-column horizontal set-up the library has on the first floor; flanked on one side by a wall of large windows for natural light, and on the other by perpendicular, large and wooden bookshelves. There is space at each table for six people, and some of them are filled now with two other full groups of students working on projects. He sits on the leftmost seat, closest to the windows. (His mind had gone to the world outside of the windows during peak moments of boredom, and thinking back, that action may have been what told Eddward it was time for them to have a break.) Nazz sits across from him, one chair away from the middle his tutor had always claimed so that his left and right could be topped high with the materials they needed during their sessions.

“Double-D, how come you always grab so many books when we come here? Are you studying too?”

“A bit, but not quite. I am using them to think of lesson plans for you.”

“Every time?”

“Of course, Kevin! I want them to be fair. They have to include what we have already been taught in our classes, but I also want to touch on future material as well. I feel that you would have an easier
time getting tested on them if you already have some experience before they are mentioned."

“I get that, but do you know what’s gonna be talked about next?”

“My parents always ask for their lesson plans ahead of time so my own tutor can help me with the new material before the school year begins.”

“My tutor’s getting tutored… ‘Tutor-ception?’ ‘Incep-tutor-tion?’”

“Haha, I suppose so.”

He briefly looks around. The library both looks and feels the same; and that haunting feeling he has gotten from it when he passed by it these last two years, growing weary of the building each time he was headed to the athletics building, starts to dissipate. The building now feels like home; the memories it brings are joyful. The library has been both a beginning and an end. It all so bittersweet.

What was the name of that book again? The influx of moments shared there that are coming back to him bring up an old desire; he looks around with the hope that he can spot the shelf that Eddward had pulled the book out from. He thinks he sees it, and is about to stand to go and see if it still there, before he remembers what he came to the library for, and holds himself back. He is not here to let himself drown in old memories or relive the past in the present—like the peacocking character in the he book does.

“What’s wrong?” Nazz questions, looking in the same direction he had been ready to go to. He brings his attention back to her—back to them and their current timeline, when and where it is needed—and sees that she has already removed her overcoat and placed both it and her tote bag on the chair to her side. He can understand why; this part of the library is always warm from the line of heaters under the windows. Even his leather jacket is starting to feel like too much.

He starts to settle himself in on his seat. He removes his jacket and puts his backpack next to him on the table. Eddward’s face flashes in his mind again.

“Kevin, it is rude to put your backpack there.”

“Come on Double-D, it’s not like the table thinks it’s heavy.”

He chuckles.

By now it has become clear to Nazz that his mind is elsewhere. Only, she does not have a starting point to ponder where it could be. She simple sits in her chair quietly and observes his actions. They all ring suspiciously. The half-lidded look of his eyes, the faint smile on his lips, the softness of his face, the chuckling, earlier how he seemed about to rush a shelf, and so on—with behavior going as far back to that morning. Sure he can be forgetful from time-to-time, but never when he had made someone else a promise. So him not remembering that today he would be driving her to school and back, is surprising.

Him getting distracted enough to almost pass a red light is concerning.

Since it does not seem as though he is going to start the conversation any time soon—his eyes still looking around slowly, almost methodically, as though searching for the right clues—she takes the task upon herself.

“So,” her voice, again, seems to bring him back—but for how long that will last, she does not know, “where should we start?”
He blinks.

“Oh.” His eyes go wide with surprise. “Right, I totally—”

“Got distracted.” There is a bit of a cheeky tone as she says this, teasing him. He looks flustered for a moment as she watches him shift his cap with the rim hanging behind his head.

“Sorry about that.”

“It’s fine,” she assures. “I just want to know why.” She is also not going to hold back her punches. Kevin has taken her to the library so he can explain what happened to him back during their drive, but her observation skills tell her that the almost-accident is only a result. The problematic causes lay deeper than that, and that fuels her investigative curiosity; she wants to help.

He leans back in his chair, arms wrapping behind his head, eyes up to the ceiling. Is he going to whisk himself away again?

“You know,” this time he snaps her in place, “a couple of minutes ago I was ready to tell you everything, and now I’m… kind of embarrassed and scared.”

“Why is that?”

“Because it’s embarrassing and scary.”

“What is ‘it’?”

His head shifts down so their eyes can meet. “I feel like I’m being interrogated.”

She giggles. “I’ve had some practice.” It helps being in a home filled with sister striving for justice. He groans, probably thinking about the second oldest of them.

Then, even though he had taken it but a few moments before, his position changes. He leans forward, arms folding on the table, much more attentive to her and whatever she may say. She can feel that now is when their actual conversation will begin. She braces herself for it.

“Nazz, if… if I said I was gay, what would you think?”

No matter of mental preparation could have helped her just then. It is a direct hit to her senses from so far out that she never saw it coming. Her teal eyes, hard like steel but a moment ago, are now cracked with surprise.

“W—” How can she reply? Stop. Think for a moment. What had Anais taught her before about speaking with the accused?... Ugh, she cannot remember. His statement is far too blinding. So she opts to reset herself by taking a deep breath as casually as possible, and going over his statement again. Then a good reply hits her. “I’d say I’m surprised out of my mind.” Obviously.

“Why?” Are their positions flipped now?

“Well, as far as I know, you’ve never shown interest in another guy like that. You’ve told me about every girl you’ve wanted to get with, so I’ve only ever been able to see you as straight. You being gay would be… really different—at least for now.” His head bobs; perhaps to show that he is listening; perhaps because he agrees with what she said; perhaps because he cannot think of how else to respond; perhaps because he is absentminded again.

“This morning I almost made us crash because I was thinking about Edd.”
“…Which one?”

“Double-D.”

She keeps her eyes from being replaced with saucers for as long as she can. It is far too easy to connect 2-and-2 together. “Why?” She musters out meaninglessly.

“I have a crush on him… I think—I do.”

She blinks to keep her mind from going aflutter. Connect the dots, connect the dots, connect the dots, a mantra for concentration.

“Did you see him on the road?”

“No. I was thinking about him since before we left the cul-de-sac.” He removes his hat and forlornly starts to play with the size adjustment strap using his fingers, on the table. It is a nervous habit of his that she has seen many times before. Focus, she wills. She may be surprised, but that all seems superficial to what he may be feeling.

“Is there anything you can tell me about what happened?” Her voice is low and gentle. The shock is gone, and in its place is worry for her friend.

He closes his eyes.

Anything he can tell her? There is so much he needs to say, but so little that he feels he actually can. He is starting to think that he has said too much already, wanting to ditch the conversation, wipe it from her mind in a flash, and enter his homeroom class late as though the last half-to-a-couple-of-hours have not happened. The nerves in his stomach are churning into fresh regret, expiring never. Where was that bravado that so vehemently allowed him to declare that, yes, he does have a crush on Eddward, back in his home?

—Gone to gather and hide all those feelings of lust and wanting in the deepest and darkest corner of his mind. Out of fear. There is a stark difference between admitting his feelings to himself and conveying them to another person. The latter… makes it realer than he wants it to be.

“Kevin?” Her voice calls to him.

“I’m thinking… about what I should say.” He skips her ‘about what?’

“You don’t have to say anything if you don’t want to.”

“Is there anything you can tell me about what happened?”

“I want to.” Does he? He does. He needs to. He wants to. He wants to.

He opens his eyes; she sits patiently, expecting nothing out of him, already trying to be as understanding and fair as she can. He lets a breath out in partial relief.

“I don’t know where to start.”

“With the more recent events since they’re fresher in your mind.”

“That makes sense.” (“But the more recent events are difficult to talk about.” He swallows that and hopes it gets taken apart about the acidic nerves distilled in his stomach from the regret, instead of
mixing into it make a bigger mess. If he says that, they will loop back to not talking about anything at all. He is positive that is the last thing he wants.)

“So…?” She coaxes.

His fingers tense around his cap. Like ripping a bandage off:

“I have a crush on Edd,” he says again, his voice lower and more intimate than before, now hyper aware that there are others in the library. “I’ve had one since… back when he tutored me.” Almost three years, and it is now that the full brunt of it is crashing into him in one piece. “And lately a lot of stuff has happened between us. So, this morning I was trying to forget that you were with me because you remind me of him. And you know the rest.”

“I’m really, really sorry about that Nazz—and thank you for pulling me out of my head. I don’t even want to think about what could’ve happened if you hadn’t.”

She leans in a little as well and reaches out to ruffle his hair. The gesture puts him at ease. “It’s fine. Neither of us were hurt—but I’m going to get you a second helmet sooner than Christmas. The best one I can find.”

His smile matches hers. Her response says to him that in that moment when their lives were both in danger, she had thought of him, and how he was technically more at risk of severe injuries because he had nothing protecting his skull. Even if all that had happened was—best case scenario—them ramming into the side of a car, she could have walked away with a few scrapes while he would have needed stitches for his head hitting the pavement when the motorcycle falls over. He had not even thought of that until now; the entire time he had assumed she would get the worse of it. Or more so, he did not think about what would have happened to him.

“There’s one at Mo and Tasha’s that I’ve been wanting. It has good padding without being heavy and looks cool as hell.”

“Perfect. Take me there sometime so I can have a look at it.”

As she removes her hand from his head, he grabs onto it with his own and squeezes it. “Thank you.” She responds by squeezing back.

“Do you want to talk about the crush some more?”

It is like new life has been breathed into him because he feels less hesitant than earlier; he nods his head in approval. His body language has changed as well as he slouches more like himself in his seat. That urge to think about all he had shared with Eddward at that table dissipates as he actively and truly focuses on sharing himself with Nazz.

He is appreciative of her leading him with her questions. Like the aspiring lawyer she is, she knows when to ask simple “yes or no” types and open-ended types; all in the pursuit of making this conversation productive. To help him. He finally has someone helping him.

“You know that I’ve never liked a guy before; but he doesn’t feel like any other guy. Honestly, I keep thinking of him as more like the other girls. Again, kind of like you.” Where will the similarities between Eddward and Nazz end? Still, because of them, he is grateful that he can converse with her about what is occurring; her perspective is invaluable. “So I don’t really know if you’d call that being ‘gay.’ I guess it’d be more accurate to say that out of all the guys I’ve met, he’s the only one I’d fuck.”
“Kev!” Her exclamation is as loud as it can be in that private space and is the catalysis for the massive blush that spreads across his face and ears. Is he as red as his hair now? As the cap he had been twirling on one finger?

“S-sorry…” He cannot believe he just said that so openly. It is like he super-jumped past several checkpoints between them that could have led to him telling her about his wet dream. He has told her details about the girls he has slept with before, but saying something like that about a guy… He wants to bury his head into the table’s wood.

“It’s fine; I was just shocked for a second. I didn’t think you’d be so forward.”

“It just came out.” His head is turned away from her, with his left hand up to his cheek to hide his face. Why did he do that? Could he make it any more obvious that he has been lusting as though he is sex-deprived? Which… can that really be the case if the last time he shared a bed with someone was back in August? With the only reasons he had yet to do his usual philandering during the school year being because of that month he spent with his arm in a cast and Eddward occupying all of his thoughts?

Perhaps, is that why he is so gung-ho for getting into his ex-tutor’s pants?

“Do you only want him because of the sex? You know, normally guys would find that part the hardest to think about.”

“How would you know?”

“I’ve talked about this with some others. One of them woke me up in the middle of the night to say that gay porn scares him, crying that he doesn’t want to be on the bottom.” Even though her face is primed for a laugh, his loses all the color that had made it bright just a second ago.

“I… I didn’t even think of that—I thought I’d be on top…”

“Oh.” A few seconds tick by in silence. “Let’s not talk about hypotheticals like that, okay? We’ll get to that when you’re more secure about everything.”

He sends her a thousand telepathic thanks.

“…But I’m guessing what made you like him doesn’t have anything to do with sex.”

“Definitely not. I may—” Is he really going to go all-in on sharing the details about his wet dream? About what happened in them? About the several times he masturbated to them that early morning? “—have to think about it in the future, but I don’t know if we’d ever get that far anyways.” He hopes that sounded natural enough. Now, away from this blushing topic and onto… a blushing topic.

“I started liking him because… back when everything felt hopeless for me, he saved me. Nazz, I was in way deeper shit than I told you about during freshman year. Like, deep shit. My depression was the best part of it. I hid a lot from you because… one of the things that brought me down was how jealous I was of you.”

She edges of her lips downturn. “What do you mean?”

“Remember the speech our old principal gave during graduation? About high school being the most important part of our lives because it’s going to impact our futures? That scared the shit out of me. I don’t know what I want to do in the future and I was just planning to mess around during high school until something came by. But then everyone started talking about what they were going to major in college and you said that with your sisters’ help you were gonna start training to be a
lawyer. Everyone had something they were going to do during high school, except me. That still fucks me up.”

Before she can say anything, he continues with, “But it’s not as bad as back then. I fell into the wrong crowd because I thought everyone had their life together and I didn’t, but I know that’s not really true. Some people are even going back on the stuff they said during graduation. But during that summer those first feelings did lead me to some bad places and bad people, and things just continued spiraling when school started—they probably got worse. I hated how everyone seemed to be having fun in high school. I hated how I had to go to school; I just wanted it to be summer vacation again so I can fuck around and forget how I felt like I had no future. And when I started failing and was told I was about to get held back?” He chuckles sarcastically. “I thought that was a sign that I really didn’t have anything to look forward to; that I was useless. That’s when the depression got severe and I hated the world.”

“…I don’t know what to say.”

He grins. “Like I said, I don’t feel that way now. I know all the bullshit I thought back then isn’t true—and I’m happy that you know what you want to do when you grow-up. It’s no one’s fault but mine. That’s… what Edd showed me, and him helping me with that is why I fell for him.” The blush still pinches his cheeks the color of a rose, but he accepts it.

She stands and heads to his side of the table, and plops herself on the seat next to him. She rests her head on his shoulder and grabs hold of his right hand, giving it a tight but comforting squeeze. A dramatic hug would have been too much. He knows that for the rest of their conversation, they are going to stay in that position; she is going to stay by his side.

“I’m glad you were able to find someone to be there for you.”

“If I hadn’t been so stupid, I would’ve just gone to you. I’m sorry.”

“Idiot,” she replies lovingly, “I’m not mad that you didn’t. You worry too much.” Could that be another thing his tutor had taught him?

“So,” her head is off his shoulder, but she shifts her body so that it is facing his, and he reciprocates this turn, their hands still together and creating a bridge over their laps, “you’re sure you like him?”

He nods. “Did you tell him?”

His mood sours and his heart starts to storm. Has he told him? How many times has he told him? His grip on her hand tightens, asking for more comfort. She responds by placing her other over it and giving him warmth as well. Looking at her, her blue-green eyes have a current of concerns swirling inside.

She does not need to prompt him further to get him to respond. He tells her all that he can. About the two kisses, the confrontations, the despair and the obstacles. How much does her hand hurt from how harsh his grip becomes as he tells her the more heart-wrenching parts of his ordeal? She makes no sign that it ever does, listening as intently as possible, emoting when what he says strikes a chord with her.

When he is finished, her hands clamp down on him more. After hearing all of that, she understands that he and Eddward are on a road to a very unhappy ending. The bumps are lined with spikes put there by a blue-haired guard. His car is clearly running low on gas and to continue further… seems foolish.

She decides to ask him, “Have you considered letting go?” How cumbersome of a weight is all this
on his shoulders? What can be done to alleviate it the best? “It’s probably hard to think about, but, with everything that you’ve told me, I’m starting to think that’s the better option.”

In her eyes, his body sags; his fingers and arm sag, his shoulders sag, his face sags, like the pressure is bearing down on him more harshly than before. His expression changes from hopeless to contemplative to a bitter grin to confused to… nameless. It tugs at her heart slow and extensively. He is trying his best not to let himself fall apart, to keep it together for another couple of moments. It registers in his eyes that it is too much—too much—for him to keep holding on his own, and he falls onto her shoulder. She is still holding his right hand and now his left grabs for her right hand as well.

“Am I stupid for thinking it could all work out?” His voice is low, almost muffled by the fabric of her shirt. Is this question rhetorical? Judging by the way he presses further into her palms, she is guessing not.

What should she say to him? What can she say? Her instinctive response is “yes.” From the outside looking in, it is a stupid move on his part to think that fighting through all the mess in front of him is both possible and would be worth it. Even if he reaches the end of that destructive road, how long will it take and what will his condition be by then? Will he even want for things to work out by the end of it? Will he not start to think he wasted his time and effort?

“…Possibly.”

His shoulders heave; she can feel drips accumulating on her shoulder. “I don’t know what to do. I want it to, but… I don’t think it will. I know it probably won’t. But I still want to try…”

“What?” It is the only thing she can get out of her mouth before quickly shutting it to keep her heartache in. It hurts to see him like this; so downtrodden and hopeless. It has never occurred to her until now that he could ever be so vulnerable and affected. She has seen him all types of ways before, but “deeply saddened” had not been checked off on that list until this very moment. She wishes she could erase it altogether.

What could be going through his mind? He digs his forehead further into her with a couple of sniffles, looking to her more like he is trying to shake away all the doubts and discover under that messy pile a reason to keep moving forward. He wants to keep chasing after Eddward but cannot ignore that he will more than likely incur a loss by doing this.

She thinks back to all the times he had come to her asking for advice with another girl. The instances were always based around petty little problems, like him disliking her makeup or her parents. During those times, the solutions would come after some quick discussion and then after a few texts he would have put an end to it all by informing the girl that their relationship is canceled. (“See you around school :)” If only now could be small and simple like those instances.

He swallows. “He… promised me he wouldn’t run away again… I really thought we— I at least want to know why he went back on his word.”

“And after that…”

“I don’t know.”

She gently moves her shoulder forward to nudge him into lifting up his head. When he does, words cannot describe the effect his tearful face has on her. Removing her hands from his and gently taking hold of his head by his cheeks, her thumbs wiping at the few streaks of tears he had let fall, she offers him a brave face and the best words that she can think of in that moment:
“Okay. That works for now.”

“Hng, I hate crying.”

She giggles at his grumpiness, heading over to her tote bag to grab some tissues she has inside. “A few small snifflines are nothing to get upset about,” she teases. After she fishes the small pack from her bag’s inner pocket, she returns to her seat next to him and takes one out with the intent to wipe his face clean. He stops her hand midway to reaching him.

“I’ll do it.” He takes the issue gently from between her fingers. “You have to clean yourself up too.” His eyes point at where his sobs had soaked into her. He then takes another tissue from her pack, places it in her hand and guides it to her shoulders. She is amused by this.

“I forgot about this.” They both get to work on drying themselves, one capable of doing more than the other. “I’ll have to keep my coat on until it dries.”

“Sorry, I know some classrooms get stupid hot.”

“That’s, what, the fifth time you’ve apologized to me today? The sixth? I’m officially putting a ban on you for that. Do it again and I’ll have you thrown into a cell.”

“The closest ‘cells’ here are lockers, and I’m too big for them.” Good height, broad shoulders, toned arms and legs.

“I’ll have you squeezed in somehow.” For a second he believes that would possible because of how assured of it she sounds.

It takes him a couple of dabs to make himself look good and ready for the day again; he mulls over how he has probably cried more times in the last month or two than he has in the last two years. Crumpling the tissue into a loose ball, he thinks back to two nights ago, when Eddward had used a similar tissue to put him back together; to that feeling of security and progress that had swelled in him at his gentle touch. What made Eddward do a complete 180 and suddenly send Marie to tell him that they are never going to see each other again? Something is greatly amiss.

“Here, give me your tissue.” She holds her hand out for him, hers already in place to be thrown away, and instead of giving her his, he takes hers and heads to the trash can himself. “Aw, thank you,” she gratefully says when he returns.

“It’s the least I can do.” He punctuates this with his own soft smile.

“So, about talking to Eddward again,” she immediately goes into the business of things, “I was thinking of a way you can talk to him today.”

“How?”

“The members of student government are having a study session over at his house today. You’re my ride for the day, so obviously you’ll have to meet up with him when we all head there after school. I can say I invited you to the session too, so you can stay over until everyone else leaves, and then talk to him.”

That sounds great, but, “He drove Marie to school today, so he’s probably taking her home too. I didn’t see Lee’s car in the parking lot when we were there.” He and Lee work at the garage together, and he had helped her with restoring the clunker to modern standards. Since they fought in front of
the Kankers’ home a couple of weeks ago, they have been icy towards one another at work; incredibly awkward given that they are often paired on jobs due to having a good balance in skills between them.

“Hmm… I’ll ask Eddward about it. If he says he does have to take her home, I’ll text you and we’ll talk about another way to make this happen. I don’t know if she’d stay over to study, too, and if she is coming it’s probably for the best that they both know you’ll at least be taking me home. I don’t want this to blow-up into another fight.” Her pacifist nature has restrained him often in the past, so he is certain she is none too happy hearing about the multiple physical altercations he has been involved in during all of this occurring.

“But, Kevin,” she says, locking his eyes to hers, a gaze so deep it feels as though she is piercing into his mind, “what are you going to say to Eddward when you do get your chance?”

…I don’t know. I was hoping—”

“Not to be forceful, but, let me stop you right there.” He can feel the analytical part of her activating; when he would come to her with his girl troubles, she would take on this same tone when she was brushing him away from an ineffective play on his part. “You have to be more purposeful about these things. From what you’ve told me, every time you’ve talked to him so far has been a disaster—even during Homecoming, it just barely worked out in the end, and I think that’s why overnight he changed his mind. You know he’s always had that bit of snob to him that kind of puts people’s suggestions aside.” He nods, remembering those times in their childhood when Eddward’s high-and-mighty self would peek out of his persona and try to make one of the Eds or kids of the cul-de-sac feel dumb. After him doing that one time too many to him, he christened him a “Double-Dork” to get him quiet.

“And honestly, I think one of the things you really should mention is how Marie’s been treating you.”

“What? Why?” He crosses his arms over his choose with a bit of a shrug; what an odd suggestion for her to make. “He probably knows. He tells her everything, so I doubt she doesn’t do the same.” There is a flare of annoyance as their confrontation yesterday rears its ugly head again.

“I… don’t think so,” she replies, a suspicious look on her face. “He isn’t exactly the type that promotes fighting, or bullying. If he knew what Marie was doing, he probably would’ve stopped her by now or at least tried to.”

“Maybe he did try and just couldn’t?”

“I still think you should bring it up to him, just in case.”

“Okay, fine, I will.”

He doubts it would do him any good, but to quell her worries, he will do so—after fully preparing himself to hear the “I know” that Eddward will surely give him.

“As for everything else—” She is interrupted by the first bell stating that the period has ended. It is then that they look around and see that the few people in the library have been packing their school materials in their backpacks, and have been getting ready to leave. “—let’s text about it.” She makes a quick change to her suggestion.

He groans as he gets up from his seat, his body feeling heavier than usual for a brief moment before he stretches. “Thanks, Nazz,” he says as his stretches whine down. “I appreciate all your help on
“Maybe I should have you thrown into a cell for thanking me too much, too?” She teases while going to put her overcoat on. He rolls his eyes at her. “You’re welcome, though. I’m glad I’m able to help.”

The helmet attached to his backpack strap hits the wooden chair next to him with a hard thud as he swings his backpack over his shoulder. He grimaces and takes a look around to see if anyone other than him or Nazz heard that and was annoyed by it. He is relieved when no one glances at them. She laughs at his nervousness.

They exit the library, chatting, and part ways when they enter the main school building since their next classes are on opposite ends. Due to her “thank you ban,” he shows her his gratitude one more time with a hug. He melts into her more than before, and he can feel her standing on the tips of her toes to get closer to him. It has been ages since they have been so close. He almost does say thanks one more time when they pull apart.

“I’ll text you in a bit.”

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, with the help of a review that I got this week, I kind of realized that even though I now know the direction in which I want to take this story, that doesn’t mean that what I’ve already written fully supports. Like I’ll be super honest, I didn’t reread the previous chapters that were already out before editing the old versions of these new updates to better fit the tone I’m going for; I just skimmed through them to remind myself of what happened. Since they were first written in 2015/16, and it's currently 2019... yeah, enough has changed for there to be a noticeable enough different between what I was going for back then and what I'm going for now.

I'll be going on a hiatus that will last for one to three weeks while I got back to edit the first ten published chapters in a soft reboot of sorts. I'm not planning to have any major changes, and when I update again I will summarize what was changed at the beginning of the chapter. As hesitant as I am to do this, it's necessary for the story to be cohesive.

Aside from that, thoughts on this chapter? I'm so happy to finally have Nazz come into play because I've been wanting someone on Kevin's side for a hot minute, but I'm trying to drip feed all the show characters and implement them organically. TT^TT

I'm also pleased to have finally been able to explain why Kevin was in a dark place during his freshman year. I think feeling like you have no future, especially during high school, is incredibly common—and it's something that I've been seeing pop-up more now that my friends are honest about it while being in college. I've even struggled with it myself. It's going to be a significant part of Kevin's character development. He says he's doing better now, but those types of things stick sticky.

Look forward to the coming mini updates and the next arc of this story starting... at the approaching end of a certain someone's arc :3 While I'm radio silent here, you can always hit me up on Tumblr (@blackgoldmentality) with questions, opinions, and so on. I'm thinking I should start posting chapter previews on there...
Next Chapter: I swear it's not a study party.

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